...a pack of wolves with the rabies

by mAd_parnes

Summary

Stanford Era Outsider PoV on hunters

The car accident leaves Sam with no memories of his childhood or his youth. To help him know himself again, Jess finds him a therapist, who asks Sam under hypnosis to go to his safe place ...
It was an outrageous hassle to get to see her boyfriend. Because they weren't family, because someone mixed up Sam's name, because his father wasn't reachable, blablabla... They lived together for almost two years now for God's sake! But they weren't family, duh. Two years in which Sam's father hadn't checked up on his only son, not once. But the hospital tried to reach John first, before they even let her know Sam was in fact alive.

Stalking angrily down the corridor Jess tried to calm herself, Sam was fine. He was out of intensive care. He was awake. There would be no lasting brain damage, no injuries a healthy 22-year-old wouldn't recover from completely.

She just needed to be angry at someone and the other driver was no option, because the accident had been Sam's fault. She still couldn't quite believe Sam would ever drive recklessly, but on the other hand, Brady wouldn't lie to her. Wouldn't dare to.

She needed to be angry at someone, but Brady was no option either, because he had saved Sam's life. And she couldn't be angry at Sam when Sam was hurt.

But John Winchester was the perfect person to be angry with. And her anger blinded her for a second when she saw a dark haired man in his fifties exit room 405 – Sam's room.

“Hey!”

He turned around and sunlight flitted through his eyes -or something, but the weird lightning slipped from her mind, because, to her embarrassment, this guy was not Sam's father.

“I'm sorry,” she held up a hand, “I thought you were someone else.”

The man smirked, tipped his head to the side and told her, “It's no trouble sweetheart,” -in a super-creepy non-whisper-whisper, “I am someone else.”

And now that guy wasn't going away. Great. But Jess had no time for that, “Sure ya 're,” she acknowledged his grade-A creepy uncle performance and tipped her chin up, walking up to and by him, to finally see Sam. And if he chuckled, like he didn't buy her self-confidence, that wasn't her
problem. Not today.

Chapter End Notes

The idea of this scenario is twelve years old, some written parts up to seven years old. This is classic Supernatural, with its down to earth mythology, its innocent uncertainties, its hands-on suspense, psychological horror and undying hopefulness. Expect a novel length, because I have 70000w on my hands and Jo is still writing (but the last CH is already written). Updates will be posted once or twice a week (more often twice a week), depending on how long it takes me to put the story parts into shape.
Till next week, Bee
Jessica had found him a therapist, here in California, specializing in amnesia, trauma cases and:

Hypnosis.

Sam wasn't happy about letting some stranger manipulate him, but he trusted Jess and she was sure this doctor would help him. So they went.

Dr. Irving was really nice – really normal. The college professor type. Sam didn't know why he expected crystals and incense and a guy wearing a purple/orange scarf – but then his brain wasn't too trustworthy these days.

The doctor explained the process to him, asked him if he wanted the session to be recorded, for it could help him feel more in control to revise what happened. Then the doc gave him the opportunity to ask Jess to leave -without her taking offense- smooth, really. The man knew what he was doing and that made Sam only more nervous.

“No, I'd like her to stay, if that's possible.”

“Of course it is,” Dr. Irving said. Talked a little bit more and later asked Jess to sit in the other chair. Sam felt like a child, thinking about asking, if it was possible for her to stay closer, hold his hand. His heart beat up to his chin as he laid down on the couch.

Then he berated himself, he was nervous over nothing. He was just trying to get his memories back. That was a good thing, right?

And it wouldn't work anyhow, was the thought that surfaced before he started to listen to the doctors voice...

In the end getting into trance was as easy as falling asleep.

And as blank.

When Sam came out of hypnosis he didn't feel different, he hadn't remembered a thing. Which was probably why Jess could barely meet his eyes.

She wore the white polka-dot dress, his favorite and he hadn't acknowledged it all day, hadn't even looked. Not only because he had been too nervous and too buried in himself, but because wearing a special dress for him was something Jess didn't usually do. Too girly, too lame. But somehow Jess ended up doing a lot of girly, lame things for him. Like drying and keeping the red rose he had gifted her with before he learned that she didn't like roses.

She sat down beside him on the sofa and took his hand. She was strong for him again. That was
okay. Letting Jess be there for him was good for them, she needed that. She was more bothered
with his condition than he was. She was a fighter, would be some kick-ass doctor one day, because
she was terrible at letting go. How could he know so much about her and not remember his
mother's name or his own birthday, if he ever had a pet as a child or why his father and him didn't
talk?

He had no clue, but he was glad it wasn't the other way around. Rather he was oblivious about
himself than about her – so that this here hadn't worked, wasn't so bad. They would get over it. Jess
just needed to do something, they would try something else-

“Sam,” her hand was sweaty, but her grip on him as strong as ever. “Look, I want you to know-

“It's fine, I already had a feeling that this wouldn't work.”

“What?” Jess' eyebrows went up, “What are you talking about?” she asked, forced herself to be
gentle.

Why was she so gentle with him, this wasn't the end of the world. “I'm talking about that it didn't
work.”

She looked more worried.

Her worry started to freak him out a bit, Jess was never worried, never scared-

“Do you remember anything of the last fifteen minutes, Sam?” Dr. Irving asked now.

“No? Why, what happened?”

“You were recounting a memory,” the doctor answered him.

“You don't remember anymore?” Jess sounded like she couldn't believe it, then she looked down at
her hands -balled up in her lap.

What was wrong?

Right next to her on the small table was the recorder, so getting answers shouldn't be a problem.
“Can I-?” he gestured to the recorder.

The doctor held up a hand, “Of course, in a minute, Sam,” Dr. Irving sounded like he searched for
the right words.

Now they were really starting to freak him out.

“First,” the Doc started, “you need to know that you went into a very, very deep trance.”

“I did?”

“Yes, “you” did. Normally I avoid to put my patients into a deep trance, because therapeutic
hypnosis is not stage hypnosis. It is detrimental to their progress when patients feel they had no
control over what happened to them. So I must apologize, you went with me so deep and easily, I
saw no harm in taking you there.

But after what happened I would advise to be more careful. After the suggestion to remember your
recovered memory failed, I must ask you, Sam and this is important, do you feel like you want to
remember?”
He looked over to Jessica-

“I haven't asked your girlfriend, Sam, I ask you. Do you want to remember?”

Jess touched him again and it steadied him for what she said: “It's okay, Sam,” she sounded terribly worried – what the hell had he remembered under hypnosis? “The doctor is not wrong, ya know? Maybe I rushed you...”

“No, you didn't. I want to remember.” He did. “It's pretty weird missing such a huge part of my life, 18 years...you didn't rush me, I was just...” it was weird to say, but he didn't care for those memories, he had to find other words, explain it so... “After the hospital, you and your parents, our friends, you all made me feel like everything is fine. I still feel that way. Like the things I don't remember are not that important.”

She swallowed visibly, “Like you're better off without them.”

Well, no, he almost said, but then Jess wasn't meeting his eyes anymore. So he didn't say anything but held her closer, nudged the side of her head with his chin, nuzzling her hair.

She sucked in breath, she was upset. But why?

“Jessica, you shouldn't weigh too much on what we uncovered today,” Dr. Irving advised. “I think with the support Sam has through you, he should be able to face this memory. If he wants to?”

Again, this question. “Of course I want to know.”

“Do you prefer if I tell you what you recalled or do you want to hear the recording – to hear it in your own words may help you to remember?”

The recording it was then. Sam was not scared, not really.

Dr. Irving didn't start the recording at the beginning, but when Sam already had been in trance, when he had asked him to find a safe place...

“Where are you, Sam?”

“Under the oak tree.”

Jess and him were there at least three times a week, having lunch, reading or just cuddling – it was their tree. The doctor had questioned him some more until he had recounted a clear picture and even hearing it now it made him feel like he was there, like he had Jess in his arms and her elbow digging into his ribs every time she turned a page-

The doctor's recorded voice shook him out of his sensation of Jess-

“You feel safe, Sam and now you remember the first time you felt this safe.”

…

“Where are you, Sam?”

“I'm in bed-”

That was weird, he heard himself speak, but-
“-I'm allowed to sleep in – Dad 's not home.” -it wasn't like he would ever say that. If it weren't for pictures he wouldn't even know how his father looked like.

“Are you alone?”

“No, Dean 's there, he 's licking my neck -it's gross.”

“Who is Dean?”

“He is my big brother.”

Before he really knew what he was doing, Sam had reached over and stopped the play back. Not just because it was almost too much to hear himself talk about something he didn't remember, but also because that didn't make any sense:

“I have a brother?” he asked the only person he was able to ask.

Jess bit her lip and shrugged apologetically, “You never said anything about a brother. I would've told you...”

But he hadn't told Jess about his big brother. Why? Maybe because he hadn't had a brother anymore...maybe that was why they both looked so shocked, because something bad had happened.

“You can still change your mind, Sam,” the doctor suggested and sounded a little bit too suggesting, almost like an order and that pissed Sam off.

“No, I'm fine,” he hit the Play.

“Tell me, Sam, what makes you feel safe right now?”

“Dean touches me and holds me close. He keeps me safe, he promised. He always keeps his promises, not like Dad.

Dad 's never there. But Dean is and that's fine. I like it better when it's just us.”

…a short moment of silence followed, something that wasn't audible had happened and then Irving had spoken up again:

“Sam? What makes you uncomfortable?”

“Dean wont stop slobbering all over my neck.”

“Why does he do that?”

“cause he's being stupid. And he says I taste good.”

Hadin't this experience of hearing himself sound so young and telling things so foreign been strange already, Sam would have wondered more-

“Where is Dean touching you?”

-maybe as much as the doctor had, for asking such an absurd-

“On my belly and my dick.”
The recorded pause felt as loud as an echo.

“Is this the first time your brother touches your private parts?”

“No, we do that all the time. Just foolin’ around – no need to freak out over it.”

The doctor stopped the recording there.

Sam felt Jess shift beside him and all he could think of was that she had heard this -a second time actually.

“I brought you out of trance soon after this revelation,” Dr. Irving explained, “I only asked you how old you were and also how much older your brother is.”

“And?” Sam felt like packed in wool and shot in the head.

“At the time of this event you were twelve, your brother four years older than you.”

He didn't feel it – whatever someone was supposed to feel who had been touched like that by his own brother, he didn't feel it. He didn't feel anything, he just wanted to get out of here.

~

Sam broke her heart, sitting beside her in the parked car, finally talking to her, asking if she would leave him.

“Don't make me smack you,” she blabbed out before she could think of something more empathetic, “That's the most stupid thing I ever heard. I love you, why would I leave you?” Just because Sam's brother was a pervert – it wasn't Sam's fault!

She was extremely proud of Sam's decision to go see Dr. Irving again for their next session. Jess was pretty sure, she wouldn't have been back for more details, but Sam was brave like that.
“Sam, you have to understand incestuous relations between siblings are much more common than most people think. And not all of these experiences are traumatic,” Dr. Irving started to talk tacheles. *After* ten minutes of therapeutic foreplay – psychiatrists, really, even the good ones tried Jess’ patience.

“Remember I asked you to revisit a feeling of safety,” Irving rehashed, “Which means at some point during these experiences you did not perceive them as abuse.”

She prayed hard he was right, but she had read up on incest -recently, and the fact that Sam had been twelve already and his brother that many years older, those facts didn't bode well and even Irving seemed to think so, because carefully...

“...of course, with your father being absent,” he introduced the much likelier scenario, “There is the possibility your brother took advantage of your dependence to him. Though I might have an idea how to ascertain how manipulative your brother really was.”

Sam's posture was denial, so Jess knew what he would say: “I'm not sure I want to recall the worst things he did to me. Knowing in an abstract is already...a bit much.” Sam had come back to learn more about his father, not-

“Of course that is your decision,” Irving crooned on, “But it wasn't what I meant. I'd like you to recall a time when your brother voiced his love for you. In what context he made his feelings known verbally could give you an answer if manipulation or coercion were present in your relationship. And if, to what degree.”

That was a good idea, actually. Jess had to give it to Irving, that even though he talked a bit much, he knew how to make things quick and as painless as possible for his patients.

“What do you think?” Sam asked her.

She knew that Sam didn't want to know more about the incestuous relationship he had had with his brother, he hadn't agreed to this session in hope to come to terms with his feelings. He had sounded more like he was doing reconnaissance, like he was on a mission or something. Sam got like that sometimes, but this was the first time he had shut off emotionally since the accident.

“I think it would be easier if you could stop wondering and just know how bad it really was.”

Sam looked at her, already agreeing, but his touch told her, that he was only doing it for her.

“Would be easier for me too,” she said, because if he wanted to do this for her, it should be out in the open. They didn't have a relationship where they implied stuff and expected the other to guess right, leave each other insecure, or resort to tricking each other.

“Okay,” Sam agreed.

This time she sat at the edge of the couch when Irving put Sam under. No touching, she reminded herself.

“Where are you, Sam?” Irving asked after he had told Sam to find a safe place again.

“In the backseat.”
“Whose car is it you are in?”

“It’s the Impala...Dad gave it to Dean for his birthday, but it's always been ours.”

“Is Dean with you?”

“Naw,” Sam’s drawl was so cute, he never talked like that usually, “Dean ’s in the front seat. He went to sleep ther’, just in case Dad sees us. We're too old to get away with it.” -sleeping together that had to mean. Reading the subtext was easy: they had been both in the backseat before Dean went to sleep. And Sam's frustration about being apart from his brother, even though it was only in different seats, was audible enough that Irving asked:

“How hasn't you woken Dean up yet?”

“I wanna watch him sleep”, a slow gentle smile worked it's way over Sam's relaxed face, “He is so beautiful, I never get to watch him for real when he's awake. -always calls me a girl when I do. Take a picture, Sammy, it will last longer,” his voice had dropped, like it had during the first session when he said -fooling around was nothing to freak out over-. 

“He's just shy. He doesn't like how people stare at him, with girls it's okay, but not the men...next time any jerks whistle or catcall, I'm gonna break their face.”

She couldn't help but snort a laugh, but luckily Sam wasn't disturbed by it. Knowing Sam, he had been deadly serious. Aside from her, few people knew Sam could go berserk when the right button was pushed.

“Has Dean been hurt by men before?” Irving asked.

First Sam didn't answer, then his hand, before this question relaxed, twitched. “No. Not many are stupid enough to try – Dad will kill them. No one in his right mind messes with Dad.”

“Can you tell what makes Dean so beautiful?” Irving redirected the course Sam had taken. It wasn't rocket science to figure out John Winchester wasn't the safe place Sam needed to be in before Irving pushed deeper and inquired if Sam's brother had used love as a lever to make Sam consent.

“Dean is just perfect...he is so beautiful, all over and deep down. Most people get ugly the closer you look, especially the pretty ones, but not Dean, he only gets more beautiful, most of all when we kiss and can't even see him clearly because we're too close. He always smiles at me afterwards, a real smile...not a smirk, not sad, just happy...I wish he could always be like that.”

Wow, that had been a rushed emotional confession if she ever heard one. A grim thought dogged in it's footsteps:

How could someone not use this devotion? It wasn't for nothing that they said, Absolute power corrupted absolutely.

“Sam, you're gonna let Dean sleep,” Irving suggested, “and follow your memories. They lie before you like books you know well,” -they had agreed on this mental picture before, because being surrounded by books was a familiar state for Sam- “Can you remember an occasion when Dean said to you the words, I love you?”

Sam's right arm twitched again.

“Where are you, Sam?”
Something was wrong, Jess knew, before Sam's breath became labored fast and he gasped in pain and struck out.

Without thinking she held on to him and he grabbed for her, twisting her arm-

“Sam, listen to my voice,” Irving stayed perfectly calm, “You are safe, you-”

“Dean-” Sam gasped in between.

“-are leaving this memory and-”

Sam had let go of her arm and his eyes were wide open. Catching his breath, he sat up.

“Sam, look at me,” Irving ordered.

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He did, even though everything was swimming before his eyes and his body was hurting like it really just had been clawed open. He knew he had to get a grip on himself fast before-...

Before what? He was safe, Jess was right there, had slipped down into the couch and put her arms around him. He wasn't nine years old anymore, he wasn't hurt.

Dr. Irving brought him a glass of water.

“You remember?”

It wasn't a real question, the doctor had to see that Sam remembered, he was still shaking, dammit-

“I got hurt. Dean was so scared for me...” ...I love you, Sammy, please, don't do this to me, please don't die...There had been so much blood and so much pain. His brother, only a kid himself, had held him, carried him, away from whatever had hurt him.

Sam took another gulp of water and tried, but he couldn't remember what hurt him. But, “I think it was when I got these,” he lifted his shirt.

“You said, it had been a dog,” Jess helped him out.

But those thin, white scars were huge, inches apart. A dog? Also, “Dogs bite, they don't just scratch,” unless, “Dean must've gotten to it before it could bite me. I wasn't scared, it just hurt,” he had been 100% sure Dean would save him.

Dr. Irving allowed him some time to think, before he started to question him – but really, what he already said was all he knew.

When he listened to the recording, to his own voice waxing poetics about his brother, it didn't feel like he had anything to do with it. And he didn't want to feel like he was this person.

The doctor, sniffing out Sam's aversion to the topic started to approach it gentle, started with his observations about Jess and their relationship. How they communicated their more complex feelings nonverbal, which was uncommon, for both of them were good with words and vocalizing their feelings...

“...you are hypersensitive to Jessica's reactions, which is not unusual for somebody who was raised by a single parent.

It could be interpreted as the aftereffect of prolonged abuse, but I would be careful to assume this
so quickly. Especially because you and Jessica have a healthy relationship. She is just as tuned in on your feelings as you are to hers. You are equals. I don't see how you could have overcome years of abuse to find a partner who neither dominates nor submits to you. Equal relationships are a challenge, hard work. Yet the two of you seem to make it work fine.”

“You think,” it was hard to believe what he was hearing, “What my brother did, didn't effect me?”

“I think-” Irving reused Sam's parlance in order to weigh on meaning – Sam really hated these kind of tricks, “-it would do more harm than good to demonize your brother. It will keep you from consolidating with your past. Unnecessarily so. Nothing indicates you suffered a trauma through him:

When asked to go to a safe place, your mind reaches out for him. He was your safety, your parent. And due to your closeness and his young age, maybe also due to his inability to voice his feelings, he turned your relationship physical.

I'm not saying it was a healthy relationship, he seduced you. But seduction can be done without ill intent and this makes the difference between outright abuse and a codependent relationship.

If you could, only as an abstract, assume for a time that your brother has loved you, cared for you, that your childhood was a happy one, the mental block-”

“Just- stop, right there.” He had to take a deep breath, reign himself in, because the doctor didn't know better.

“You obviously don't want to remember,” Dr. Irving tried again, “But you will remember sooner or later and then-”

“So you want me to pretend everything was fine? Because you think it wasn't so bad, because you think I'm just psyching myself out-”

“Sam, please,” Dr. Irving held his hands out pacifying.

“No, I can't do that. Because I know for a fact my brother is not a good person. I know it was worse than I can imagine – so no. No, I'm not going to jump head first into these memories...it was a mistake to come back,” he stood up.

“Sam?” Jess looked up to him.

He hadn't told her. He had kept this a secret, because he was ashamed, because he knew he had lied to her before he lost his memories. About his father being a mechanic, a drifter and nothing more.

“I called a few friends of your dad's,” he started to explain, and gave in when Jess pulled at his arm to sit with her again, “I wanted to know if Dean was still alive. If we ever got on the radar of social services. And because they couldn't find anything in California, Bruce asked his sister in law,” who worked for the FBI, but Jess knew that of course, “Just to speed along the process of pulling files from other states, but it turned out she didn't have to. The FBI has enough circumstantial evidence on John and Dean Winchester anyone gets the picture:

My father has been on the ATF's radar since the early 90ies. He bought firearms and explosives through illegal channels, had contact to domestic paramilitaric groups and he is a suspect in several cases of arson. As is Dean, only he likes to light up corpses, instead of chaples.

They were both sought out for questioning in a case of an *exorcism*, where a little boy died from multiple fractures. And they are prime suspects in fourteen cases of grave desecration-” He could
have gone on, could have told them, there were majorly two different kinds of grave desecration:

The simple theft of jewelry or the bones, above all the skull, because one could sell it to occult practitioneers.

And then there was necrophilia.

In all the fourteen cases of grave desecration, the jewelry had been burnt with the bones and the skulls had been left behind; burning something was a great way to make sure there was no evidence to find out what you did with it before you burnt it, so it was not hard to draw the conclusion what kind of graverobbers his brother and his father were.

But maybe he did his family wrong, maybe they were just completely insane and those dead people had been witches who needed to be burnt to really die. Because that was what the family of the little boy did with his body when they got him for the funeral: They burned him in their backyard.

But Sam held his tongue, he already had shocked the doctor into silence and he didn't want Jess to...hear all this, imagine it. Ask herself what was worse for a kid? Being raised by necrophiliacs or someone who thought killing little kids was God's work?

“Sam,” Dr. Irving started gentle, “You should have informed me about your finding beforehand. This obviously bothers you-”

“Bothers me?! I wish I never found out! Maybe you're right and I did this amnesia to myself, maybe I don't want to remember. And I'm not sure anymore, I need to. I know I left and never looked back and that's all I need to know about myself.” He didn't want to know what he did to survive, he didn't want to have feelings for these monsters, feel like he owed them, like his brother had protected him!

Jess was uncharacteristically silent beside him. He wished he had the courage to reach out for her, but after what he just told her about his family-

-Jess hugged him hard and rested her chin on his shoulder and Sam realized that he had held his breath for too long.

“I should have known,” Jessica whispered after a while, “that you don't want to remember. It isn't just that you never talked about them. You didn't even keep pictures. I mean aside from the one with your mom in it.”

And he had been a baby when she died -in a fire- he never could've possibly had memories of her, but that's what he had held on to.

He wasn't overly surprised that while his memory remained blessedly blank, some of what he learned came back to haunt him. Surfed to sully the good things he held on to:

Jess embraced him and kept him safe after he woke from the same nightmare three nights in a row. Sights like straight out of a horror movie: Jessica in her nightdress pressed against the ceiling, bleeding, bursting into flames.

She told him it was okay, she wouldn't leave him, wouldn't die like his mom had.
He didn't know what he would do without her.
“Dad, I tell you it's better that way.”

“That is not discussing what we do here. You barely informed us, that Sam is no longer seeing a therapist and now I am not supposed to ask why!!”

“You weren't asking why!” she pointed out while put the salad into the fridge, “You were lecturing!”

“Alright, maybe you have a point. So why has he stopped seeing a therapist? You said the hypnosis worked?”

“Tom,” her mom gave him the look. How was this woman managing to get what she wanted without having to get loud, Jess wondered for about the millionths time.

“Fine I will stop being concerned about the boy. To hell with his memory, what do I care, he is just some guy my daughter is hanging out with.”

Now he was playing dirty. He knew that one of the things Jess loved most about her relationship with Sam was, how well he got along with her parents.

Not that any of her former boyfriends had problems with her mom, it was her dad that became distant, antagonistic and occasionally scary when she had brought someone home.

But never towards Sam, when she came with Sam, she always had to fight to spent time with him, because Dad would drag him off somewhere. And Sam did not just endure it, he loved it. No matter if it was one of her dad's crazy do-it-yourself projects or a new old book about some war or even the Soccer World Cup. Sam loved it and her dad loved to make Sam a part of his world.

And they never even had to get to know each other, it was love at first sight -she and Mom used to joke, behind their backs of course. To herself Jess long had admitted, that she fell for a younger version of her father.

“Dad, it's not like that I don't want you to care...”

“It's okay honey.”

A yewish mother had nothing on him in the fine art of guilt tripping. With that he even got her mom:

“Look Jess, the only reason your father is insisting that something is wrong, because it is pretty obvious.”

Alright, now she had to be careful. Her father was one thing, but her mom... Well her mom did not react to her secrecy and her sudden avoidance discussing their reasons to stop therapy, like her dad did. Her mom would keep silent, reflect about what she read in her daughters behavior and then without warning confronted her with something very close to the truth. Between the two of them it was like a game of bad dad and good mom, and as on TV, it was always good cop that got you in the end.

“I am sure you had your reasons not to tell us a month ago, that Sam stopped the therapy. But you know your dad, he is going crazy when he's worried about you, and you includes Sam.”
Her father frowned at that, as if his wife's words were completely unsubstantiated. But he seemed to let it go.

Her mom gave her a secret smile.

She had ended that discussion for Jess. Finally. Without waiting what her husband could get out of Jess.

That was odd, that Mom didn't even try to guess.

Maybe she became paranoid, Jess mused. Yeah, that whole incest-secret made her paranoid.

When she took a fair stand, she knew, that her parents would never give Sam a hard time for not being able to face his past. They would not even ask him why. From the beginning they made good guesses what questions were off limits. They had behaved in the most unobtrusive way parents could behave towards a boyfriend.

It was entirely due to them, that she was a person who could form a functioning relationship with a man who would never talk about his past. Who would deflect on questions like, *Do you have any siblings?* Sure, for good reason. But she hadn't known back then, she just accepted that Sam was a good person, who did not want to tell about his first day in kindergarten or how he first got drunk, or his first anything.

So probably her parents could be trusted with part of the truth.

“I cannot tell you everything,” she started, her mother seemed surprised and her father did his best, not to stagily draw out a stool for her to sit beside him, so she could talk. She smiled at him. “You are right, you are Sam's family. Probably officially so in the foreseeable future, because I found some stuff on our laptop, that suggests, he does research on engagement rings.”

“Really!?!” Her moms grin nearly split her face in two, she let all mature serenity go and squeed, jumping up and down, Gawd, Mom was such a girl sometimes.

Jess rolled her eyes. “I just told you, so you can practice your surprised look, though he might come to you first, 'cause knowing Sam, he will ask Dad for my hand.”

“I have to think over it,” he pointed with his finger and did his suspicious eyebrows, “That boy has a shady past.”

“Dad,” but she couldn't keep herself from laughing along with him. “It's better that way,” she finally said, still trying to think of what she could tell them.

“You keep saying that,” her father stated soberly. “What could be so bad, he's better off not remembering it? I mean, being raised by a single father, who dragged you through all states without ever settling down couldn't have been a picnic. But his father never hit him or abused him in any other way.”

“How do you know that?” she asked genuinely surprised. She knew that, at least Sam had said so when she had asked him about his scars in the beginning of their relationship. But with the recent development she wasn't so sure it had been a 100% truth.

“He told me so, and I believe him.”

“Why did you question him on that?!”
“You're raising your voice again, Jess.”

“Sorry, Mom.”

“I did not ask him anything. We were looking through old family albums, I was showing him baby photos of you.”

“Dad!”

“Just so you know, he said he wouldn't have cared if you hadn't grown out of your baby-fat-phase. So if you ever want to stop dieting.”

“I am not dieting. I am just working out a lot. Trust me, I am still eating like a seventeen year old linebacker.”

“Hopefully not with the same table manners,” her mother joked.

“Well according to Sam I do.” Strangely, he always addressed her greasy eating habits with such adoration, it was hard to feel insulted. “So you two were casually talking parental abuse over my bumblebee baby pictures.”

“I told him about Jeff.”

Her dad had talked to Sam about his father.

“He said he could relate. What it is like to tiptoe around a drunken father. Making sure never to upset him. To hear him stumble home in the middle of the night and have him sleep through all the day on a weekend he promised to spend with you.”

Sam had never talked with her about this. But then again, neither had her father, not with her and from the way her mom looked not too often with her either.

“Neglect sometimes is even worse than outright violence,” her dad went on. “Especially nowadays, some can get angry and fight back against an abusive parent. But with an absent one, who just does enough to keep you alive and in school, you do not even get officials to help you.”

Jess knew, that this was one of the reasons her father quit his job as a social worker when she was younger. It was not because he had strove for something better paid with more opportunity, but only because he could not take it anymore. He had quit his job and persuaded Sophie's mother to let her daughter go.

Sophie had lived with them for two years, before she left for college.

Jess had worshiped the older girl, and would have instantly announced her her sister. But Sophie always kept her at arms length and even when she came to visit these days, Jess could feel, what she learned to recognize as envy. When she had been younger, Sophie's coldness had hurt, but with the years she had accepted, that Sophie would never like her. It helped a little bit with the situation that her mom had sat down with her one time, when Sophie had rejected her again and told her about nonverbal communication.

Because of that talk, even at the age of ten she had understood, why her mom would hug Sophie first, smile at her more often than she did at Jess and searched for excuses to touch her, like braiding her hair or sitting next to her on the couch.

Though she had a jealous streak sometimes, Jess had not felt so because of all the attention Sophie
got from her mom. She had always been a very independent kid and not overly cuddly. Not even with her boyfriends.

Only when she had met Sam, she unearthed the knowledge of her mom's ways to build relationship. The shrink had been right, she and Sam touched a lot. And early on, she had found out that she needed that. Whenever she couldn't reach out to Sam through words she took a leaf out of her mother's book and reached out physically. Didn't hurt their sex life either.

Much later she found out how much Sam had needed all of it too. To be allowed to touch, to hold, sometimes to crawl into someone's space and get comfortable there. She had held the day dear, when he had confessed to her, that he never had that before, someone so close and just for himself. That was the day he told her he could imagine to spend the rest of his life just holding her hand.

Any guy could manage a simple I love you. Sam Winchester managed a I love you to the end of days; without sounding lofty. All her girlfriends awwed.

Only, she remembered exactly what he said: I never had that with a girl before.

She did not think anything about that when he had said it. But it came to her, when the shrink explained, how he thought the incest was just brotherly touch getting out of control. An expression of misguided love, instead of abuse.

The shrink had not seen how angry Sam got at his words. You needed to know that simmering heat intimately, to recognize it. For Sam it was clear, that there had been abuse, that it had been wrong.

Just she, for a moment, was remembered of the day Sam had held her, fingertips stroking her skin and how he told her how happy he was to have this. This emotional closeness that always came with their physical closeness. He never had that with a girl before.

When he had said it, she had not interpreted the longing in his voice, for a longing for something he had had before.

He had explained to her his relationships never worked because the constant moving. But now she wasn't so sure he had told her the truth.

How do you let someone close, when there is already someone else? And moreso, would you be allowed? Had his brother accepted Sam's aspiration for a normal relationship? Had Sam had to fear to lose the love of his brother if he let someone else close?

She could not ask this, because Sam himself did not know anymore. But from the time they had discussed how he felt about what they found out, and also, and more important to Sam, how she felt about it, she knew: Sam had asked himself the same questions. And was afraid of the answers.

Maybe his brother had not forced himself on Sam, but it sure had done a number on him. And still, even without the memories to the knowledge, it weighed on him.

Only not as much as it used to.

And that was, what she could tell her parents.

She explained to them, that Sam, for the first time seemed like a burden was taken from him, his smile was less sad, his ways more open, less cautious. He did not wake anymore from her leaving the bed at night.

“He did that?” her mom smiled, but there was nothing to smile about. It had made Jess reconsider
drinking after nine pm.

“Yes, failsafe. There once was a leaf falling down from a plant in our bedroom and he woke from that. A really small leaf. One. A dog wouldn't have heard that. Sam was out of bed and checking the whole apartment with a baseball bat, before we found out it had been a leaf and not an axe-murderer.”

“Has he still the nightmares he doesn't talk about?” her dad asked.

“Yes, but not as much. And he talks about them.”, and he let himself be calmed by her, which never before was possible, because he had always downplayed them to nothing. “He actually talks more openly about his past than ever before.” Like that his mom did not die of accidental cause - thank you Mister It didn't happen to me, I just wrote the report on it- but in a fire that burned down their house when Sam was a little baby. No wonder he had nightmares about people bursting into flames.

“So we do not bury our head in the sand about Sam's amnesia. We talk.” Not as much as they probably should have. It wasn't like Sam had forgot how to bind his shoelaces or to stop at a red light, or anything vital as that. They had time. “We just don't want to push it and be confronted with something Sam can't handle. I think to remember bit's and pieces is scarier, than to remember all of it.” She knew it was, Sam was scared, he even had admitted that. “I trust Sam to do this at his pace, without a therapist rushing him.”

Her mom nodded. “I know you don't like it when I say so honey, but I am proud of you. Not many girls of your age would be so supportive.” She even kissed her on the cheek.

“Mom, really. It's not like I play Mother Theresa. For one: I sleep with the guy-”

Her mother instantly let go of her, muttering 'You have your fathers humor.'

“-and for second: I am not sure how cool I would be, if he forgot about the time with me.”

Her father agreed to that, nodding mischievous, “I get it: Most of the important things in life he still knows. He is still smart enough to become a filthy rich lawyer. And that is good so, because I will not let my daughter marry some idealistic hippie graduated from a two bit college.”

“You mean one like you?” she kidded back. The doorbell rang.

She still had a smile on her face from the banter with her parents, when she answered the door.

She had not anticipated some stranger, more likely a neighbor, who felt obliged to ask her how she is doing at college, before they said what they really came here for.

Definitely not some guy who returned her smile with a twinkle in his eye. ...
Chapter 5

She still had a smile on her face from the banter with her parents, when she answered the door.

She had not anticipated some stranger, more likely a neighbor, who felt obliged to ask her how she is doing at college, before they said what they really came here for.

Definitely not some guy who returned her smile with a twinkle in his eye.

“Can I help you?” she asked bemused.

He stared at her for another full five seconds, before he shook his head, abandoning his own thought.

“You are Jessica Moore?” he asked, his voice a bit too deep, as if he made deliberately so.

Now her suspicion was full roused.

“Yes,” she did not hold back with what she thought about his question.

He turned his smile up a few more degrees, sheepishly happy about something. “I am sorry for this ambush Miss, this must seem really strange. I am just glad-and surprised we got to you in time.”

“Wow that cleared up everything,” she answered dryly, but with a little bit less suspicion. That guy, whomever he was, seemed genuinely happy to see her, like it meant a lot to him. And he made a little bit of a fool of himself.

“Uh, I'm,” he searched for something in his jeans, “Marshal Beards,” he showed her some credentials.

She checked them, but all she could tell they were not factored by a chewing gum machine. The star was metal, not plastic.

Then he conjured up a cell phone, stopped before he hit a button and asked, “Your parents don't also happen to be home?”

“They are. Why?”

His face brightened even more like she just told him she would strip naked for him. “My lucky day,” he said, before he corrected, “Actually it's your lucky day. Could you be a doll, go inside and wait there? I just have to make a call to the FBI, I will be with you in a minute and explain everything.”

“Oo-kay.” She left the crazy guy on the porch, went inside and considered locking the door.

She was still staring at it, as her father approached her.

“Who was that?”

“Oh just a guy who claims to be an US Marshal talking with the FBI.”

“And who is really out there?”
“Really a guy who shown me some Marshal creds and nearly peed himself in glee, because not only I, but you two are also home. Should I lock the door?”

“What is going on?” her mom asked, joining their guard duty at the door.

“The Feds sent a Marshal to take you in, Angela.”

“What?”

Her father apparently hijacked the joke that was no joke at all. Jess turned away from the door to explain her mother the situation. “There is really an US Marshal out there, he told me to stay inside and wait for him, until he had called the FBI.”

“Was there something on the news, Tom? You did watch them, didn't you?”

“I tell you, the government found out about you illegally downloading Days of our Lives. You think this FBI issued warnings against internet piracy are just for fun?”

“Actually,” the voice behind her made Jess jump. The Marshal had opened the door and let himself in, “they are not. Fun is not in the FBI budget. You will see, no humor these guys.” He nodded for emphasis and then focused on Jess' mom. “But 'cos we DooL fans have to stick together, I will not rat you out, mam.”

And then he winked at Jess' mom.

“And you are?” her mom asked with a sudden throat disease developing, because there was no way her mom was flirting with a guy her daughter's age.

“Marshal Beards,” again the credentials, he handed them to her dad.

Who seemed to approve of them, but did not give them back: “And if I called my contact at the Sheriff's department, these will check out?” he asked Marshal Beards.

“Sure,” just a hint of teeth, then he turned on his charm again. “I get this a lot, but I am a Marshal and I am not as young as I look,” he turned to her mom. “It's a curse,” he told her, fishing for sympathy and did this guy's eyes ever stop twinkling? “Would be easier if you'd call my superior directly,” he told her dad. “But if you wait a few minutes Agent Brownell and his partner will be here. They said they're just around the corner.”

“I would like to call your superior, after you explained to me what brings you here,” that voice reminded Jess, that her dad could get scary when he meant business.

“No problem, uhm,” Beards did not like this development. “It's two pm. He should be in the field, so you reach him over the cell. You got paper?”

Paper was handed. Still no explanation. “Don't expect him to be overly helpful,” he warned her dad while he handed back the written down number. “Bill is no fan of my work with the FBI.”

Her dad accepted the number and stared the Marshal down. “You are on first name basis with your superior?”

“What can I say, the Marshal service is a big family-” -twinkle again- “-Not like these FBI guys who call each other surnames while they break fraternization rules.”

She watched her mom laugh at a joke that wasn't even that good. Okay, the Marshal was cute. Still:
Way too young for you, Mom, Jess thought at her.

“Downside is”, Marshal Beards explained to her dad, “every family has a grumpy uncle who lives by himself and shoots at everyone trespassing his property.” He sighed, “And you're about to call that guy.”

She had to give him, he was really good at not telling them what he wanted here. And kinda entertaining while he did so.

“And what exactly do you want from us?” her dad wasn't so impressed with the Marshal's humor, maybe because Beards charm was fired mostly towards Mom.

The Marshal looked instantly apologetic, which, by now Jess suspected to be artificial. Like every emotion he showed, or maybe it just came off artificial, she could not really tell with the guy.

“I am so sorry. This,” he made a whole-thing gesture, “Comes to you in a flurry mess. I must seem like an idiot. I am just so glad to see you all alive. This is the first time we got to the girl before she was gruesomely murdered.”

The doorbell added to the shock of this revelation. And with the sound Marshal Beards lost all his goofiness, he made a gesture for them to back off, head deeper into the house, his expression focused and this time it didn't come off artificial. His right hand moved to his lower back, under his leather jacket, same time as he approached the door.

He relaxed after he had looked through the little window, at the door side and opened to two casually dressed man.

Sure she knew, real federal agents did not look like MIB, but these looked a little bit too casual.

“Agents, nice of you join us.” The Marshal was twinkling, all was well. “I was just explaining to the Moores how lucky they were, not to fall victim to your serial killer.”

“Were you jus' running off your big mouth or stopped a minute to clear the grounds?” the taller agent bit out.

Tall was an understatement, the man would have dwarfed Sam. The black man's shoulders nearly brushed the doorframe on both sides.

“No,” Marshal Beards replied sickenly sweet, “I was just here flirting with the ladies, left the legwork to someone who could use it.”

Wow, no love lost between those two, Jess thought.

“I will check outside,” the agent proclaimed, vanishing before ever only looking at them.

“Hey!” Beards called after him. But he was gone. “I checked outside,” he told the other agent. “No backdoors, cellar locked, all windows closed. Not a bad house concerning security. I did check before I came in.” Now he sounded about as young as he really was.

“Why do you tell me that? I speak sarcasm,” the agent replied. “What I don't get is why you waste it on Rabson.”

“Guy has no humor,” Beards mumbled sullen.

“His humor is good, his patience needs improvement.” The agent had closed the door behind him,
watching them with hard eyes. He looked not overly friendly, but polite in a distant way. He was a little scrawny, but maybe he made that first impression thanks to his partner. Her dad eyed him suspiciously. To Jess all this appeared most surreal.

That feeling subsided when the agent extended his hand, warm and sure, gave them his name, Agent Brownell and sat them down to explain it all.

Marshal Beards stayed silent through the whole story, though big parts of it, were his story.

How his first assignment was a family of three in witness protection. Father, Mother and twenty-two year old daughter. They all died. And the Marshal just couldn't let it go, kept digging about what went wrong, till he found out the murders were not done by the Irish mob, but were the third in a series of killings, always parents and their daughter.

He had tried to convince the FBI there was a case and cracked the pattern, that lead them to killings number four and five. Everything pointed to Jess herself as victim number six, her parents too, because for a reason they could not tell, he always murdered the parents too.

“Even if they girls do not live with them anymore,” that was the first time Marshal Beards injected himself into the conversation. “That's one of the things we don't know yet, why the parents too?” he shook his head. “Because everything is about the girls, they are all the same -hair color, height, weight, age, medschool, steady boyfriend, pecan nut allergy, cheerleading and runnersclub in highschool, no blood siblings, but adopted older sister who lives out of state, they are all born in last week of January, fond of 80s rock, national geographic reader-”, he stopped himself, Jess had stared at him. She felt a little sick. “I'm sorry this must be weird for you. But I've worked this case for so long and still can't figure out how the killer knows all this. Because the details always fit. It's crazy, just last week I talked to the aunt of Patty, she told me Patty never liked roses. I asked the other families, none of the girls liked roses.”

She took a deep breath.

“You don't like roses, do you?” he asked.

Jess shook her head. She had a stalker. Who wanted to kill her. And her parents. Sam-“My boyfriend.-”, she started, but Agent Brownell cut her off:

“We already sent agents to collect Mister Winchester. We don't think he is in danger, but now that we have a head start we wont leave anything to chance anymore.”

Sam would be safe.

“I must ask you to come with us,” Agent Brownell said. “Please pack for a few days outside of your home. You don't have any pets, right?”

Her mother shook her head. She was scarily silent through the whole explanation. She, just as Jess seemed to feel in her bones how close a call this had been. Five other families had already died. And Marshal Beards still seemed surprised, that they had found them before the killer had.

Packing was a silent ordeal. She had enough clothes at the house to make do. Her mother handed her a bag. She wanted to call Sam. She would when they were out of the house, on the way to the safe house Agent Brownell talked about.

Her father spoke to someone on the phone.

“Who did you call?” Brownell asked, when her father pocketed the phone.
“A very unhelpful US Marshal,” he answered.

Beards looked up, not apparently concerned, more ripe with mischief as if he knew what her father meant.

“He asked me more questions than I could ask him. When he was convinced I am who I said I was, he just told me you should quit playing with the FBI and come back to your real job. Then he called you something I will not repeat and hung up on me.”

“I tried to warn you,” the young Marshal gloated.

The van seemed old and rusty and it did not surprise her, when her father started to ask questions again.

Agent Brownell shrugged his shoulders, a gesture out of place for a sedate personality like him.

“Marshal Beards is not the only one here who goes against his superiors wishes,” he explained. “My unit did most of the investigation on their free time. This is why we work on our own budget, with our own vehicles.”

“What you told us presents a very solid case,” her father said, handing Agent Rabson his bag.

“Politics,” Beards explained. “The Service and the Bureau play bureaucratic-chicken. Whoever admits there is a case, admits he was wrong. But I was never one for stupid games when lives are at stake,” he ended with a stern expression.

It earned him a grunt from Agent Rabson.

Beards ignored it and paused with Jess' bag in hand. “You wanna ride with me?” he nodded towards a black classic car at the other side of the street. “My baby is not going to fall apart from rust before we get you safe.”

She could feel her father shift closer to her. A second later she realized it was not a real offer directed at her, but a jab at agent Rabson, who grabbed her bag from the Marshal's hands, without a word, but none was needed, his eyes spoke what he thought of the younger man.

“The Moores will ride with us,” Agent Brownell stated. “You will drive ahead, Marshal.”

The words were final and Beards took them as an order. He gave them a nonverbal See you later, and took off.

The first thing she noticed, when she climbed into the van after her parents, was the window to the front, the only one that should have allowed them to see outside: It was painted black.

The second thing she noticed was Agent Rabson climbing in after them with his gun drawn.

When the van's door opened again it felt like they had driven for hours. He had them drop their phones and their watches into a bag, so for all she knew it could have been hours. She already had overcome panic, fear, hysteria and begging. Now she was pissed.

The roads had indicated, they were in the middle of nowhere, at the end of a bumpy path. So it was no surprise to see tree's and nothing but trees around them.
Twinkly-eyes stood in the door of a rundown cabin, a beer in his hand.

He frowned when “Agent Rabson” urged them on to move.

“Seriously, the whole drive?” he asked scrawny-guy. “Couldn't you have fooled them for a little longer?”

‘Agent Brownell’ shrugged and this time it suited him. “The difference between a skilled liar and a brilliant one is the knowledge when to stop.”

“Spinnin' fairytales again, Caleb?” a gruff voice from the cabin's inside asked.

“At least I didn't get the boys to sleep with a warm glass of whiskey,” Caleb shot back with a mean grin in his thin face.

“Don't listen to him, you did great-” Twinkle-eyes told the older man, who had appeared out of the cabin's shadows and looked at them, scrubbing his dirty beard. “-with that one story you know,” added Twinkle-eyes.

“Quit swee'talkin' me and gimme a hand, would'ya,” was the rumbled reaction.

They both vanished from their sight and Caleb and 'Agent Rabson' maneuvered them into the cabin, to the side, as if they were cattle, not people. Jess lost her patience about two seconds before her father would have. “What do you want from us? Why are we here?!”

Caleb shot her a look that told her he couldn't care less about her questions.

To her surprise it was the bear of a guy who answered and showed signs of compassion: “You don't have to be afraid, Miss.” For all the intimidating, barked-out orders he gave them in the van, he now seemed to talk to a young child. “You just all have to stay for a while.”

Like that explained anything.
Chapter 6

They ended up shackled to a bed, which did not reassure any of them. After some time she stopped asking questions, because none of them were answered anymore. She had wondered for a moment why her father kept from doing the same. He just watched them and after they were left alone for a minute he quietly spoke to her and her mom. The man with the beard and the baseball cap, was the same he had talked on the phone with. They had not seen anything of this guy or “Marshal Beards” since they were shackled. They had heard a car, maybe Twinkle-eyes and the Baseballcap-man had left. Her dad had done a lot of thinking and came to the conclusion, now was maybe the only chance they had to escape.

Roger, that was what Caleb called the big man, had left the keys to the van on the kitchen table.

“If there was any chance to get out of those shackles.” Her father was eyeing the space between them and the keys.

“And how, do you plan to pick the lock somehow?” her mother asked, shaking her head.

“No, not him,” she suddenly answered. “But me.” How had she forgotten about the hair pins? While her mother helped her reaching them, she thought about it again. Her escape plans were not as detailed as her father's, but he was right, it was now or never. They would not expect them to find a way so quickly. And as her father pointed out, they did not want to stay around to find out what these guys would do to them.

She broke two nails bending the pin into shape, but for all the sweat and pain, it was worth it, because she needed a lot less time opening her shackles than she expected.

Still it was not fast enough.

Footsteps approached from outside. Hastily she pulled the shackles on, so that they looked like they were still in place.

Roger, closely followed by Caleb.

“How long has Bobby said?” Roger asked.

“Less than an hour,” was the short reply.

The waiting game began. Because neither of the men seemed to leave and with every second that ticked away it became more likely, that the other two would return.

She did not exactly know when the decision formed in her head to take on two armed men.

It was insane. But it was somewhat between her counting half an hour gone and Caleb crouching nearby, turning his back to her.

There it was. The gun, tucked away into his waistband.

She could have gone straight for the gun, but she acted on pure instinct and flung herself at him.

He couldn't weigh much more than her. Her body crushed him headfirst into the wall. She pulled the gun from him. Aimed and could only in the last second dodge 300 pounds that attacked her.

Roger missed her, but grabbed after her, his hand encircling her arm in a steel grip, shaking it hard,
till she lost the gun. It dropped somewhere, and he howled in pain as she kicked his shin.

She must have gotten him good, because he let her arm go and she did not loose a second to attack him again. She fought with everything she got. And he must have been stunned by that. At least for two more seconds. Then he had his hand in her hair, trying to hold her still. The door flew open, the young guy followed by Baseball-cap and she should have stopped fighting, but she couldn't, she squirmed to break free from the arm surrounding her middle, till the young one pulled a gun.

And aimed at her mother.

She went so still even her lungs constricted mid-breath.

“Let go.”

She did not understand. Not before he repeated. “Let THE FUCK go of her!”

The pressure around her ribs and arms subsided and the tug on her hair eased. Roger let go of her. His fingers untangled from her strands, he even stepped away.

“You needed to get rough with her?” now-not-so-Twinkly-eyes asked, his gun arm dropped a little, away from pointing directly at her mom.

Roger shrugged. “She ‘s gone for the gun.”

This explanation earned him a disdainful sneer. “You gotta be kiddin' me.”

“She took Caleb out and kicked me in the shin.”

“Boohoo, the little girl kicked you.”

Baseball-cap stepped in between them, took her gently by the arm and led her to the bed.

“You gotta keep in mind, Roge,” Twinkle-eyes' slight scoffing turned into something more mocking. “You're bigger than her and she is a lot more scared of you than you are of her.”

When Roger came up to the younger man, she was sure, he would make him bleed, gun or no gun in Twinkle-eyes' hand.

Roger's fists slackend, and all their strain went to his voice. “Watch your mouth with me, boy. You are not your father.”

Not in the slightest intimidated, the younger man took another step to close any distance between them. “Touch her again and you will find out how much I am my father.”

“Tha's it!” baseball-cap said. “Roger, we took care of your van. You probably wanna take a look at it.”

It was a dismissal. Roger took it.

“And you,” baseball-cap addressed twinkle-eyes, “Get lost, don't wanna see you till they're hea.”

This dismissal was not followed. “He hurt her.”

“You're hurt?” the old man asked her gently.

Jess shook her head.
“See.”

“But-”

“Clean some guns or sumthin', jus-!” he shook his head.

That was when the younger one got it and left into the backroom of the cabin.

The old man let out a sigh easily expressing years of frustration. He put her shackles back on and asked her. “Where is it?”

She honestly didn't know what he wanted, but he did not seem to believe that.

“Look, sweetheart, I don't get it from strip searchin' young girls, make this easy for both of us.”

The hair pin.

“You got out of these shacks somehow...” he stalled actually searching her for it.

“It must have fallen down somewhere,” she answered and took a look herself.

He sighed again, squinted his eyes and then called out, “Caleb, you help me, we're searching for... a hairpin I guess.”

The other man had nursed the bump on his head, now stood up and approached her warily.

“You need something from me, Bobby?”

“She let the hair-pin fall, you have better eyes.”

“Better eyes my ass,” Caleb scoffed. “You just don't want to go head level with this one's knees, mean fighter she is. I once had a girlfriend like that.”

Bobby reached behind her on the bed, hair-pin found and gave a her contemplative look, still talking to Caleb, “I s'riously doubt you ever had a girl like that.”

“People always underestimate me.”

“You're a'right?” Bobby asked him, nodding to Caleb's head.

“I will be fine. As long as I don't have to listen to Dean's shit. You keep him in line, will ya?”

Dean. Twinkle-eyes, Jess thought.

“Do I look like their nanny?” Bobby replied. “As far as I'm concerned those infantile idgits can brain each other. May spark some enlightenment.”

“Sure,” Caleb considered. “But, when Roger teaches Dean to shut up, who will talk you down from shooting John?”

“No one” Bobby grinned, “Win-Win.”

Dean and John.

...
Chapter 7

“Sure,” Caleb considered. “But, when Roger teaches Dean to shut up, who will talk you down from shooting John?”

“No one” Bobby grinned, “Win-Win.”

Dean and John.

He came back after a while. Acted perfectly normal, even around Roger, as if they had not been short of beating the crap out of each other only ten minutes ago.

She could not keep her eyes off him.

This was not how she had imagined him. Not that Sam had told her much, but he was just different, not like Sam's older brother should look like. Too blond and fair. Too butch and feminine at the same time. Way too flirty and hotheaded.

It had to be him. Dean and John, it would've been too much of a coincidence.

Didn't take long for him to get uncomfortable under her stare.

Sam would have become shy. Dean stared right back at her, a false smirk in place, covering his uneasiness.

“Jess, stop it,” her father asked her.

Dean had heard him. “You should listen to your old man, 'cause he has a point there.”

“Who are you?” she asked, not backing down.

“Siegfried Houdini,” he answered and grinned like a loon. He carried on with his task and it almost did not look like he fled when he left the cabin.

“What was this about?” her father whispered.

She explained equally silent. Not that Bobby really seemed to listen in on their conversation.

“I didn't even know Sam had a brother,” her mother summed it up.

“One of the things he did not tell me before he lost his memory. Like that his father and his brother are criminals.”

“What kind of criminals?” her father asked, but they did not have a chance to discuss this further, because a car was to be heard outside and Dean entered with Caleb in tow.

“They're here.”

Had she not expected John Winchester, she would not have been able to identify him. The man entering the cabin had nothing in common with the smiling face she knew from the picture,
showing him and Sam's dead mother.

Jess' thoughts about John were short lived, because with him entered another man, and both of them had Sam in the middle.

Sam appeared unharmed and calm enough, though he did not come willingly with them.

The second he spotted her, all his calm vanished.

He froze and she was remembered of the very recent experience of stopped breath. Sam's eyes grew wide, his struggle ceased and a word formed unbidden, *No.*

He shook his head. “Dad, I gotta talk to you,” his voice was low and even.

Yet Jess knew better, though she never had heard him like that. Never had heard him panic before.

“Please, you can let them go.” She never had heard Sam beg either. “I will listen, they don't need to be here.” Tears were forming in his eyes betraying his voice of any placidity. “I will stay. Just let them go.” No reaction from his father to this panic-stricken pleading, none at all.

“’s okay Sammy,” it came from Dean. She had forgot about him. “It's alright.”

Dean was clearly disturbed about his brothers fear. “What's up with him?” he asked John.

“His accident in May. He has partial memory loss, he does not believe that there are demons,” John answered.

Jess shared a quick look with her parents. Now they had an answer to what kind of criminals: the religious psychosis kind.

Sam's pleading drew her attention again:

“Please, Dean, anything,” he seemed breathless, like he kept himself from sobbing, “I will do anything, just tell Dad it is not necessary to keep Jess and her parents here,” he sounded reasonable, but then his words fell apart again, “Anything Dean... Please, I am sorry I left - it was a mistake, I see that now, just let them go, they have nothing to do with this, with us...”

Dean looked wide eyed from his father to his brother, unable to reply anything to that. In the background Caleb stated, *The demons got Sammy hard on the head,* which Dean didn't hear over Sam's pleas, but John did. The glare he sent towards Caleb made the guy volunteer for doing rounds outside.

“Sammy, you are confused, we would never hurt you or your girl,” Dean's voice had a pleading quality of it's own. “We took them for their own safety; sure it looks tough, but the are in good shape,” it seemed like he really could not take it to see his little brother so distraught. “Jess! Tell Sam you're okay,” he did not wait her answer. “You should have seen her, not even half an hour ago she picked her shackles and beat up Roger; he whined like a baby.”

Sam shot her a look and it held so much regret, so much misery, so much guilt, it made her feel physical pain.

“I am okay, Sam,” she heard herself reassure him. “We are okay.”

The man, who came with John, had a gentle look on his face and finally let Sam's arm go.

Testing, like he was not sure, they would let him, he made his way to her, knelt beside her. He
seemed not to know what to do with hands, they looked like they tried hard not to rip through her shackles own their own.

“Can I take them off?” he asked nobody specific.

“They stay shackled,” John denied. “They’re flight-risks.”

Sam did not ask a second time.

A silence had fallen over them. She let it be, in spite of every bone inside of her screaming to talk to Sam, she waited, till all these men lost interest into them.

“Who is the other man,” she finally asked. “The one who brought you with your father?

Sam understood and kept his voice softened. “He is called Jim, but I don't know more, I don't recognize any of them.” He touched her, had his head beside hers, she wanted to kiss him, but Sam evaded the move.

“Don't. Not here.”

“Because of him?”

“I don't know how he will react.”

“Who?” her father asked and was smoothly ignored by Sam. Who turned to her mother, asking, “How you holding up Angela?”

“I had my moment of hysteria an hour ago,” she joked.

“I am so sorry,” came Sam's frantic apology.

Her father would not let him fall into that hole. “Sam, did you kidnap my daughter, my wife and me?”

“No, I-”

“Then don't say you're sorry, it's not your fault,” her father stated the facts. “Do you know what they want?”

Sam turned, made sure they were not watched, when he told them silently about what his father had said. Religious psychosis suddenly seemed like a very abstract couple of words, compared to Sam's narrative...

“...believes my mother was killed by demons too and that they had come for me when I was a baby. He thinks he is fighting dark forces, and that they are pursuing me somehow.” Sam stopped, swallowing. “I am so stupid, I did not want to remember. It could have helped us now. I have no idea what they will do-”

Dean headed their way, and Sam had quietened, must have read in her eyes someone came up behind him, that it wasn't safe to talk anymore.

His brother squatted beside the bed, looking up to Sam. “Sammy,” the nickname startled Sam visibly, nobody called him that, “You want something? Pastor Jim said they plucked you right outside a Starbucks, so...are you hungry?”
Dean got only a mumbled reply, *I'm good*, more a flinch in words than anything.

Dean seemed stricken by a startled flinching Sam. Jess felt his uneasiness vibrate beside her and she could relate how hard it was not to reach out to soothe Sam.

“Hey,” Dean tried again, “I know all this looks weird, but it will be okay, you know that right.” It didn't seem to be a question, but it wasn't a statement either.

Sam looked like he wanted to say something, followed by a hard silence like he bit his tongue not to ask again for them to let Jess and her parents go.

She marveled at the fact that Dean seemed to read Sam's expressions easily. Because he nodded an apology like Sam had asked and he had to deny him. “I don't know how much you remember, but you remember me, so you have to know it will be okay, right Sammy? I would never let anything happen to you.”

Sam became more unreadable with everything his brother said, but Jess recognized this look, he tried to make himself go through this; he nodded, “You watch out for me.”

Five simple words caused Dean to give him a megawatt smile outshining real light and lending him a sudden brightness, Jess thought only reserved for small children, the kind of happy expression that leaked into the world and infected other hearts.

“So, how much do you remember?” Dean said, like everything was right in the world again.

“Not much, everything since the second I sat in the bus to Stanford,” Sam kept it neutral. But was there a neutral way of saying, I don't remember anything about you? “I know I was angry but I don't remember the reason for that.”

Dean snorted like he remembered the reason just fine. “But you remember me and Dad-”

“No, not really,” Sam told him.

“You recognized us, from photos or something?” the light dimmed, his brother slowly realized Sam did not remember whatever he thought he did remember.

“Or something: I did research on my past.”

“Sure you did,” an easy quip, before Dean asked with reined in dread, “What came up?”

“Not much,” Sam answered, they played a game of poker Jess realized, Sam fished for tells, had to give things himself if only by making a bet, say - talking about things, so that Dean called him upon it and talked too, but he did not give up much; neither did Dean, only on his part she was not sure if it was intentional or pure instinct.

“I visited a hypnotist.”

Another snort from Dean.

“I only came up with one memory from that. That's how I recognized you, I remember you.”

Strange how wary Dean suddenly was, Jess thought, but on the other hand, there were many things to remember about Dean, Dean was probably afraid Sam would tell anyone.

“What do you remember?” a grin, semi bluff, re-raisin and pushing Sam to fold.
“Mostly the pain from getting these scars,” Sam made a clawing gesture along his midriff. “You carried me. You were pretty scared for me.”

“It looked like you would bleed out then and there,” Dean said in a way, like being afraid for his brother was something he had to excuse. “But you remember the black dog so you have to remember-”

“I remember no black dog, Dean,” Sam stated. “Only pain and you.”

Some could have taken that last sentence of Sam's as an accusation. Dean looked guilty, but then Jess realized so he would have if Sam's choice of words would have been different. He felt guilty because Sam had been hurt and it seemed to be Deans sole reason not to let any harm come to Sam.

For the first time since she been taken from her home, she relaxed a little. Nothing bad would happen to Sam; at least nothing bad in his brother eyes.

“You ‘ sure you don't want anything, I got a four day old tuna-sandwich? You wanna beat your own record of eating a three day old one?”

“No, I think I'll pass dinner,” a small smile, one had to know Sam expertly to recognize it as fake.

“Maybe it's better if he has an empty stomach,” Roger said to Dean's back.

“Why's that?” Dean asked.

“James had an idea, Bobby called it crazy but good, he's preparing for it right now,” Roger explained.

“Idea about what?” Dean asked, annoyed about the vagueness.

“This one's memory.”

“What's that supposed to mean?”

Jess sensed that Dean was at the end of his patience.

But so was Roger. “See me wearing a skirt? I ain't no secretary! Get your ass upright and ask them yourself.”

Dean got up, patting Rogers stomach bypassing him.“With your BMI I suggest wide flossy summer-dresses.”

Jess thought Rogers BMI suggested he could tear Dean apart with bare hands and Roger seemed to think that too, because this time he let it slide.
Chapter 8

Hours passed. Sam would not stop holding her hand, like he was terrible afraid to let her go. What should be a comforting gesture had become one of terrible fear.

He was not shackled, but he was out manned and all of these guys looked like they could handle the guns and shotguns, that stuck in their waistbands and hung loosely from their shoulders. Even the one Dean called Pastor Jim carried a gun. And when John Winchester took off his black leather jacket, there was a fucking machete in a sheath on his back.

She squeezed Sam's hand.

For a moment he seemed startled, but then she saw, that he was just jolted from deep thought.

He scanned the room like he was searching for someone to return eye contact. And, when no one did, he turned close to Jess.

“If you get the chance,” he whispered, “you run. Even when you have to leave me behind.”

“Sam-”, in no fucking way-

“Jess, we can't start an argument here. Just listen,” his eyes were wide and pleading. “They will not hurt me. You heard Dean, I am one of them. You are not. I am safe. But I know that they are gonna hurt you and your parents.”

Did he really think she would buy that? “Bullshit.”

Dean was moving in their direction. He just opened the fridge, took out a beer and handed it his father.

When he was out of ear-shot again, her eyes turned back to Sam and she told him what she thought about his little plan: “They think you got influenced by demons, you have no fucking clue if or not they will hurt you. What we know is that he has unusual ways of keeping you safe, you expect me to trust that? Bullshit! I am not leaving you.”

Sam's lips were a thin line, one only formed when he was really pissed or in stress. “Fine. No Bullshit. You can do absolutely nothing to keep them from hurting me. But with you here I am susceptible to blackmail. With you here, I will do anything they say. Because nothing they could do to me could be worse than watching you suffering. I can take everything they dish out as long as I know you are safe. So if you love me, you take your chance to run without looking back.”

~ The absolute sincerity which Sam spoke to his daughter seemed to work on her. Even Tom's hard-headed little girl had to give into that.

And he himself was moved. He knew that Sam loved his daughter, would never jeopardize her safety, but as a father he could not avoid to put blame on him. No matter what he had told him before, Sam was the reason they were here. What he had not counted on, was Sam's willingness for self-sacrifice.

“Jess, promise me,” Sam asked her again.
She gave him a very reserved nod that did not seem to assure Sam at all:

“Jess-”

“It’s alright Sam,” he interrupted him. “She understands. She’s a smart girl and she does not stop being smart under pressure. Must have got that from her mother, because she sure did not get that from me.” That made his girls smirk. And Sam smiled a little, he took Jess hands again.

Tom really would have wanted to ask, why or better because of whom they did not touch more. Normally the kids couldn't stay apart for more than a few minutes, but since Sam arrived he had not kissed Jessica, no hug, not even a peck on the cheek. It couldn't be just tactic, so these people would not view her as a bargain chip. They knew she was his girlfriend, nothing to hide there. No, something more specific was behind their distance.

Suddenly everyone moved, several shotguns were cocked with that forceful scraping click.

And then he heard it too, outside, the rumble of a car died down. Car doors were opened and shut. Bobby, the one with the baseball cap, came inside.

“Calm down y' idgits,” he mumbled. “Is just Ellen.”

“Roadhouse Ellen?” Roger asked.

“Who the hell called Ellen?” the Pastor asked and laid a hand on John Winchesters arm. Who seemed calm, but wasn't. It was like watching a grizzly bear just standing there, no outward indication that promised violence, but you just knew he would rip you into pieces.

“Ellen? Who the fuck is Ellen?” Sam's brother asked with a hint of amusement, but he was eyeing his father just as wary as the others.

Only one didn't seem to give too much thought on the questions, and that one John addressed now: “You shouldn't have called her, Singer.”

Bobby shrugged. “It was the smart thing to do. She wants to help and we need every gun.”

“Ellen and I had a fallout, she does owe me nothing,” John's words sounded pretty final.

But the suicidal baseball cap man just shrugged again. “You and me did not part on friendly terms either and I am here, am I not.” That did not come out final, but it was, because before anyone could have said something else, the door swung open.

A women, about their age entered in, followed by a blonde girl, maybe still in her teens.

The pastor greeted her warmly, tried to shake her hand, but the woman that had to be Ellen pulled him into a hug. “You suddenly shy on me Jim?” she asked in a rough voice, that spoke of too many cigarettes and too many late nights.

The girl gave him a hug too, they exchanged a few words, Tom could not understand because Ellen laughed loud and deep over Bobby's mumbled greeting.

He gave her a flask and asked her to drink.

She shook her head. “Thanks, Bobby, you know how to treat a lady, but you should also know I do the job sober.”

“That's spiced with holy water,” he explained. “You know the drill Ellen.”
“If I am not wrong I just walked over a saltline and two devils-traps,” she pulled out a necklace from under her shirt. “I wear an anti-possession amulet. All the same, you try to roofie me”, she grinned and took a swig from the flask. “You're one paranoid bastard, Singer.”

“Thought that's what you love in a man,” he joked, while she handed the flask to the young girl. Who also took a swig and handed it back to Bobby, chatting him up, like she had done with the Pastor.

“Winchester,” Ellen approached the grizzly and for a second the whole room stopped breathing.

“Ellen,” there was a softness in his voice he did not even use towards his own children.

It did not only surprise Tom. Dean seemed very irritated, but still had not repeated his question from before.

But that was only a small amount of reaction compared to Dean's widened eyes when the girl flung her arms around his fathers neck. “Uncle John,” she squeezed him fiercely, her voice barley containing her happiness. “It's been too long.” She let go and there was the faintest smile on him.

“You're supposed to check for your wallet now,” she beamed.

“Since when?” he asked. “I reacall we have a standing agreement: what you can steal from me without getting caught is pocket money.”

“Sweet,” she lit up like the sun. “I've always liked that jackknife of yours.”

“Joanna-Beth,” her mothers voice broke up the moment, “Stop fooling around.” Tom was not surprised that the girl handed John a pocket knife without showing any form of protest. “Get out, help Caleb unload the car.”

Joanna-Beth did what she was told, but not before rolling her eyes and giving Dean a discreet once over. Who did not behave as charmingly as he had done with Jessica and Angela when he tried to get them to follow him. Tom had been sure that Dean fancied himself as a ladies man and his bordering antagonistic ignorance to a young girl's assessment made no real sense.

Till Ellen stepped closer to John and Dean narrowed his eyes in anticipation of a hug that never came.

Dean did not like how friendly these women were with his father.

Or how friendly his father was with them, because Ellen did not really radiate warmth towards the eldest Winchester. Tom spared a quick glance to Sam, who followed the event just as focused as he did.

John was the first to break the silence. “There was no need for you to come here Ellen.”

“But here I am,” she replied. “I will not say let bygones be bygones, John. But you were like family once and this thing is too big to watch safely from behind the counter.”

“How much has Bobby told you?”

“All of it. He's a smart man.”

“He can't have told you everything, because you wouldn't have brought Jo then,” he retorted grim. “This will get ugly.”
Dean watched his father with furrowed brow. It was obvious he did not like the concern John showed for the girl.

“I know ugly,” Ellen retorted. “And Bobby told me everything. Even the things you think, he doesn't know. I have a good idea what's waiting for us in the next years. It's pure strategy to keep family as close as possible and seek safety in numbers.”

John nodded. The grizzly-bear-vibe did not really subside, but he seemed to accept Ellen's presence.

“Don't think you can hide from me Roger Rabson, I spotted you the second I walked in,” Ellen called out to the big man who tried to make himself invisible. “The only reason I have not hunted your ass down for what you did to my saloon is because Gordon really deserved the beating you gave him.”

“Yes, mam. We're good?” Roger asked.

“It's what I just said. You could make yourself useful, draggin my daughter back in here. Before she and Caleb eat up the food I brought.”

She turned back to John. “It's mostly canned food.” John nodded, while his sons face fell. “With what I brought, we should last ten days before we have to head out.”

“Great,” Dean commented.

“Don't be like that, boy,” Bobby slung an arm around Ellen's shoulder. “Ellen Harvelle warms cans like no other.”

“So you must be Dean,” Ellen assumed and with that assumption dissipated the last grounds of Toms theory, that Joanna-Beth's way of addressing John as her uncle was anything more than an endearment.

“Yes, mam. That's me,” Dean wore a smirk, like a mask to hide anything true.

“Bobby told a little about you. You're a good hunter,” it was not a question and Dean did not add anything to it. “A wide range of experience from hunting with John, I guess,” also not a question, Tom asked himself what exactly was discussed here, because what had hunting to do-

“With all that hunting and as you hunted demons too-”

“Yes, mam,” his respectful answer was betrayed by underlying rebellion, but she would have none of it:

“That wasn't a question. You should let me finish speaking. As you know as someone who hunted demons, hand to hand is important when you fight them.”

Dean nodded with grit teeth.

“My daughter's good with knifes and guns, which is pretty useless against a demon. Jo is not helpless, but she needs experience with someone who outweighs her more than I do. I would say you qualify for that.” Now she had ended speaking and while Dean did not grit his teeth anymore, he didn't look too happy either.

“If its just weight”, he shrugged, “Roger would be the right one for the job, he pretty much outweighs anything short of an elephant.”
Tom thought Dean had a point there, but he was sure, Ellen would not like to be talked back.

“I was not asking Roger, I was asking you.”

Again Tom found himself be right. It was a terrible thought that an impressive woman like her was absolutely insane.

“Roger was not hunting when he weighed 120 pounds soaking wet, you did. You know how to fight like that and more you know how to spar with someone weighing so much less than you,” something of her words changed Deans demeanor, his eyes flickered to them, more exactly to Sam, “You will train her over the coming weeks,” Ellen finalized, “I trust you with my daughter, take the compliment.”

“Yes, Mam,” this time there was just respect in his voice.

Jo came hurtling down, the door nearly swinging shut behind her. “Jim-Jim, I saved the pie for you and Bobby; Caleb would have eaten it all alone.”

“You know lying is a sin, young lady.”

“Whom you talkin to, Padre? Can't see no lady in here,” Jo stuck out her tongue.

John and Ellen gave place to the sudden communion over the table, where Jo had dropped boxes with pie and other goods that seemed to be food.

This was the first time Ellen looked at them, except for the quick cover her eyes had given the whole room when she had entered in.

“Hi, Sam,” she softly greeted him. “Are you and your folks hungry?”

Tom would have answered with a yes, but he wasn't the one who was asked. And Sam did not answer, just fixated Ellen with wide eyes that Jess often called the puppy dog eyes of doom. They seemed to work on the hard tongued woman, because her voice softened only more. “You must be scared, kid, but there is no need to be scared on an empty stomach.”

Sam tilted his head and it made his transgression to a young boy only more believable.

“Bobby just said amnesia, but not what he still knows,” Ellen implicated a question towards John.

“As far as we know his memory is blank about everything and everyone before he left for college. He does not know anything about the supernatural,” John explained. “Which is why we are sure this is no normal amnesia.”

Ellen nodded solemnly. “So you kidnapped him and the only family he knows and thought that wouldn't spook him?”

John shot her a look. It seemed he expected his looks to be met by a hasty retreat, so he still tried, even with Ellen's immunity to them.

“I would've used a gently approach,” he answered in what suspiciously sounded like defensiveness.

“You mean lying,” Ellen suspected.

“With everything I got,” he affirmed. “But Jim tried it with the truth, now Sam thinks we're all crazy.”
She crouched in front of Sam, but still talked to John. “He ain't got that wrong, you guys are about as sane as a pack of wolves with the rabies.” She smiled. “But you know what Sam? As long as they are eating, they are completely harmless.”

Tom knew Sam and he knew how smart the kid was, there was no way he trusted her, but nothing of that mistrust showed on Sam's face.

“I bring them burritos and booze-” Ellen joked gently, “they even refrain from shooting each other.” She coaxed out a small smile from Sam, before he let his gaze fall down, away from her, a perfect storm of hope and fear in his eyes. Tom could only think, that one day Sam would play the jury like a violin. If they lived that long.

“Don't let yourself be fooled by him, Ellen.”

She stood up to face John after that comment.

“He's still my son. Behind this fear is nothing but calculation. I would do him wrong, ’d I say he has only one escape plan up his sleeve. He has counted the miles when we drove here. I just don't know if he still knows the area he lives in as I taught them to. But if so, he knows where he is and how long it takes by foot to get back to civilization.” A weird thing to inspire pride in a father, that when kidnapped by him, his children would know how to escape. Tom watched Sam closely, who kept his scared-puppy-act in place. But said not one word.

The conversation John and Ellen had over their heads, was interrupted by Sam's brother who brought them food and wouldn't leave, till Sam had eaten up.
The first night felt long. They slept little to nothing, except for Jess. Her baby-girl was able to sleep leaning against a wall in the middle of an Italian wedding feast -which was not a metaphor, Angela had pictures.

After Sam had told them it would be best to take turns on sleeping, two of them awake, while the other two could rest, Jess, like a little kid, called dibs, a joke designed to elicit a smile from the boy. Angela marveled over her daughter, snuggled close to Sam, holding his hand, trusting him completely to wake her, should something happen. Her husband's 'sleep' wasn't as trusting as Jess'.

Sam and her talked sparsely, mostly not to wake Tom and Jess. But they were not the only ones dividing the night into shifts.

Most of the men stayed up through the night and only took turns on a couch and two very uncomfortable looking cots made of army blankets on the floor. Angela did not see where Ellen and her daughter slept, it was in the backroom of the cabin and they stayed there.

John Winchester did not go to sleep. In the middle of the night, when Sam woke Jess, he still sat over the books he studied. Long after his discussion with Bobby had become silent and Bobby had woken up Caleb, ushering him away from the couch and took it for his own.

She had tried hard to sleep when it was her turn, logic told her Tom and Jess would keep her as safe as it was possible and that she needed the rest. But more often than Sam, a creaking sound or the closing of the door would bring her back to awareness. And so it was not lost to her, that also the second part of the night John Winchester did not retire from his lecture. He would only take a break to drink from a unlabeled bottle or sip some cold coffee.

In the break of dawn she was woken by the door opening from outside. Ellen came in, closed the door behind her more gingerly than the men had done and leaned a shotgun to it's side. The woman sat down next to John, close to him, a gesture of tired indecorousness more than familiarity. Angela had watched them in the afternoon, they behaved like something was broken between them and both were careful not to step on the fragments. They exchanged words now, John read something to her, but Angela wasn't able to make out all the words.

Then John abruptly stood up, headed over to the cots.

He stood beside his sleeping son, calling him by his name to wake him up.

Dean blinked into wakefulness, staring up to his father, who nodded to the door.

Sleep still deep in his bones, slugging his movements, Dean rolled to the side, brought himself upright and searched for his jacket.

Before he reached for the shotgun, he paused looking into their direction. Watching the sleeping form of his brother a full minute, till, the sound of a cup put down on the table, startled him.

Dean took the gun and left the cabin, closing the door even more carefully than Ellen had done.

Later Angela wouldn't be able to tell what woke Sam, but it must have been his father bringing down the cup noisily, it couldn't have been his brother leaving.
Morning arrived busy and loud. Joanna-Beth, who was actually called Jo made breakfast and now Angela understood what the older woman had meant when she referred to the men as a pack. They were constantly fighting and bickering, unless they were eating, then they only growled (metaphorically speaking).

It was chaos, like a pack without an alpha. Or better with too many alpha's. Someone with less trained eyes for social cue's would have thought John Winchester was unrivaled, because he ordered the others around and they carried the tasks out.

But then so did Ellen and with her no one even dared to talk back. Aside from her daughter, Joanna.

Ellen and John very carefully avoided to bark orders at each other.

What made it really unstable, was that none of the other seemed accustomed to work together. To stay with the pack metaphor, the lead was a little bit unclear, but the others had absolutely no certain place. And like dogs or wolves their nature would not let them have peace till it was proved who dominated whom. Even the young girl, had her fight with Sam's brother. It was hard to follow in the medley of voices and Angela could not say if Jo was flirting with him, or rejected him, whatever it was he was not happy with her. Not even after she made him breakfast.

It did not help, that there was a wild card in the pack.

She needed some time to figure Bobby Singer out, but then Angela saw that he was... special. He did not follow John's orders. He openly ignored John, or like when he opened their shackles during breakfast, made fun of him, Didya plan to keep them chained up till the shackles rust off or what?

Ellen did not order Bobby around, only scolded him, which he also did not take lying down, You have to put a ring on that finger, before I wash dishes for you, Ellen.

He fusses over Dean like the stereotype of a yiddishe mama: constantly acting as if the young man was the reason his hair turned gray, but defending him against anyone, including Dean's own father.

It took more time for Angela to realize that all this wild card behavior of Bobby Singer did not add to the chaos, he actually calmed it a bit, by breaking off fights and keeping peace with most of them. Actually all of them, but John.

So it surprised her when Bobby volunteered to drive John to a psychic.

„You better keep a normal pace, Singer, because I intend to catch some sleep,” John said and while that was not overly confrontational, Bobby did not put up with it:

“Holy crap! You're a prissy bitch today. I forgot what a bag of cheers you are after a night-shift.”

The pastor helped them packing books and smiled, like he did not hear the profanities spoken in his presence. “You mean compared to the cuddly guy he is after he rested his head on downy pillows?

“I want you to come too, Jim,” John missed on purpose that he was made fun of.

“If you think it is necessary,” the Pastor agreed.

“No ’s not. John just don’t want to talk to the psychic,” Bobby disagreed. “Psychics don’t like him.”

“That is not true, fraud-psychics like your hippie friend don't like me, because I got no time for their hoax rituals,” John icily corrected.
“But,” Dean introduced himself in their conversation, chewing and then swallowing first before he went on. “Her vitality ritual was really fun,” he smugly informed them, a smirk turning dreamy.

“O yeah? Ya missed the real fun, boy,” Bobby started to rant, “When she showed up at my doorstep asking for ya number because she wanted to tell you her period was late. Or when her husband wanted to know where you live because he wasn't as pro-free-love as he thought. More pro-free-punches to face. And most fun had been when her coven, in other words all her female relatives, broke into my house tellin' me We, the Elders, had responsibility to the new life - they tried'a milk me for some money!”

Dean appeared to feel guilty about this incident, but his words did not deliver the right message, “Well... then it's good that you have no money, right?”

“And you say me I have problems with psychics,” John joked.

It was Bobby's turn to glare angrily at him. “If you ever had the Talk with that boy, we'd all have a lot less problems.”

“That was not necessary,” Pastor Jim intervened. “I had the Talk with Dean when he was twelve and he agreed with me, that it is best for a young man to stay chaste till marriage.”

Even though he tried hard to stay grumpy, Bobby had to laugh about that as much as the other two man.

Dean furrowed his brow. “What are you laughing about?”, he asked. “I still have my promise ring,” he held up his hand. “Chastity gave it to me after she got real biblical with me.”

The pastor laughed and shook his head. “I was way too late when you were twelve,” he said with tears of amusement in his eyes. “That is why I had the Talk with Sam when he was nine.”

Bobby made grumphing sound like he remembered.

“Yeah, that was a Talk,” John stated, looking over to his younger son, who followed the conversation like Angela did. “He started to study the catechism and learned to read the mass in latin.”

Dean wasn't aware Sam heard him when he went on. “Yeah he freaked out when he found out we are unbaptized and he can't become a catholic priest, as long as he is not.”

“He wanted to be catholic priest?” the Pastor asked. “Why catholic?”

“Because your Talk made him swear off women,” Dean stated sourly. “You were not there to see the fallout. It took me years throwing easy girls at him to make him overcome his deranged ideals.”

Sam had followed this conversation with a blank expression and now that he noticed Angela was watching him, pursed his lips and gave a little shrug, like he wanted to indicate, he wasn't so sure these stories were true. Couldn't be sure.

After the busy night and the crowded morning, a silence overcame the cabin with only them, Dean and the Harvelle women left behind.

The pastor had accompanied John and Bobby. Half an hour later Caleb had left. Shortly after him, Roger.
A little staring match took place between Ellen and Dean, but Angela had missed what brought it on.

“The security measures around the cabin should be checked.” Ellen stated.

Dean bowed his head. “Yes, mam.”

This was what this was about, to see, if Dean would accept her to be in charge while his father was gone.

“Actually, Jo and me could use the fresh air. If you could watch the stew?”

Ellen had brought real food too, not only canned and after the meager breakfast, she had started to cook in earnest.

“If you like it with a taste of coal, sure,” Dean answered waggling his eyebrows.

“In all those years you ate Singer out of hair and house, he never taught you how to cook?” she doubted him.

“Only how to toast waffles and heat his coffee from last night,” he joked and gave himself away through his little bit too devilish grin.

“Are ya lyin' to me Dean Winchester?” Ellen asked him, infected by his good mood.

“Absolutely, mam.”

“Watch the stew,” she said with a twinkle in her eyes mirroring his, before she waved at Jo to follow her outside.

Dean was left alone with them and the stew to watch, but that did not seem to bother him. He muttered something about emancipated women when he lifted the lid to take a look into the pot. The stew was not going to give him any trouble with the medium heat it simmered, and neither would they.

Sam was the only one not shackled. John made a point in reattaching the irons before he left, not without a sharp, but ignored look at Ellen.

She would not leave them like this the whole time, Angela was sure, but right now they were as helpless as in the beginning. Except for Sam.

She could see the wheels turning behind his hazel eyes.

Tom silently communicated the question to Sam. Dean. Could Sam take him?
Sam shook his head, then he nodded outside.

Even if he could take Dean on in a fight, and Angela was not so sure about that, there were two armed women out there.

Sam locked eyes with her daughter. There was a conversation going on, lost to her. It was about Dean, or not, Angela couldn't be sure.

Jess wasn't agreeing with Sam, her jaw was set and she shook her head.

Sam seemed to plead her, his shoulders tense with another subliminal emotion. His chin dipped down slightly, even though he did not give into the need to break eye contact with Jess, the constrained need was there, and her daughter, good reader she became in the last years, saw it.

Shame. Whatever Sam had suggested, it made him afraid and ashamed. Jess caught his hands. She mouthed *I love you*.

Now the shame was written clearly on Sam's face, he even broke eye contact.

"Don't be stupid," Jess whispered and earned his attention back. "I'm just not sure I can watch that without breaking my shackles and ripping his lungs out."

She earned a soundless chuckle form her boy. "Wouldn't be the first time the blonde hulk saves me," he answered playful. Jess rolled her eyes. Like this nickname's use was unfounded. But Angela remembered how she prayed Jess would grow out of the phase of a hormonal teenaged girl starting fights with everyone who looked wrong at her.

She did grow out of it, but only to avoid scaring away any more boyfriends, who did not want to date the blonde hulk. When only nerdy, but lovely little Jeremy wanted to go out with Jess, she asked Angela, how it came a total wuss was the only one who was not afraid of her.

She explained alpha male behavior to her daughter, who commented it with, *That's dumb*. Did not keep her from playing the ditzy blonde for Andy till he saw through it, but he had already fallen for her at the time, so he was a little helpless, when the Hulk rose again and punched his teammate for mistreating a friend of Jess'.

That was Jess from fourteen to fifteen. Sam had laughed himself silly when Tom had told him about this phase. He was only able to reconcile Jess with the statement, that he was a nerdy little Jeremy at fifteen and also would have had to go on tiptoes to kiss her.

Back then Angela suspected they would see Sam again, but she was really sure after Jess told her a few weeks later, she had floored a guy in a bar who insulted Sam. And Sam's first reaction, after dragging her away from fighting the guy's fraternity brothers, was to kiss her senseless.

She knew Jess had finally found a boy who ticked off the insecurities of alpha males towards alpha females as "Dumb" too.

Sam stood up and walked over to his brother.

Dean gave this approach a questioning look.

"Can I help you?" Sam said with all the restlessness of someone not having to do anything for too long.

Dean made good natured jokes about Sam being a disaster in the in the kitchen, Sam quipped back
how one can mess up watching meat cooking, Dean corrected him it wasn't cooking, it was stewing. Sam called him Julia Child, Dean wrinkled his nose, pretending not to get the joke, but after a moment he told Sam he could watch the stew, he could do nothing wrong, as long as he did not throw away the liver.

Angela did not understand what that meant, but Sam was cracking up over it; beside her Jess gave a snorted laugh.

The brothers continued with their idle banter, a conversation without any aim. Supposedly so, because the body language showed a clear aim of Sam's. He wanted to make his brother comfortable, to what ultimate cause, Angela was not able to anticipate. It could've been a lot, from luring him into false safety to winning Dean over.

Sam leaned against the counter, hip to hip with Dean, who talked animatedly. Settled in each other's personal space.

Dean sucked the physical closeness up like a drowning man. She knew Sam could be manipulative when he needed to be, but his brother was making it easy for him. He wanted to believe Sam was comfortable around him. He wanted his little brother back.

The shade of the conversation changed rapidly, a question asked that made it impossible to uphold the light colors. Dean seemed to want to take it back as soon as he had asked, How come Sam remembered stuff like Dan Aykroyd's cooking parody? It had given away too much of the hurt he felt because his brother forgot everything about him.

Sam hesitated and it was not because Dean had asked a substantial question, Sam would not shy away from that.

“We watched that together didn't we?” he asked Dean unsure. His brother nodded.

“It's complicated...”, Sam began to explain, to lie, as Angela suspected. Because Sam did not remember things like this, like watching Dan Aykroyd with Dean.

Her daughter was a Dan Aykroyd fan, Blues Brothers and Ghostbusters every Halloween.

Sam just sold a memory of Jess to Dean.

And Dean bought it.

“So you do start to remember?” Dean asked as soon as Sam had ended his tale. He faced away from them, faking to be busy with the stew. Sam still close to him, head turned to the side, studying his brothers face.

“Not really,” Sam wilted Dean's hope. “It's not memories I recover, just facts -no, that's too dry... It's like I can't see the movie, but sometimes read the subtitles and they spark something, a feeling, does that make sense?” he asked and reached out-

She nearly failed to catch it. A touch so subtle and fleeting it should have meant nothing: She saw Sam's arm move, saw his knuckles stroke over Dean's lower back and the hand fall away again.

And with this touch something shifted. She knew what she just witnessed, but without reference it was open to any kind of interpretation. In Jess she found a reference:

Jess had stopped watching. Her fists had turned white from the strain and her breath was repressed
in an attempt to control herself.

While realization set in for Angela, the brothers had continued to talk about Sam's memory. When she caught on again, she heard Dean suggesting some things to trigger it, _no matter how small the steps would be, it would be something_.

“Sure,” Sam agreed, “I mean I dug through the things I had at Stanford, but—”

“That wasn’t much,” Dean ended his sentence. “You left with only half your stuff. I didn’t save all of it, but if you wanna take a look?”

“Yeah.”

Sam's eagerness wasn't faked, even though he did not remember more than he did after the therapy sessions, he wanted to know about the person he was. He needed to know, he had told her at night. Every little piece of information could help them now, he had said, and he had been so stupid to bury his head in the sand, he had added.

It had been impossible to stop him from beating himself up, but Angela knew better. None of this here was Sam's fault.

Dean lead the way outside. The things he had of Sam's were in his car.

The door fell close. Tom tried to speak up-

“Don’t,” Jess let out the breath she had been holding. Tears stood in her eyes. “This is hard enough for Sam with me knowing. Could you just pretend you did _not_ see?”

“So there was something to see,” Tom stated gently.

“Tom,” she tried to stop him, but he wouldn't.

“I need to know what I am pretending not to know,” he declared, but he did not push Jess. He waited.

She needed almost a minute before:

“Sam doesn't really remember. And he doesn't want to,” Jess answered Tom, not straight away. “But under hypnosis he talked about it. It's not the worst case scenario. Sam wasn't raped. Dean did not use violence,” she kept her statements short, as if to get over with it as quick as possible, “It was the opposite. Whenever Dr. Irving asked Sam to go back to a safe memory it was about Dean. When he was young, Sam was completely dependent to him.”

An unstable dictatorial father, no mother or other adult to give Sam a safe haven, Angela could see how he would turn to his brother for everything.

She could also see it on Dean, the hunger for attention from his father, the absolute obedience; his charming demeanor with women overcompensating for real experience with a female role model. His little brother must have been the only person he really had trusted.

The door banged open.

Dean had grasped Sam's arm, escorting him inside in a rush. And while Sam made no struggle, he seemed to be slowed down with confusion.

“Dean, I don't understand...”, he watched his brother with an air of clueless innocence. “If I did
“No, no Sam,” Dean assured him, voice dripping with spite. “It's just bad timing, I'm not in the mood for that. But why aren't you asking Jess to come outside with me?” he suggested and angrily let go of Sam's arm.

“What for?” Sam still feigned confusion.

“For a ride in the backseat of the Impala,” Dean made his intention clear. “No big deal. We've done this before - sharing girls.”

If Sam had been less upset, he would have probably noticed how upset Dean was. Because Angela could see, this was not about Jess, Dean had not once looked at her, only had furious piercing eyes for his brother.

But Sam didn't notice and he shifted to the side. Brought himself between Dean and Jess and everything that made him the mild mannered boy Angela knew fell away from him as he said:

“You touch her - You die.”

Dean made a step back, but only to give his rage scope. “Finally,” he spit. “Takes a lot for you to drop your facade,” he stated and then-

-shut down. For all the force, the vibe Dean gave off, possessed, Angela would have expected him to do something drastic. Not to shut his emotions completely off, become a wall of blankness.

She shivered. Extremes of compartmentalization were not found in sane individuals.

His hands were steady, when he pulled out another pair of shackles from his jeans. “You should've thought 'bout two things before you tried to play me,” Dean informed his brother even voiced. “First, I know all about you that's to know. And second, you don't know shit about me.”

He let that settle in.

“Because if you knew,” he explained further, “You would know, I would never touch your girl. Because I'd never hurt you,” a spark of emotion shone through this empty look. “But I swear to god, you try shit like out there again, I punch your lights out so fast you ain't see'n'it coming. Because that what you did? That was low.” He tossed Sam the shackles. “Now be a good little prisoner and chain yourself to the bedspread.”

“Why?” Sam asked.

Dean rolled his eyes unnerved about the innuendo of the question. Angela could not tell anymore, if he was close to losing it, or did not care about it at all.

“Because you're a greater flight risk than I thought and proved to be stupid about it and I don't want to stitch you up because Ellen shot you in the leg and now just do as I say!”

...
"Now be a good little prisoner and chain yourself to the bedspread."

"Why?" Sam asked.

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"Because you're a greater flight risk than I thought and proved to be stupid about it and I don't want to stitch you up because Ellen shot you in the leg and now just do as I say!"

Ellen noticed, but did not comment how Sam was shackled to the bed with the rest of them. She only asked Dean about the stew and gave him a disapproving look at the tone he tried with her. Like Dean had felt it in the back of his head he turned around and ducked his head in submission. Angela noticed how he did not let the same submission flow into his voice when he addressed Ellen again, trying hard to hold his ground, while he offered retaliation in other form...

Jo perked up about the new topic. "What training?" she asked.

"Dean's gonna spar with you."

Her mother's explanation roused a wicked gleam in the young girls eyes. And Dean, did not miss that. Angela wondered if he was aware how much he focused on women and how hard he tried to keep on good terms with them.

"Watcha smiling 'bout, kitten? Ya think I'm goin' to go easy on you?" He was probably aware, because his carefully constructed jabs at the young girl perfectly fit to challenge her and rein her in at the same time.

"I find it funny how guys like you call me kitten and then squeal when scratched." She played along, understood this as a form of flirting and moved closer, tossing her hair back. Dean stepped to the side.

"Oh that's just cute," he commented and Angela realized she had been wrong, Jo did not flirt, they were already circling each other.

"What?" Jo asked all innocence, even tipped her head to the side overdoing the questioning look. Then she attacked.

The motions were nearly too fast to follow them, but it seemed like Dean had tried at first to catch her arms, but she unwound from that and used the spin to kick him, only he wasn't were she aimed anymore.

He only gave her a pat with the open hand to her shoulder and while it brought her off balance as intended, he had to sidestep her again half a second later, to avoid her fist. The blow to her stomach was open handed too, but it was anything but gentle. The young girl winced and Dean grunted -Jo had rammed her small fist to the inside of his arm and it had to hurt more than Angela would have thought it should, because Dean stepped up his game and attacked in earnest.

Now it was Jo's turn to sidestep and dodge fists and for a while she did really good till Dean out of nowhere kicked her.
Angela gasped out in surprise, it had looked brutal, but only because it happened so fast, rewinding it in her mind she understood the kick merely shoved the young girl off, it had been controlled, harmless. Jo did not even wince when she straightened.

“That one would've gotten me good,” she owned her defeat.

“You're fast,” Dean consoled her.

“But not fast enough to dodge a kick,” she did not accept his praise.

“You're learning,” Dean stated. “If this were real I would have had you on your back when you first moved in.” Maybe he was physically unable to say that without the lewd overtone.

Jo sucked it up like his attitude wasn't generic but their special secret. “You're all talk.” Now she challenged him.

“Another round, grasshopper?” he asked, but did not give her a chance to agree, because he tugged at her shirt, moved her to him, and used her struggle to change direction of his pull to a shove and had her stumbling over his leg that somehow had moved behind her. He did not drop her, or throw her to the ground, but more guided her fall. Soon it became clear it wasn't only to be gentle, but to restrain her, her booted foot shot up and only because he was so close Dean was able to redirect her move, twist her away from him and press her face first into the floor.

“I am not on my back,” she declared while she softly tapped the floor.

“You're really good at this,” Dean sounded surprised, he did not let her up.

“Yeah,” she felt mocked, “That's why you had me pinned in under two seconds.”

“You can't take a compliment lying down, huh?”

Her small body shook under his knee from laughing about the bad pun.

“Try to free yourself,” he ordered her.

“How could I?”

Going through the pain

Angela turned to Sam, who had mouthed the words barely audible and his mind so absent he mustn't have realized he had said anything.

“You can't, not without hurting yourself. But if this were real you can't stay down like that,” Dean instructed her, “I will give when you make the move, but in a fight you have to go through the pain, even if it dislocates your shoulder…”

Sam's eyes were very far away and fixed on his brother at the same time, as Dean uttered a few short instructions of how to move and Jo followed, freeing herself.

To be pinned again, this time with her whole upper body immobilized by Dean's strong arms and she moved, he applied more pressure. “Oww!-ah!” she gasped out.

“Please, you really think I'm gonna to fall for that?” he chuckled and waited out till she stopped faking. It was impossible to pinpoint the emotion Sam showed in his intense observation, if anything, Angela would have described it as a flare, illuminating something about him that she did not recognize, but the light was fed by the laughter his brother evoked in the young girl when they
abandoned the serious lesson and scrambled over the ground like young dogs, only short of biting each others ears.

Ellen cleared her throat, bypassing the tangle of bodies that was partly her daughter. Dean broke their play up, even though Ellen had vanished into the back of the cabin.

"You're afraid of my mom," Jo commented his behavior.

"What can I say," Dean shrugged, "I'm smarter than I look."

~ One statement she certainly believed about him, Jess thought. Because Dean was good at acting dumb, so good Sam himself had thought he could play him.

She would not make the mistake of underestimating him. But right now Sam's brother wasn't her major concern.

"What is it?" she asked Sam carefully.

"I think I remember this.... Not really, but the moves, the... it's like I can feel it in my body," Sam explained. "I guess we did that a lot. Sparring. To watch it is like... an itch," he said after some thought. A small introverse smile twitched in the corner of his mouth and in the next second he furrowed his brow, like what he felt, felt foreign. He breathed his frustration out. Jess agreed with that, this was not probably but surely the worst setting for Sam to have to deal with his buried memories.

She bit the inside of her lower lip, all the things her instinct screamed to do, she had to suppress. She couldn't crawl into Sam's lap and softly kiss his temple as she knew would soothe him, because it wouldn't soothe him, not in a room full of people, not with his brother here. She could not ask him what had happened when he was outside with Dean, if he was alright, because even alone it was a hard one to ask your boyfriend what he did to come on to his brother.

Ellen took off all their shackles during the meal and they sat at the table with a hyper Jo and a silent Dean. Ellen served them and made the rules of their stay table-talk. She directed most of her words to Jess' mother.

Ellen did not think that they would try to run, she gave Dean a pointed look. But if they tried, they would be stopped. As long as they did not break the rules, there would be no problems and she found it most practical if outside of their meals always three of them stayed shackled, while one was free to move.

This woman with her drawl and her simple words and almost comforting attitude was just as misleading as Dean and her daughter.

Ellen was sharp and anything but simple and it scared Jess how she talked with her parents. Like it was the most normal thing in the world to behave civil and talk square with the hostages you kept. But the scare stayed a background buzz, because rationally she knew neither her mother nor her father were naive enough to see this woman for anything else than what she was: Their captor.

While Sam, Jess and her father sat on the bed again, her mom was the first to stay free. She had asked to help Ellen with the dishes and they talked. Ellen told, when asked, about her saloon and that she was widowed, she asked Mom about her work.

Sam lay his head in Jess' lap. He did that to think. He had done that, it came to her in a flash. He used to do it before the accident, but hadn't since then. Now he did it again, for the first time since then. He looked up to her and while she softly carded her fingers through his hair, he lost himself
in her eyes till he was far away. A thought came so unbidden she wished she could stamp it out. *Was this something he had done with Dean?*

She wouldn't go there. Not in this situation. It was stupid and unfair to Sam and most of all did not help any, because what if? What did it mean? That Sam did an intimate and casual thing with her, he had done before with the person he had been closest with. So?

She looked over to Sam's brother.

He had dumped a box at the cleared table and now pulled things out of it, that looked like parts of—something. Or many somethings. For her life Jess couldn't have said what electric doohickeys lay in a dissembled heap on the table. After a while Jo became so bored at playing with her knife, she stood up and questioned Dean.

Jess couldn't believe what she was hearing: He was building an EMF meter. They had been kidnapped by the Ghostbusters. She told Sam so.

Whatever he had been thinking, that lightened his mood and made him focus on her eyes again.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“Sure,” he answered.

And more wasn't possible.

“I hate to tell you, but this is a little bit bulky for an EMF meter,” Jo gave her opinion on Dean's work. “How you're gonna smuggle that by civilians? Tell them you have to use their bathroom with your ghetto blaster on?”

“That's not the EMF meter,” he lectured from above, like she was simply too small and too girly to understand. “That is just a byproduct from the parts I don't need. It's called a radio. Don't be scared,” he held a hand out in a warning, “It's going to make a sound.” He turned it on and somewhere behind the static a boy group sang it's corny song. He shut it off in a hast.

“Ash made an EMF meter out of a car radio last year,” Jo suggested. “It's really easy, I can show you.”

She was pulling Dean's leg and he knew it because his eyes twinkled when he rebuffed her. “Woman - back off. Play with your tooth pick.”

For some time it had looked like the strange insulting flirt they had going would move on to more, at least Jo had looked like she would have liked to move it further. But that changed when Dean insulted her knife.

...
Chapter 12

For some time it had looked like the strange insulting flirt they had going would move on to more, at least Jo had looked like she would have liked to move it further. But that changed when Dean insulted her knife.

Over the afternoon into the evening it became evident, that Dean gave Sam the cold shoulder. He still had to be pissed because Sam had tried... -well whatever.

They went to sleep, Ellen and Dean at first, Jo kept vigil.

When Jess settled for the night in the crook of Sam's arm, Jo caught her eye. The younger girl looked away.

Maybe Jo wasn't as confident about the demon threat as her mother and the men. Maybe she found it strange to shackle people to a bed. Because so far she had not made an ill attempt to sit with Jess and have a girl talk.

The next day came with routines Ellen had laid out for them. Every hour another one of them was free to move. Inside the cabin.

Jess' mom took a shower while a flustered Jo had to follow her into the bathroom and sit with her. She had tried to argue with it, but after her mother and Dean simultaneously ordered her to do as told, she wore a scowl that did not vanish till Dean announced it was time for sparring.

They returned an hour later from outside. Sweaty and dirty. Jo more than Dean. Which he pointed out and mocked her for.

Sam wore that same look as yesterday and Jess knew he did not remember, not really, because he would not have kept that from her. But just like her and her parents, he couldn't help but to observe and analyze their keepers' behavior. There was little else to do. To overthink the ways they were not able to free themselves would have driven them crazy.

It was Jess' hour when it was Jo's turn to check the grounds.

She had noticed, that Ellen did that in the morning after everyone was up, as Dean in the evening before they retired for the night. They took the demon threat really serious. Her mom had pointed out that group dynamic made the delusions more explicit.

Maybe Jo wasn't taking it as serious, because she asked if Jess would want to accompany her.

“Outside?”

“Yeah, it's a nice day,” Jo said and there was a hint of guilt.

“No way,” Dean argued.

“Oh come on,” Jo shot back. “You nag about being stuck here every five minutes and they can't even leave the room. How would you feel?”

“I said no.”
“Why?”

“Because I am older.”

“Mom?”

“You're on your own.”

“Ha,” Dean gloated over having Ellen on his side.

“Come on Jess,” Jo held her hand out to her.

She hesitated. Getting outside also meant leaving Sam alone with Dean in the cabin. Not completely alone, but-

“I said no,” Dean tried to stop Jo.

“Reason?”

“There's a whole lot of reasons. Like for one there are demons after us and we are in hiding and we do not take civilians on a hike, because this ain't some trip into the great wide open.”

Jo gave him a pitying look like these reasons were so invalid they did not even deserve argumentation. Jess liked her more with each second.

“And she outweighs you,” Dean nodded like this point was specially valid. “She took Caleb's gun from him.”

“Are you saying I can't watch one person?” Now he had pissed her off. “Take my gun from me,” Jo demanded.

Dean rolled his eyes. When he approached her she still held the rifle at ease, by her side and she let him come really close, before she brought it up in a move that totally blindsided him.

He stumbled back and held his aching jaw. “Fuck,” he sounded pained and surprised. “What was that?”

Jo had hit him with the butt of the rifle, that was that.

“I told you she is good with guns and knifes,” Ellen replied.

Jo held out her rifle. “I broke up brawls with this thing when I was still in pigtails. Trust me those few who had been able to take it from me wished later I hadn't had my hands free to use a knife on them.”

“I will keep that in mind,” Dean answered.

And Jess would too. Not that her plans required attacking Jo.

The young girl took her hand and drew her outside, not waiting if Dean tried to stop them again.

She had not noticed how suffocating the cabin had been till she stepped out into the fresh air.

“I am sorry about that,” Jo said and let go of Jess hand. She pointed a direction and they started walking. “I know the situation is freaky,” Jo said. “And it looks like we're the bad guys for a lack of white hats, but-”
They already brought some distance between them and the cabin and Jo turned to take a look back. Maybe this was why Jo had insisted so strongly: she wanted to talk to her.

Jo's face tightened in a scowl. Dean was following them. Well he made it look like he was taking something from the trunk of his car, but he was fooling no one.

“After Sam is cured he will remember,” she picked up their conversation. “He will be able to explain it to you. We're not crazy, just...” She gave a nervous laugh. “I'm no good at this.”

“Then why did Sam leave, if all of this is real?” she asked Jo.

“I don't know, I don't know Sam really. John never brought the boys along.” Jo answered. “But I know hunter's kids, so it's not so hard to imagine why he left. This life...”, she searched for words, “-it's either in or out. There's no in between and as a kid you either try to grow out of it, I think that's what Sam did, cause he went to Stanford, right? That's not Community College, you have to work for it. Or you grow into it, like Dean or me. I mean Dean is a full blooded hunter,” slight hero-worship there, Jess noted, “You don't become that if you have no motivation. So Sam surely didn't leave because he doesn't believe into the supernatural. He has a few hunts under his belt as far as I know. Maybe he just saw no reason why to live like that and decided to live a normal life instead. So he left and had a normal life. He pulled it off, not all of us could. If you know what's out there it's hard to play normal, I know I couldn't. Not that I want to.”

She knelt down between two trees. There was a circle filled with symbols scratched into the ground. Jo looked at it, tracing the lines with her eyes.

“And if Sam doesn't remember?” Jess asked.

“John’s working on that,” Jo answered in a tone that made Jess abandon the idea of pulling Jo to their side:

Jo trusted John Winchester. Sam's memory loss was a problem, but in Jo's mind it seemed unthinkable, that John wouldn't find a solution.

“What is he going to do?”

Jo shrugged. She didn't know.

“We tried hypnotherapy, but it didn't work very well,” Jess stated, she did not really want to talk about Sam, because Jo did not really seem to know what John planned. But maybe she could shed some light on John himself. “Sam can't remember a single thing from his childhood, but before the accident he used to tell me a little bit. Not much about his father, though. What is John like -when he's not kidnapping you for your own safety, I mean?”

Jo chewed on that one a bit, like she didn't know how to respond to gallows humor. “I was little when John was around. He is more quiet and brooding than other hunters, they like to brag among themselves, but not John. That's why my dad trusted him.

I never knew he had kids back then, but he was fun. He taught me stupid things, like how pick a pocket or shoot spitballs at the patrons. I think he just couldn't stand the idea I could be afraid of him. I was real tiny back then and he was – well dark, even compared to the other dark figures in my mom's saloon, John is dark. Has it's perks. No matter who we hit with spitballs, they never tried to pick a fight with us.” Fond memories.

It wouldn't be harder to turn this girl against her father than to turn her against John Winchester. Jess studied the landscape and asked Jo other things.
How old she was.

Older than she looked. What music she liked.

They had a similar taste in music, only Jo liked it a bit more cheesy now and then. They talked about John again. About Jo's dad.

A catchy subject. Yet still, Jo warmed up to her and did not notice that Jess didn't really care about their conversation, but worked hard to memorize the cabins surroundings. The hilly ground provided several spots to give an idea what was around them.

The cabin was neither in the valley nor at the highest point, but somewhere in between. Down the woods descended into an old forest thick with brushwood and somewhere in between she was able to see glimpses of water, a river or a lake. Uphill, where the only 'road' came from, it seemed more open, timber wood, civilization...

...she ended her detailed description of the area and then told them they had to form a plan, because she did not like the idea of John working on Sam's memory one little bit. As little as Jo knew about what John was doing right now, it did not present itself as something like hypnosis.

“No, something more invasive is more likely,” Sam agreed. “I did a little research about the occult when I researched grave robbery and there are really sick ideas out there. If they consult a psychic, it could be anything from a drum circle to trepanation.”

Trepanation? Wasn't that literally picking someone's brain?

“We could simply ask Ellen,” her father suggested.

They discussed this a bit, before they decided, against Jess advisement, to ask Ellen. Carefully. They wouldn't want her to know they were worried. That they planned to flee.

Her father stood up and went to Ellen.

She described it as a vision quest to him.

That didn't sound to bad.

Like Hypnotherapy.

Jess didn't trust it one bit. She had a bad feeling about the way this people were sure Sam would be 'cured' after his memory was regained. It didn't sound like they meant the memory loss. What they said was that Sam would think inside their crazy little box again. The problem was, that Sam would not magically remember and then be what they wanted him to be. So either they would not like the outcome of their vision quest, or they had already thought about that and the vision quest was something that would do more to Sam than make him remember.

“Yes sir.”

The only two words out of Dean's mouth through the whole phone call.

When he hung up, he addressed Sam for the first time since yesterday. “That was Dad. He says you need to fast, only water for you till he comes back.”

“Why?” Sam asked.

Dean made a face on that question. “Because it's part of the ritual to get your memory back.”
“What kind of ritual?”

“I didn't ask.”

“When will he be back?”

Dean sighed, “Gawd. Some things never change.”

“When will he be back? Tomorrow, in a week, I mean how long do I have to fast?” Sam demanded to know.

“Jesus Sammy, don't worry, we're not starving you. He called from the car, they'll be back tomorrow.”

A lump formed in her throat and she refused to swallow it. Tomorrow. She knew Sam had not asked because he was worried to starve. He must have hoped for more time.

They did not sleep that night.

...
I just wanted to inform you that my schedule does not allow me to answer comments in the next days?weeks? since I will put all the energy I have to spare into preparing a new chapter every few days. I will still read every comment to Jo though and on that note I want thank you all for the kudos and the patience you have with our progress. As a more tangible form of gratitude, first we would like you to be prepared(warned?): there will be cliffhangers, quite a few of them, but you will never have to wait long for the rest of the scene to be published. And second, we want to remind you that this is not really a WIP, more a Work in Editing, so we won't leave you hanging in the middle of it. On a personal note -because I won't speak up any time soon- I'd like to wish you a nice summer and say how happy I am that you decided to spend part of it with us, the Moores, the Winchesters and more smelly hunters, all crammed into a dusty cabin. Bye, Bee

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They did not sleep that night.

Ellen and Jo did not notice, but Dean did, he threw Sam worried glances while it was his time to keep watch. They talked about escape. By now she would have had no problem breaking her thumb to free herself and get Sam as far away as possible, but Sam said they wouldn't make it and did not want to risk them getting hurt. Her father agreed with him and tried to calm her. She couldn't find a calm place inside of her anymore. Not when she knew Sam was terrified and refused to show it to her.

Morning came again with Ellen's excellent coffee and Dean on the phone with his father. Two hours later the three men were back.

They had lost their chance of escape.

The day went by in a haze due to their weariness and her parents dozed off a few times, but she couldn't, she could feel it coming in the quiet they carried out tasks, efficient and without a break. John had taken the lead and all of them followed. The communication had dimmed down to stares as like when Jo wanted to turn up Dean's radio again and was denied. Or one word orders, like John's way of calling his son by his given name, who knew what and where without further instruction, like his mind was just a satellite station to John's.
Sam's reposefulness crumbled, unnoticed by everyone but her. “Talk to me,” she whispered under her breath.

He took another sip from the juice the pastor had given him. His easy compliance in drinking what they gave him worried her. “Do you really think you should drink that?”

“It's just aloe,” he answered.

“You don't have to be strong for me, Sam. Don't you remember, that's my job. You're the brain and I'm the brawn.”

He huffed. “Yaw, sure.”

“Don't you dare to go alpha male on me.” She made him smile, at least that. “You are scared, I can see it.”

He shook his head. “I am not scared of the ritual.” John had announced the ritual would begin after sunset, a few more hours.

“It's not too late yet,” she said, even though she did not believe it herself.

“It is,” he disagreed and bared his teeth in expression of deep desperation. “Isn't it funny, that the one thing I am afraid of, would've gotten us outta here. I think there was a time when I would've been able to take Dean in fight, or disarm Jo, or, use the one weak spot Ellen has, against her, by threatening her daughter. But I am not like that, I don't remember how to be like that. And I don't want to,” he whispered, he didn't want anyone to hear, just her. “I am afraid of my memories. Now that I am faced with my past, my father -my brother who follows his every word and these people who live in this parallel world, I get it: how children break when they are raised into this. Like Dean, trained like a dog, or Jo who seems almost delighted by the idea of spending the rest of her life like this, in dirty cabins fighting wind mills.

But what I can't make sense of is, how did I escape that? The terrifying question is, have I escaped that? Have I really ever gotten out of their mindset? And I don't want an answer. I don't want to be someone who has to wear magic amulets to feel protected from demons. I don't want to wake up to find out this is so deeply ingrained into me, I don't know their insanity from reality. I don't- I can't look into your eyes and have you see I am not the man you fell in love with.”

“Sam-”

John approached them and she stopped midsentence, looked up so Sam would be warned, that his father was standing behind him.

When he turned to John his expression was completely guarded, his eyes not watery enough to give him away.

“Sam. Your brother said you're a little bit nervous.”

Sam nodded.

“There is no reason for that, son. Jim will walk you through every step before we begin. Most of it will seem like new-agey mumbo jumbo to you, but that is because it is,” John joked. “Broken down to the basics it isn't more than what you did with this doctor. Only it isn't one of us who will do the suggestion. The ritual will get you to a place where you will break through to your memories on your own. That will be overwhelming, but you have time to adjust afterwards. We won't rush you. Okay?”
“Okay.”

It was impossible to say if Sam was really calmed by his father's words, or if he played along.

The scrawny guy, Caleb, returned late in the day. With a truck, her mom described what she had seen from the window. He had transported something, but she hadn't been able to see, because a tarp covered it up.

John's question if Caleb got everything, did not give away much more. He and Dean were so busy they left them alone and she was thankful for that. Their presence made Sam jittery. Bobby and Caleb avoided them too, Caleb because he did not seem to see them as people and Bobby Singer...

This man was a miracle to her. She felt a intense sympathy for him, so irrational she wondered if she suffered from Stockholm syndrome. But since he returned he had not once spared them a glimpse and also behaved strangely distant to Dean. And he drank. And he had stopped picking fights with John.

Ellen and Jo remained like they were. Jo even sat with her some time and tried to make conversation with Sam, but possessed enough empathy to mind her own business soon enough. Ellen behaved a lot more unobtrusive, when she brought Sam his juice and escorted him to the bathroom. In the late afternoon he once grabbed her arm.

It hurt Jess so deeply she couldn't breath, that Sam was a at point to reach out to Ellen, though he had to know she wouldn't help him.

She could not hear their quiet conversation, but Ellen looked sympathetic, touched Sam's cheek and led him back to the bed.

It was her father, that reassured Sam. “Your fear is working in their favor Sam, you have to get a grip of yourself.”

Sam nodded, but she grew angry. Get a grip? What did her dad think Sam did for the last hours, days, if not stay strong for them?

“I am not talking about showing a strong front,” her dad rectified. “It's about how you really feel and you would be an idiot if you were not afraid. But I don't think the way they leave you in the dark about what is going to happen is unintentional. You have to think of the things you know for sure and gather your strength from them.”

“What I know for sure?” Sam huffed angrily. “That I know that they wont stop till I have my memory back and think company line again?”

Yeah, very reassuring, she agreed, but she felt that her father meant something completely different.

“No, you know that you are not in the same situation you were in as a kid. You now know what it's like to be your own person and that isn't something they can take away from you,” he explained. “And you have something else you had not when you were last confronted with them.”

He left it unsaid, but Sam looked up to her. He knew. She and her parents would not leave him alone in this.

“You promised me to run if the opportunity comes up,” Sam said like he had read her mind.

“I promised nothing,” no point in lying to a mind reader.
“Jess-”

“You don’t have to repeat yourself Sam,” her father interrupted him, “We understood the first time. Your chances to flee are better without worrying about us. Goes the other way around too. After this ritual, whatever it is, they maybe let their guard down around you.”

Sam shook his head. “These are two totally different scenarios,” he argued. “You leave me behind you can estimate to a level what they will do to me.

I leave you behind, anything’s possible, even that they get rid of you. So I wont-”

“Then don’t ask us to,” her dad established. “Family isn’t who you’ve grown up with, Sam. It’s the people who care for you. We wont leave you in vulnerable condition to them. And that’s my last word.”

It was hard to tell if this talk had reassured Sam or upset him, but she guessed it was a bit of both.

“How do you feel, Sam?” the pastor asked. The sun had set.

“My father had said you would explain the ritual to me,” Sam avoided an answer.

“It is fairly simple. What do you know about baptism?”

“Not much. I mean I know how it works, pouring water over the head three times.”

The pastor seemed have expected a different answer. “But you don't know the words?” he wondered.

“No,” Sam answered him.

“Interesting,” the pastor mused. “You knew them in three different languages,” then he breathed in like he had to pull himself away from the thought. “But it is not relevant, if you simply forgot over the years or if this is part of your lost memory. Because tonight has little to do with a christian baptism.”

“Part of a christening is foreswearing all evil,” Sam stated and the Pastor nodded, waiting where Sam headed with that. “Do you think I am under the influence of evil?”

Sam wasn't the only one who watched the pastor's reaction like a hawk and was relieved when he shook his head with a gentle smile on his face. “No my dear boy, I know you're not under the influence of evil.” But it had been him who had told Sam, that they suspected his memory loss was caused by a demon, not by the accident. “Bobby Singer,” the pastor pointed him out, “Is somewhat of an expert on demonic possession and he has cleared you before your father and me picked you up. I should repeat, the ritual tonight with all it's prayers and acts has nothing to do with baptism. But our use of water has.

There is a reason baptism or ritual baths are found in every religion, in an astonishing similar manner. And that reason is the mammal diving reflex. When the whole body is submerged into water or also only the face, this reflex kicks in. It slows the heart rate ten to twenty five percent. It redirects the flow of blood from hands, feet and intestines to heart and brain, which can be perceived as pleasant centered feeling, in addition to a real clarity because the brain is better supplied with oxygen. You may remember this from the refreshing effect it has to wash your face with cold water, it is the same. The coldness of the water is essential as the reflex does not kick in when the water is warmer than 70 degrees. You see, pouring water over the candidate-for-baptism's face is anything but arbitrary.
But that is only one part of tonight's ritual. Another will be that we burn incense. Mostly frankincense for it's anxiolytic effect and it's balancing quality of the brain hemispheres. And the psychic gave us Italian immortelle, as she explained to me is used in European tradition to unearth the past..."

The list went on.

Once or twice the pastor lost himself in ramblings about the varying uses of a practice and while she found it a little bit unnerving, she knew Sam didn't. As always he sucked up knowledge like no one else she ever knew.

"It's time," John said over the pastor's shoulder.

He seemed almost soft as he unshackled Sam and led him away. She let go of Sam's hands when she had to. The things the pastor had described seemed so harmless, but she couldn't calm herself down.

Dean opened the door from outside and passed Sam as the pastor guided him out. The brother's locked eyes for only a second and Dean's face became blank.

He held his father back, before he could follow Sam and the pastor outside.

"A word," Dean asked, voice damped, like his throat constricted painfully.

He closed the door and waited for a second, before he spoke to his waiting father. "Is this what it looks like?" he asked wide eyed.

John nodded.

Dean kept staring at his father, those eyes full of emotion, pleading. "Does Sam know?"

John shook his head and said, "For once Jim saw the benefits of lying."

No, no, no, this couldn't be. She had known, felt it, they would-

"If you can't stomach it, you stay inside like Bobby," John told his son.

Dean's hand rubbed over his face like he tried to wipe off the anxiety there. "No I-"

"I can't have you loose your nerve in the middle of it. You better not try intervene-"

"Yes, sir."

...
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“I can't have you loose your nerve in the middle of it. You better not try intervene-” 

“Yes, sir.” Dean visibly shook from the strain of holding it together. He took a look at Bobby, who downed another glass, sitting in the same corner he had adopted half an hour ago. 

John left and Dean was still frozen on the spot. 

“Bobby?” he asked the older man. 

“I'm not coming.” there was hardly a slur in Bobby's voice, even thought the bottle was close to empty. “There not a thing I can do to stop your daddy short of shooting him. But there's no force on earth that can make me watch this.” 

“But you approve? This will bring Sam's memory back?” Dean fished. 

“Yea,” the older man answered straight. “Just not sure it's worth it. Fought with John the whole drive back. Stubborn prick. We only agreed that Sammy doesn't need to be afraid that whole time till they adjust the board head down. Ya shouldn't go out there boy, you don't wanna see your brother when he realizes what thea' go in' tdo'to him.” 

Dean backed away from Bobby's gravelly slur. “I have to go.” 

“What ya hafta do 'sstand up to John,” Bobby said to the closed door, to Dean who wouldn't hear him anymore. “...the only one 'h can get thru'do him.” 

Jess wasn't sure Bobby had noticed Dean was already gone. 

“Mister Singer,” she said and startled at her own rough voice. She had to know- 

Bobby became aware that she must have heard every word and he shook his head, mumbled to himself. It sounded like an apology.
“Mister Singer-”

“Leave him be,” Ellen said. She left no room for argumentation. She asked Jo over, who slipped her shoulder under Bobby and heaved him to his feet with trained ease, telling him it would be alright. She got him settled in the back room where the second bed stood.

When she came back, Jess heard her tell her mother she never saw Bobby drink himself to this stage.

“Singer has a soft heart. Makes him a good man,” Ellen said.

“What are they going to do to Sam?” Jess asked and this time she was the one who left no room for argumentation. She wanted an answer.

Ellen’s lips were pursed tightly. But she answered, “I don’t know. John said I don’t wanna know. And last time he said that to me, I wouldn’t have wanted to know.”

Jess thought the dread of knowing Sam was out there helpless would prepare her. But when the screams started, she knew it hadn’t.

Like the labor of childbirth the screams came in waves, with minutes of silence in between. About fifteen minutes into the weeping, broken pleas, the door banged open, Dean entered, eyes wild and shaking like a leaf-

Like it had been his cries they had heard.

In two long strides he was at the table grasping for the bottle Bobby had abandoned.

He drained it in one go.

The door was a crack open and they heard the silence. And somehow she knew, read it from Dean that right now: they hurt Sam. That the silence was filled with agony and fear.

Faint coughing and retching broke the ban and Dean shut his eyes to the almost sound of it.

Sam begged, breathless, begged for them to stop, promised, pleaded, louder and louder, till it became a nonsensical screech of a noise, that was suddenly muted.

Dean straightened his shoulders. He put the empty bottle down gingerly, but his hands were steady.

Ellen cast a glance outside and pulled the door shut.

What she saw had dispersed the resolute air she usually carried. She approached Dean, asked gentle,

“Honey, don’t-”

“I am not stupid! I wont. I know we have to go through with it,” Dean expressed. Not only Jess was startled, but Ellen equally didn’t know-

“Then”, Ellen found her words again, “Don’t go out there. John can do this on his own.”

Dean remained unreadable, blank, dead. “But Sam can’t,” he told Ellen. “Now get out of my way.”

She didn't move. Dean stepped in close to her, everything in his body language said he would go
through her. Yet then he used his words, “If this would be Jo out there, I wouldn't be so fucking
stupid to stand in your way.”

Ellen faltered. He made his way around her, pulled the door open-
ragged breaths carried sharp inside and Jess made the words No more- out in them before the
wooden door shut and blocked Sam's lower sounds out.

“You have to put an end to this.”

Ellen, for the first time, considered her with a distance. “You don't know what you're talking about
girl,” she said, the rasp in her voice stronger than usually. “Do you really think John would put his
own flesh and blood through an ordeal for kicks?”

Yes, she wanted to shout at the woman.

But they were all mad, so what good would it do. As good as trying to break out of the bonds now.

“What are they doing to him?” she asked Ellen again and this time she couldn't say she didn't
know.

She said nothing, ignored Jess like she wasn't there. Jess would show her she couldn't be ignored
like Sam's screams. God help her if Ellen would ignore her till she managed to ditch the shackles.

As she began her rampage her mother put a hand over hers and said, “They are water-boarding
him.”

“What?”

“It is a form of torture.”

“I know what water boarding is.” Drowning without dying. Only sometimes the victims did die.
“We have to stop them-”

“Jessy, don’t”, how could her mother remain so gentle, why wasn't she going berserk, why did her
father hold her hand to keep her from breaking her thumb, this was Sam!

“He will give in,” her mother said.

“What!?”

“If they give him any way out, he will take it,” her mother explained. “Eight seconds is what
untrained people voluntarily endure water-boarding. The fear is too intense, so whatever they want
him to do, he will do it. This wont be much longer.”

She couldn't believe this! “Let go of my hand.”

Her father shook a silent no.

Bobby Singer stumbled into room.

Sam wasn't screaming full words anymore. He wasn't begging. His voice carried an inhuman tang
of fear so desperate it wasn't even registered by the brain, skipped it and went straight into Jess'
body burning her nerve endings.

Bobby's eyes were red and he contemplated the empty bottle, caught by the fact it wasn't holding
any liquor anymore.

“Please! You have to do something!” she pleaded him loudly. “You're the only one here who knows this-” she paused to a ripped cry of Sam's- “-isn't right. Please do something before they hurt him irreversibly.”

His weathered features showed more sympathy than his drunken state should have allowed, like the alcohol wasn't only useless to dull his pain, but couldn't drown his agitation either.

“How many?” he asked. Then directed it at Ellen. “How many times did they put him through?”

“I didn't keep count.” At least she had the decency to sound guilty.

“Fifteen. Sixteen, with now.”

Jo. Jess had forgot about her. The young girl had curled herself into the corner by the stove, a beer at her hand, going down the same road as Bobby.

“Seven more,” Bobby said. “Then it's over.”

“This could kill him,” she said.

“John 'snot do things half'ssed, he knows wha' he 's doin,” Bobby argued.

And she had hoped that at least he did not trust John Winchester as blindly as the others.

“‘ss nothing I can say to make dis easier for ya little lady,” he admitted. “But were John the monster ya think he 's, I’d have put a bullet to his head first time he came to pick up the boys.”

The screaming started again. “Six more,” Bobby said.

Counting did help. But the nagging feeling remained that he maybe had lied to her.

And when it was twenty-three and no screams followed the last silence she panicked.

“The ritual goes on for some more now. But he is in trance. He 's'olright. No pain,” Bobby explained slumped over the chair, where he had kept vigil. Had stared at the window, counting, just like them.

The door opened. Her hope was short lived.

~      “Shit.” Caleb's tan skin had a grayish tint. “Shit,” he said again and stood there in the middle of the room.

“How is Sam?” Jessica asked and Tom was surprised at the authority she managed to create with her question. Caleb seemed just as surprised, because he did not ignore her, like he had ignored them all day long and he hastily nodded at Jess, mouth half open, words unspoken.

A nod seemed appropriate, because really, Sam could not be fine, the best the man could tell them would be-

“He is breathing,” Caleb said, finally and declined the offered beer. Jo shrugged and opened it nonetheless.

Caleb threw a glance backward from where he had just come. “If I wouldn't know better I would say John does this for a living.” No admiration shone through the statement and Tom saw, how
Ellen had picked up on the man's fear just as he had.

She followed Caleb's seemingly random movements and forage through chinking, weapon filled duffel bag's, carefully. “What's that going to be when it's at home?” she asked him.

“I am packing and leaving.” Caleb stood up to the woman like he had to defend himself even physically. “I am not stupid enough to bolt on John mid-mission. I will help clean up, but then I am out of here, I didn't sign for this level of craziness.”

Interesting, Tom thought, and dangerous.

Ellen reasoned with Caleb. “There is a war coming, Caleb. You can't run from war.”

Tom gritted his teeth, this man played with fire, Ellen was dangerous, couldn't he see that? No he couldn't. Not when he was just as delusional.

“I don't know what he-”, Caleb waved about the slumped figure of Bobby Singer. “Told you, but if it's true and there is a war, we sure as hell shouldn't look for the front. What is exactly what Winchester is doing. If I wanted to die in a war, I would still work for the government. It's not my war and it's not the kids' war,” he looked over at Jo, who was at her second bottle, then he focused on Ellen again. “Sam’s screwed, but Dean could still get out of this, if John would let him.”

Ellen straightened her shoulders. “There is nothing John wouldn't do for his sons,” she was not only talking about John, she was as much speaking about herself too and her decision to bring her daughter here. “At John's side is the best place to stay, because he will fight with everything he's got.”

Caleb nodded, but not to agree with her. “I know what John's capable of and after tonight I know he upped that to his top game. That's the problem. I can't keep up with him, and if you can't keep up with him, John has the nasty habit of getting you killed. Of all people, you should know that.”

For a second she looked as if Caleb had slapped her. Then Ellen's jaw set and Tom swore he could feel the room getting colder. And quieter. Quiet enough so they could hear the footfall on the porch.

Ellen kept herself from doing anything. What didn't mean, that Caleb was reckless enough to turn his eyes away from her when Dean opened the door.

This time he carried no sounds with him into the cabin, only an air of lightness compared to the standoff in the middle of the room and to Jess, who was shaking the bed with her physically perceptible worry for Sam.

“Sammy's doing good,” Dean said, into an unsure direction between them and the silent pair, that still faced each other. “What's going on here?”

Ellen stopped piercing Caleb with her icy stare and answered Dean. “Caleb is leaving after tonight.”


“It's not arguable,” Ellen said. “He wants to leave and it's better does. Because if he ever mentions my Bill in a disrespectful way again, he doesn't have to worry about John getting him killed.”

Because she had all this spoken to Dean, as if Caleb were not there anymore, Dean seemed inclined to answer.
“Okay,” he said, with a lopsided nod and a befuddled expression, then he shrugged it off and headed over to Bobby.

Like no one had threatened to kill anyone.

Like everything was perfectly alright, now that the standoff was resolved and Caleb scrambled to pack his things.

Like he had reason to have pep in his step, after his brother did not scream anymore, for at least ten minutes.

Tom sympathized with his daughters anger, even though he held himself better and wasn't literally scratching into the wood of the bed. “Doing good,” Jess repeated Dean's words from before and swallowed a bile, blinked tears away and tried to say something but failed in the face of Dean's behavior. Tom worried as much about her as he worried for Sam – they were breaking her.

Dean whispered animatedly to Bobby, one hand on the older man's arm, a picture of ease and comfort. Even without the words they could understand that Dean told Bobby how well everything went down.

Bobby nodded, but Tom wasn't sure he was still awake and lucid enough to understand anything the boy told him. Maybe he didn't have to, Dean stroked his forearm and the smile transferred into his hushed voice and after some time, Bobby's eyes dropped.

“Hey, hey, old man...”, Dean raised his voice slightly. “...grumpy as hell with a crick in your back. Hey Ellen, could you give me a hand, it's Bobby's bedtime.”

They half carried him back into the other room and this time Tom was sure he would not rise before tomorrow.

Dean avoided Ellen afterwards. But she wasn't an easy one to avoid, shuffle and shove and she cornered him in the kitchenette and asked, loud enough even they could hear, maybe so that they could hear, “How is he really?”

Dean made another futile attempt to dodge her, then he stayed still and answered barely audible, “I don't know.”

Tom checked on Jess and how she would take that, but she did not seem to react at all.

Dean's cheery behavior had only been for Bobby. Now, for real, he was the same shaking mess he had been the last time he stormed into the cabin.

“Dad says he will wake up,” Dean said and seemed to want Ellen to indorse that.

And as any mother would, she did: “He will be okay.”, she spoke her encouragement. “John and Bobby planned every step and checked every fact three times. Bobby wouldn't let this go down if there is a chance it could harm your brother. And Jim, spiritual guidance comes with his day job, he has the exact right temper to lead one through any ritual, Sam couldn't be in better hands. John made sure of that, because we both know John doesn't allow mistakes. Mistakes scurry away, wherever John Winchester passes, to seek themselves some other place to happen.”

It seemed to work. A very faint smile curved itself into Dean's face, before he told Ellen. “You suck at pep talks. When you lie through your teeth, you have to stay close to the truth and we both know you don't trust my dad much.”
They were talking in low voices again and Tom could only hear half of Ellen's come back, closing with, ...not all of them could be as motherly as Dean and sing sad old drunks to sleep in under five minutes.

“... practice,” was the last word of Dean's reply. They stayed tense for all their banter. Tom realized that even though Ellen had tried and Dean had asked for it, she could not give him comfort, because he didn't know how to accept it. Dean was the one who provided comfort, who felt at ease at protecting and caring. With Bobby now asleep he was lost.

Jo announced she would retire too, to be fit next morning and do rounds with Uncle Bobby. Her voice carried a slight slur, that third bottle hadn't been a beer. Her mother asked her worried where she headed to. In drunken slowness, Jo replied, to bed, duh.

Then she vanished into the back room, after Ellen had not objected again. Ellen's gaze and thoughts were held by the room where her daughter shared bed with a man more than twice her age.

“It's Bobby,” Dean said very tense. A statement bordering a threat, not to gainsay.

“What?” Ellen asked surprised.

“If you can trust any man with a kid, it's Bobby.” He challenged her angrily.

Ellen let the anger directed at her slide, now that Caleb had silently vanished, her daughter and Bobby asleep and only them and Dean here, a lot of her energy had left her. She seemed tired.

“You don't have to tell me what a damn fine man Bobby Singer is, boy,” she answered. “It's only I am not sure he's drunk enough to sleep through my daughters bed hog performance. She's a menace to share bed with after she drank.”

“I will keep that in mind,” Dean replied and it took him and Ellen and Tom a second to realize what he just had said there.

“I didn't mean-” Dean tried.

“Any other night I would tear you a new one,” Ellen gave him a pass.

“Any other night I wouldn't be so brain-dead to say it to your face,” Dean noted.

Tom followed Dean with his eyes, when he slipped away from their awkward exchange to the bathroom. Ellen sat with her arms propped up, her head buried in her hands she fought the tiredness.

His little girl beside him fought a completely different fight.

“Jessy.”

She hugged her knees tighter, an indication that she had heard him.

“I'm fine,” the reply so hollow he would have not believed it came from his Jess had he not seen her lips move.

“I can't do anything,” she said, like she really accepted it now. “We're outnumbered. I can only wait and try not to do something stupid.” A sob broke out of her stoic mask, but it did not do anything to liven up the emptiness she wore.

...
Chapter 15

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~ Dean came and went, Ellen sat still and read in an old book sipping coffee.

She couldn't have cared less. She wasn't even angry, Jess thought this was what shock had to feel like. It was new to her. Whenever life had thrown something at her she was able to fight or flee, she never had been trapped like this, unable to do anything, not even to endure, because what was done, wasn't done to her.

Only when her mother touched her she realized she had started to hyperventilate.

She couldn't loose it like that, Sam would need her. She calmed her breathing and tried to focus on the only thing moving in her limited environment:

Dean.

He never stayed inside for long, only to wash his hands, carry a bag inside, carry a bag outside, use the bathroom and then he was gone again. Dean was a bad thing to focus on because he was able to do what she wanted to do most: be with Sam.

She did not speak to him because she feared she would bite off her own tongue due to the strain of keeping her words and tone civil.

Unable to miss it, she saw him gathering, a clean towel, from his duffel bag, and boxer shorts and a T-Shirt, into his arm.

~ Angela could not tell how much time had passed. Ellen had stayed stone cold sober, while all around her turned to the bottle, but she drank coffee in regular intervals to keep herself awake.

So she guessed, by Ellen's coffee cycle it had been more than two hours, since Sam's screams had died down, when something happened.

Jess became vivid. Dean had just headed outside again, without so much as a glance spared to them.

Angela suspected he was given tasks to keep him busy, keep him sane. Because the boy did not look too good and had Angela not been worried sick herself and watched her daughter go through hell out of fear for Sam, she would have felt deep sympathy for Dean.

She knew it was not fair to think he was free to help Sam, because he was not. The restraints binding him were far more tightly strapped than their shackles. His faith in this madness was too strong and nothing overcame true faith, not love or pain or death. He would rather see his brother burn on a stake than to allow doubt to take hold.

“What is it baby?” she asked her daughter carefully after Jess practically stood at attention, as far as that was possible sitting on a bed.
“Something's going on,” Jess mumbled, her eyes trained at the door as if she could see through it if she only tried hard enough.

More minutes of nothing and then. Steps on the porch, many feet, slow. Ellen got up from the table as if called and hurried to open the door, but the pastor beat her to it, pushed it open from outside. He was exhausted, his plain attire rumpled, he never had looked less than a pastor than now. His sleeves were rolled up and on his bare left arm was a darkened red smudge.

Angela fought down the sickness risen by this sight and hoped Jess had not seen.

She probably had not, not the way her eyes were now transfixed on Dean, entering sideways through the door, Sam's limp form close to him. He and his father carried Sam between them, his head hung so loosely down, he seemed unconscious, the wet hair in his face, but then she saw one of his legs move. His feet tried to find footing, but the movement was too uncoordinated and frail, it would have made him stumble if not for his father's strong arm around his middle. John seemed perfectly calm, like any other day, cradling his child to him indifferent to the fact that his son was taller than him. There was not a line of worry in his face.

Dean was the very opposite of his father, with every step he checked three times on his younger brother. He did not hold Sam's brunt weight, only balanced his father's hold and his eyes were wide, searching for a cue from Sam, anything. But there was nothing, only boneless spastic movements that scared Angela and, so it seemed, Dean too.

A clanking sound startled her. Jess had stretched herself to a point where the shackles began to restrain her and caught John's attention.

Her daughter's eyes held a silent demand.

She posed a claim.

And John nodded. A ghost of an emotion haunted his face in company of that nod, but it was too long dead for Angela to recognize.

Dean nearly stumbled when John moved them into their direction. Jess made room, sat on the edge of the bed and Angela made more room and Tom beside her too.

John settled his son down between her and Jess, who moved in seamlessly the second John let go. She spent one last look at Dean- Who was so wordlessly upset with having to let go of his brother, but he was tugged away by John. Then like a blanket was drawn over the four of them, her daughter crouched over Sam, shielding him.

~

The cold and clammy skin under her fingertips scared her and centered her at the same time. Sam was here, they were together, she would not let them take him again. First she checked his vitals, obscure pulse and she didn't like his labored breathing, it heaved his whole chest to a point where it shook him violently. She stroked the wet strands of hair from his forehead and brought their faces together so she filled up his vision and spoke to him. His half closed eyes kept staring through her even after she had called him by his name three times.

A hand came up, hard into her side, uncoordinated and his fingers caught her skin painfully, but he did not try to shove her away. That was good, he was aware of her.

In precaution not to upset him she backed away again, made sure, not to hover too close over him, his open-mouthed wet breaths such a violent struggle – it was him lying down like this. He had breathed close to normal when they held him up.
With an out of body like ease she went through all the shock symptoms to be sure, because sitting someone up who was suffering shock wasn't the best of all idea's.

But he was not in shock, he was suffering a trauma, similar, but a different ball game.

She asked her mother for help and soon they managed to prop Sam up with the two pillows they had, so that his position was in a soft angle and the wheezing stopped, even though his breath was still agitated.

~ While Jess made Sam more comfortable, Tom could see her calm down to a level of cold serenity. He himself barely held it together. When they had brought Sam in- Tom blinked away the tears- the boy did not respond at all and Tom couldn't help himself to feel the dread for all the lack off animation he had come to recognize in Sam, even when he was quiet, the boy usually was so full of life. If it hadn't been for his breathing...

He looked so frail as if they had had him more than hours out there, his cheeks hollow as of a starved man, the skin palid. The only sight ever chilling Tom the same had been to find a forgotten child in the filth of her crackhead parents apartment, so small and underfed it did not look real.

He was startled by another of Sam's movements that made the terrible picture of a doll with broken joints.

Blood trickled down his nose.

~ Angela tried to hold Sam's arm down when he lashed out again, but her daughter scolded her:

“Don't, it's okay.”

And she caught on quickly at what Jess was doing.

All her daughter's touches were non-restraining and she allowed Sam room, just sat close enough to stay in his peripheral vision. Angela settled down to do the same. Sam looked horrible. Just plain that.

Sure she noticed the blood. Jess had to too. But what could they do? She searched and only became aware now that Ellen and the Pastor had left to somewhere. John and Dean were the only ones still with them, but John was busy already, writing something down and Dean... The boy sat on the rumpled cot, legs bent, he hugged his knees lax, defeated. She was sure his eyes had not left his brother for a moment since he was with them and just as sure was she Dean would not give into sleep, no matter how tired he was.

Jess swabbed away the blood with her sleeve.

Even if they would help and Angela doubted John would allow anything close to medical care for Sam, her daughter would not let them lay a finger on Sam. Right now they would have to pry Sam from Jess dead hands if they would have wanted him back. The realization awoke a new fear in Angela.

Because sooner or later they would take Sam back.

~ Time lost all meaning while she studied the changes in Sam. After a while she had unfolded his cramped fingers and held his hand.

The changes were so small, it felt like she woke up suddenly when his eyes focused on her for the
first time. But the built up had been there, the press of his fingers against her, the breathing began to indicate intention instead of panicked reflex, a rapid eye movement, as if dreaming and a more gentle press of his hand to hers...

The moment he looked at her and she saw recognition was short and the reaction afterwards, unraveled the knot inside of her.

He shut his eyes abrupt. Wouldn't open them then.

He just rested them, she noted after more observation. He wasn't sleeping.

Very lightly she put her fingertips to his neck and stroked her thumb over his cheek, a gesture she had learned over the years, deepened his sleep and chased away any nightmare.

He blinked his eyes open. Surprised.

*Jess*, he said, his voice so scratched she wasn't sure she just imagined to understand him. And then there was pain in his features, so sudden and raw, she winced and checked him in a knee-jerk reaction for injuries, while she knew-

He brought his right arm up. The back of his hand flapped against the side of her face, before he took control of the motion and touched his hand gently to her.

She smiled down at him.

His fingers traced her face and drew her in, till she understood and laid down beside him, hugging his shoulder, still in avoidance of putting pressure to his chest.

He smelled strange, but that was only the dry cotton covering him. She tried to find Sam's smell underneath, but the only one she found was the cold, clear smell of rain. She pressed a kiss to his temple and willed him to sleep, to rest, to get better.

But lying beside him she could feel that he did not fall asleep.

~

Tom watched his daughter working a miracle. He had often wondered how his loud and active daughter choose medicine, over a career in sports. But only because he had never seen her like this: Taking time. Hours, which felt longer because this night stretched into an unmovable obscurity. Blackening out everything that made one aware of time, laggard motion in their surroundings designed to mute any sound and made proportions indiscernible, so that Sam's eyes blinking away a thought felt as loud as his brother standing up, stretching his legs.

But Jess let herself fall into this nerve-wrecking pace-less pace to draw Sam out of it.

For a long time now Sam had stared off into an abyss. Tom's eyes dropped close more than once, but whenever he opened them again, Sam was still awake. None of them had slept much since two nights ago, for all Sam had been through, exhaustion should have taken mercy on him by now.

But Sam's unseeing eyes did not rest. His overstrung nerves would not let him sleep, maybe not for a long time. The stress, lack of sleep alone, brought to his body, should have worsened his condition, but still, he got visibly better.

He became more lucid, even though he faded off now and then, he startled more often from these episodes and when he began to search Jess afterwards, Tom knew Sam wouldn't be lost again.

The blackness of the night began to whiten into gray when Sam curled to his side, into Jess'
embrace and Tom was happy to be awake to see this. His daughter's face lightened through her gentle smile. Sam studied her in a marveled way before he drifted off again, became unfocused and looked through Jess. Taken by thoughts she could not follow.

Tom saw his little girl swallow down her emotions and stroked Sam's cheek to draw him out again, hold him back from the heavy struggles of his mind.

When Sam's gaze centered after a while, Jessy and him looked at each other and suddenly Tom felt wrong to watch this. He shut his eyes not to intrude and to rest, now that he knew they had made it through the night.

He had dosed off, but not for long, because when someone stirred and the weight on the mattress shifted, Tom opened his eyes to the same gray of the earliest morning.

Sam had sat up.

Angela, also woken, gave him a little bit room and bumped back into Tom, who was now finally awake. Sam bent his knees with a gradualness, which spoke of how little he trusted his limbs yet. Jess sat beside him, faithfully watching for every cue, just a light hand on his back.

Sam concentrated hard on whatever occupied his mind, because he did not seem to take notice of them at all.

Jess kissed his shoulder. The fingers of Sam's left hand clenched into the flesh of his own thigh as a reaction to that.

Tom searched his face and the anguish there was short lived, because Sam clouded it with the heaviness of his exhaustion.

Sam heaved himself up and the grip Jessica had on him was too soft and slid right off. When he staggered off the bed Jess still tried to make sure Sam would not fall, was not trying to hold him back.

And then he was out of her reach. The shackles dug sharp into Jessica's skin when the realization set in and she lunged after him.

Sam left.

Angela held Jess back, bent her arm to lessen the strain she brought to her wrist, so she would stop hurting herself. All the while his wife did this, Tom's attention was still with Sam, who had not just stood up, he had left Jess and now approached in narrow steps his brother.

Dean had not moved, like he could not believe it too and still watched fazed when Sam collapsed more or less coordinated beside him on the blankets on the floor.

Dean helped his brother to stretch out, every contact strictly clinical, till Sam hugged the pillow and the strain left his body. Dean reached for the balled up covers and tucked Sam in. But by then Sam had already shut his eyes.

Unsure, Dean remained in his crouched position a hand reaching for Sam's well blanketed shoulder, hovered there, not daring to touch. It took him as long as it took for Sam's breath's to steady, to decide for settling as close to Sam as it was possible without spooning him.

They fell asleep that way.
Chapter 16

The stream of the scaled shower head poured down water on her, the lukewarm touch of it perfect to keep her awake and cover her from the cold hiss of reality. Her reality now was a Sam that would not talk to her.

Who fell asleep on the floor and slept through the rumble of five people carrying out their morning routines. Who had moved in his sleep close into his brother's space, buried his face into Dean's chest.

Who had not moved out of his brother's space since he woken up, like the harsh light of the early afternoon was only bearable in Dean's shadow. Spent his time there, ducked away under Dean's care, hidden from her voice. As if he could not hear it as long as he stayed this close to his brother.

The water grew colder, still pleasant, still a distraction instead of an alert. She enjoyed the little privacy the shower curtain gave her, knew Jo tuned out any sound she would have made. She could have sobbed curled up in fetal position on the shower floor and Jo would have not disturbed her. This level of repression was marvelous. Jess wondered how long it would take for her to become so jaded:

None of them had apologized to Sam, like they had not tortured him last night.

The spiking cold cleared the way for the memories of the last hours and she did not want to review them. But she could not get it out of her mind, how the Pastor clapped Sam on the shoulder like he was proud of him.

How Caleb had asked Sam if he remembered him now.

Sam's shy answer of *Sure*.

And the apology did not come for the torture, but that Caleb left and Sam smiled in a way that must have seemed forgiving. But Jess had seen the despairing thought behind the smile, that Sam could understand too well how someone would want to leave here.

It was Ellen who checked Sam's memory, asked him things and Sam answered. How to end an evil spirit. How to kill any kind of shapeshifter. What the last line of the Latin exorcism said in English. Sam knew it all, soft spoken monosyllabic answers. Smart as Ellen was she did not keep it with the facts, she inquired for how Sam thought about demons now by asking him if he was aware what it meant for him to be a demon's target.

Dean had humored her inquisitive agenda, because she had not pushed Sam, just asked. But when Sam gone deadly pale due to this last question, Dean considered Ellen with a glare close to the one John used. Sam had hidden his face in his hands and Ellen let him be. His hands came off wet a few minutes later and his taut expression held back more tears.

Jo had stayed away from Dean and his shadow that held Sam close. Jess could not blame her. Dean gave everyone who approached them the unspoken message he did only allow them near for so long and could turn around and bite their head off any time.

Just Bobby was given carte blanche and he was the one Sam had talked to the longest, asked something in wonder, like they had not seen each other these last days...
“You're here.” It was a question, maybe more than one.

“Ya think I leave you boys and your daddy on y're own with this mess?” Bobby said good natured, like leaving here was something so unthinkable, that he would not even consider considering it.

“Last time I saw you, the only thing that kept you from shooting Dad was Dean standing in the line of fire,” Sam remembered.

“Well, what can I say, John has that effect on people.”

Bobby's answer had forced a huffed laugh out of Sam, which distorted his features in a way for his hurt to be even more blatant.

Jess wanted to bang her head against the dirty tiles, but it already hurt and she was sure to give into the need would not get the never ending loop of events to go away. The only thing that would, would be to get out there again and face more of it. She was not sure she could do it already, to have Sam so out of reach as if she only observed him through a telescope and could not even scream herself hoarse. Because he was so fragile, she was afraid to push him, not that his brother would let her.

But Dean unspoken threat going out to everyone and everything under the sun wasn't really what kept her silent. There was nothing he could threaten with, not after last night. But Sam. He had reasons for acting as if the bed and it's occupants did not exist. It wasn't calculating, it wasn't an act, no one was that good of an actor, not after going through hell.

So if Sam had to fall into the safety net Dean spun around him and had to stay away from her after this night; she had to trust him that he had to. That he knew what was best for him.

It wasn't Sam's seclusion what had driven Jess out of the room.

What sent her over the edge, had been John.

He had slept in the backroom for most of the day. While she fought to keep her eyes open, he had slept and missed his son to wake up with pains from last night. Missed him to sip water with caution and swallow the food Dean urged him to eat. He was not there to hear Sam try out his voice, wrecked from pleading his own father for mercy. Jess could see how someone would try to evade this horror show. And when John finally had made an appearance he had the common sense not to expect a hug. He seized Sam up from the doorway and after Dean had made him out, Sam noticed too...

No one dared to break the silent communication between father and son and then Sam got up and did the unexpected – John warily returned the hug and only tightened his grip when Sam sobbed something unintelligibly into his neck.

“What for?” John had asked after he turned the hug into an open embrace.

“I'm not listenin to you.” Jess heard the words in Sam's sobbing then, “I'm so sssorry,” he drew in a shaky breath, unable to meet his father's eyes.

Jess had hailed Ellen over to her, asking for a bathroom break, no longer able to watch them as John sat Sam down with the words, that they had a lot to talk about.

Now the water was so cold she had open her mouth wide to keep her teeth from chattering noisily.
Fuck, she cursed in the confines of her head and turned the water off.

Jo batted her eyes down, while Jess rubbed herself dry with a towel that surely had been used by half of the cabin's residents. Interesting how in less than a week you didn't shy away anymore at sharing towels strange men and got used to have a babysitter for your shower. She kneaded the damp ratty fabric between her fingers to assure herself that it was real.

“Oh, I-”

Jess shook herself out of the trance she had fallen into, contemplating towels and their existence, when she became aware, Jo talked to her.

“-could have given you a fresh one. I am sorry.”

“Never mind.” So this is what made Jo sorry: Reeking towels.

She clothed herself with an uncomfortable Jo not-watching. Jess already had changed, become jaded, because she would have no problem to do horrible things to this girl if it gave her a chance to get them out of here. Her thoughts drifted again and she wondered how loud it would be to smash Jo's head against the wall.

It was the lack of sleep. Because this vision of a lifeless bloody girl at her feet was not only absurd, but also unlikely. Absurd, because what good would it do? The weakest of their captors eliminated, five others waiting outside, she would have Jo, they would have Sam and her parents, not a good position for negotiations. And the real problem was, that the weakest of their captors, still was not your average teen. No matter how embarrassed and off her game she would make Jo feel, Jo was here to watch her, she had a knife on her at all times and would not hold back like Roger had, like Dean would. Jo was a girl. Girls didn't take the risk of holding back...

Her mind was rambling once more, caught in loops, not sleeping for two days did that to her. She left her feet bare and pushed the fresh socks into the pockets of her jeans. No need to dirty them up, should there be a chance to run, she would have them with her. She didn't know where their shoes were, maybe in one of the cars. Probably in Dean's Chevy, it was from where Bobby had gotten the duffel bag which held Sam's clothes. They were not really Sam's clothes. Beside his sneakers, all the clothes were obviously Dean's. Jess had followed the sparse dialog over a charcoal gray hoodie Sam had unearthed from the bag "You kept this?"

"It's mine."

"Yeah, but you never wore it, I wore it."

"Had I gotten it for you, it would have been in your size. Atta time you vanished in it, Harry Potter."

"You always got me stuff to grow into."

"Not that one, I never counted for you to become a sasquatch. It's my downtime hoodie."

"In other words, you never wear it."

"Because it's cursed, you put it on you turn into a moody bitch."

"Jerk."

The look Sam gave Dean shot right into her heart. She knew it from experience. She knew what it
felt like when Sam looked at you like that. Like you held up the sky. Like you held his heart.

“Thanks,” Sam added after a while and made Dean from shit-eating-grin happy, to uncomfortably-touched happy.

“It's just a hoodie, Sammy, not a kidney.”

Sam had not meant the hoodie. Dean knew that. What bothered her was, that she wasn't sure what Sam thanked Dean for.

Suddenly she didn't know Sam well enough anymore.

The thought had sneaked up on her and now that it was out in the open she tried to forget it again. Sure, because that was possible.

She pushed at the door, Jo held her back and anger lashed out inside her so strongly she was surprised she did not attack Jo immediately. It was hard enough as it was. Being away from Sam because she couldn't breathe anymore and wanting to stay with him at the same time, already tore her up. “What?!” she asked Jo.

“Are you okay?” the girl asked.

No. She wanted Jo to let go of her, she wanted to see Sam again, because the one thought which persistently kept screaming at her, the one she was unable to drown since she entered the bathroom, was, that she let him out of sight.

“I am fine.”

“If you want to be on your own for some time? There's a bed in the back room.” Jo seemed really worried. “You look tired.”

A cute way of describing that she probably looked like a wet half-dead rat.

“Let me be clear,” Jess said. “We are not friends. You don't care shit about me or Sam. You made a point about that last night. I don't know in what fucked up world of unicorns and flying monkeys you live that you believe you have to ask me how I am doing after you tortured my boyfriend. But trust me on this: We, here in the real world, don't talk feelings with our kidnappers.”

Jo let go of her arm.

...
“Let me be clear,” Jess said. “We are not friends. You don’t care shit about me or Sam. You made a point about that last night. I don’t know in what fucked up world of unicorns and flying monkeys you live that you believe you have to ask me how I am doing after you tortured my boyfriend. But trust me on this: We, here in the real world, don't talk feelings with our kidnappers.”

Jo let go of her arm.

~ Angela had observed Sam since he had woken up. His good condition was unexpected. He could have stayed catatonic. He should have been more jittery. The tremors he tried to hide were minor.

He was not in the least bit afraid of the pastor, his father – his brother. No, certainly not of Dean.

She could see it there, the echoes of motherhood. It came so natural to Dean, she was sure the young man did not even realize he fell back into old routines. Clothing, feeding, watching your kid. Every sorrow, tiredness or pain slid away when you had to protect your child, your own existence became nothing. Even after decades this instinct never faded, because there was no stronger drive in nature.

What a terrible thing it was when the maternal drive got steered off by religious fanaticism. Even the strongest instincts were overruled by the wrapped logic of doing the right thing for your child and it made thousands of mothers every day sit idly by while their children were mutilated with rusty razors.

She firmly believed Sam was a smart and educated young man able to reflect on his situation. He knew the safety Dean promised was false. But knowing was one thing.

She just witnessed the other:

Sam was only able to fall back into step, because his brother would keep him safe – if it was real or not did not matter. It was what he knew, what he remembered now. And habits were stronger than reason.

In a way he did the right thing. His fast recovery proved it right. And just because his behavior made her feel uneasy she wouldn't want him to rebel or shy away from his father.

Because it was not Dean that kept Sam safe.

Sam kept himself safe. He asked the right questions, he took his father's delusional answers serious, he asked for more. For an hour now they had put their heads together, over old books, scribbled notes and maps, photos, files...

John Winchester kept his voice low, gentle with his youngest and what Angela heard made so little sense to her she was unable to deduce anything from it.

In the beginning she thought, the longer his father explained, the more comfortable Sam became. She had seen him studying before, it consumed him completely and even now he blossomed, the material was something he had a good grasp on and he was highly motivated to work with it.

He had tried to make them explain their mythology in the days before, but Ellen firmly denied him and so did Dean, now Angela suspected Dean had been ordered not to react to Sam's inquiries.
Now all of Sam's questions were answered.

The only question she had, was how much his motivation to know had become clouded by his memories and the trauma. Did he still believe they could escape?

Sam was hard to read, she wouldn't even been able to guess, was he angry, or sad, or in shock? It seemed all buried under the determination by which he followed his father into the world of secret symbols and hidden meanings.

Dean paced around, urging Sam to drink some milk. Nothing to do, but to hover over his brother and his father and by his nervous fiddling, she detected what was really going on with Sam.

“It's almost five, time to check grounds,” Dean said to Sam, who looked up from his the notes his father explained to him and fixed them again in a erratic motion. Sam's neck made a painful clicking noise. “Okay,” he dismissed Dean and completely misinterpreted his brother's statement.

Angela saw now, Sam was not only determined, he was upset and he grew more upset the longer his father explained demonic omens and other things to him.

“Dad,” Dean tried again and got an equally distracted response from his father, as he had gotten from his brother. “Yeah?” asked John why he was interrupted.

“Dontcha think it's enough for one day?”

“We barely grazed the surface,” Sam answered instead of his father.

“Take it easy, Sammy.”

“Take it easy?”

“How could I”

“Son!”, John stopped Sam before he could get himself worked up over his brother's advice. “Dean 's right. You could use a break.”

“No, Sir.”

John's mouth curled around an unpracticed smile. Bobby Singer huffed, his feet on the table, scribbling away on his own notes and put in his two cents: “A word you didn't expect to hear so soon again, huh, John?”

“Nah, I'm surprised it took him this long,” John disagreed and reached out to touch his son's head, stroke his hair, kind, fatherly, sentimental – a tribute to a past he seemed to remember fondly.

Sam tried hard not to let show how much it effected him. “Dad. We- ...we have to- keep working,” but his own words betrayed him, their staccato gave him away. “I need to-”

“I know, son,” the smile long vanished, his own brand of sadness had settled over John again. “Believe me, I know how you feel. I've been there. So once in your life listen to me: It's very easy to run yourself into the ground with this hunt. But you can't let it happen. It's a fight over twelve rounds with an opponent you can't knockout, so you have to remain standing. You have to pace yourself. Understood?”

Sam nodded, head down, mouthed, Yes, sir.
“Come on, Sammy,” his brother tried to cheer him up. “Fresh air and sunlight do you good. If you're not careful your California tan will start to fade.”

Sam shook his head about his brother and heaved himself up.

And then Dean held out a hand gun for him.

Angela was too surprised and transferred her own surprise to Sam's hesitation, because in reality, Sam maybe did not think more than a full second before he reached out.

She expected Sam to take the gun gingerly, but his big hand took it sure and in one move pressed somewhere, removed the clip, he took a look at it, before he shoved it back in and worked the slide with a noise that was so much more harsh in reality than in the movies. Sam tucked a fully loaded gun into the back of his waistband. And while her brain tried to catch on with the familiar ease he displayed, she registered the others had all stopped doing what they were doing and watched.

Because Dean had handed Sam a gun.

Sam, who had been shackled to the bed not even twenty-four hours ago.

Dean stared back pointedly at those whose gazes lingered, his act was pointless though, none of them seemed really concerned. Sam's recovered memory made him one of them and they carried weapons as casually as normal people wore watches.

The bathroom door opened a gap. Sam touched Dean's arm, tipped his head outside to get him going. He was avoiding Jess.

Angela had not been sure till now. At least she had not been sure how much intent was behind it. But the subtlety of Sam's tries to urge his brother outside, made her certain.

~

“Thank god,” Dean said, following Tom's gaze. Jessica finally had fallen asleep. “Another night and I would have spiked her coffee with Ambien.”

He smiled into Tom's face and Tom asked himself how he could've trusted this man with his family only one second.

Dean turned away, eyebrows raised because his humor wasn't appreciated. Like he really expected a father to laugh about the plan to drug his daughter.

He knew it was useless to ask how he had not seen, because you did not see at first sight, or at the second glance or within the first days. This was why it was necessary to keep children away from their parents for a longer period of time when abuse was suspected. Because abuse taught you coping mechanisms, which only after long and close inspection showed to be faulty.

He could not even imagine how many times Dean's cunning charm or his big childlike eyes or his roguish smile got the young man what he wanted. Life for abused children was hard, you had to fight for everything, the world was a jungle, you had to be alert at all times.

So it was not when Dean abducted them from their home when he was out of his element. It was now, after the storm had settled, his brother not in immediate danger to be hurt, his father content and the staring girlfriend of his brother not staring anymore, that Dean's charm failed him. He seemed to have no recipe on normal social interaction. Smalltalk was what he had with his kind of people. Not people like Tom.
Ellen informed him, he should settle for the night. It was late and he was merely up, because he had tried to get Sam alone. Not an easy task, but all the while Jess and Angela had been able to move freely in the cabin, Sam had been outside with his brother. So when he came back, Tom had seen the chance to talk to him.

Sam had looked through him as through bodiless echoes.

And Tom did not push. For the same reason that Jess had claimed she was not upset over Sam's emotional absence.

Sam was not here, he was running on autopilot and avoiding them was necessary to keep himself from crashing.

Earlier today Tom had not seen it. He had been angry, when Sam fled the cabin a moment before Jess entered the room. His little girl had asked him where Sam was. And he had been afraid she would break down.

Only she hadn't. She had not been upset. She had not done anything, had not eaten, had not stopped watching the door. And when Sam returned she had not stopped watching Dean.

Not Sam. Sam needed time to cope and she was not upset over it, she understood. Well Tom had not understood.

Till he tried to talk to Sam. He understood now. He still was angry, not at Sam, he thought he hadn't even been angry at Sam before. He was angry because there was nothing they could do to help.

Sam currently sat at the table and memorized a text. Tom tried hard to let go of his anger, this kind of anger broke a person and he had no idea how long he would have to endure it. If there ever would be a chance again to help Sam.

But what troubled him much more, he knew Jess was still angry and she would not be able to let go of it. Not as long as Sam was as helpless as he was right now.

“Nighty night Sam.” Dean snapped the book shut Sam had been reading in.

“Dean,” a whined protest.

“Nah, don't even try. It's close to midnight,” he picked up Sam's cup and emptied it's contents into the sink. “Do I have to send you brushing your teeth?”

Sam rolled his eyes. He was barely able to stand, as exhausted as his body was. Tom wondered how his mind was able to work at this point.

He made it the three steps to Dean's cot and went to sleep. In his clothes.

“I did not see you brush your teeth, young man.”

Sam curled into a tight ball and ignored his brother, who cleaned the table of a few more dirty dishes, before he kicked off his boots and lay down beside Sam. Even not touching they looked so close it seemed off. Tom wondered if he would see it too if Jess had told them nothing.
Chapter 18

She just couldn't wait. She hadn't had it in her. She already been patient to a degree she hadn't thought possible. It was the next day and Sam wasn't better. He still hid in Dean's shadow. Pushed himself through the reading assignments, his father had given him, with restless force. And treated them like they were thin air.

But then John waved Dean to follow him. Bobby and Ellen left with them too.

Sam did not even seem to realize they all had left. Well, all beside Jo, but she was no problem for Jess.

She was shackled. For some reason her mother was free to move, even though noon would have been her time. Wasn't rocket-surgery to figure out who had charmed Ellen into changing the schedule. Dean had a way of getting what he wanted and he wanted Jess separated from his little brother.

“Sam.”

There was a good chance he really did not hear her. When he read the world was on mute for Sam.

“Sam.”

She waited a little bit, but when he failed to turn the page, she knew he had heard her. He had lost the line. Twice. It took him too long to read the page. Now he turned it.

“Sam, please.”

He rubbed his eyes and looked up to her. So hesitant, like he was afraid what he would find. Like she would be angry at him of all people.

Jo stared as he stood up and walked over to them.

With every step he took, he relaxed more. Artificially so. Like he had to keep it together.

The bed dipped with his weight. He reached for her hand, stroked her wrist where the shackles held her. She wanted to touch him, but she knew, she would not be able to let go-Aw what the hell!

Sam let her hug him so tight their bodies hurt.

“I'm sorry,” he said.

She could feel him hurt. A bodily ache, too deep to come from the crushing hug and when she got to let go, the ache became unbearable. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah.” His nod was only an downward motion, head ducked. Maybe it wasn't even a lie. Maybe all things considered Sam was still okay and they would get out of this madness.

“Sam, you have to tell us what to do,” she asked softly. “Do you have plan?”

He drew a shuddering breath, his chest heaving with sobs that would not come. “I am so sorry,” he repeated and took her hand between his. He kissed it. “It's gonna be alright.” His hands shook with
the fine tremor of swallowed sobs.

John lead inside again. The former silent room, with an embarrassed Jo, Sam with his face turned to the stove guarding the coffee pot on it, was suddenly filled with talk and people, which sucked out the stifled desperate air. Out of the room. Not out of Sam and Jess.

None of them noticed the state Sam was in. They merrily discussed a way of trapping witches.

Dean strode over and bumped shoulders with Sam, who ducked his head down. His slouch almost put them at the same height. Maybe the others did not notice anything was off, but Dean did. With the most gentle and subtle gesture he maneuvered Sam till they stood face to face, their foreheads touching, so fleeting none of the others saw it, even though they stood right beside them.

Sam let go of the strain.

It was not a simple surrender to relax. Sam had given up, after the torture and his vulnerability, the comfort Dean provided had tipped him over.

She forced herself to deny this assumption, shake it off, it couldn't be, Sam wouldn't give up, not Sam.

John argued with Ellen the advantage of her leaving. He needed her at her saloon, providing them with information. He reasoned if the saloon was closed for too long, people became suspicious.

“You mean other than the trusty open-hearted way hunters usually are?” Jo joked and John smiled at her. He kissed her temple and she beamed. “You watch out for your mother. Don't give her any worries, or else.”

The threat made Jo break out in full laughter. This man had tortured his own child two nights ago. And she did not take him serious.

They all said their good-byes.

Ellen even to them. Jo only nodded into their direction. Then they left. Together with John and the pastor.

They heard two cars leave. Where John and Jim had left to remained unexplained, also how long they would be gone.

Bobby informed Dean he would take the first shift and sleep till midnight.

Dean brought them dinner this evening. It seemed strange, but to know Ellen and Jo would not come back, scared her somehow. For no other reason than that they were women, she had trusted them more.

Herself and her mother stayed shackled, even through dinner. Dean ate with Sam at the table and did his best to distract him from reading. He wasn't above flinging breadcrumbs at Sam. But Sam was not to be distracted from his book. After a dozen bread pieces littered Sam's side of the table, he said without looking up, “Don't play with the food, Dean.”
Sam put up a fight when Dean sent him to bed.

“Six hours Sammy – that’s how much you slept last night, so don’t tell me you’re not tired, because-!”

Jess suspected Sam only gave in because Dean got loud and would have disturbed her mother’s sleep.

Dean stayed awake to watch them till midnight, then Bobby rose, Dean retired to the uncomfortable cot, Sam already inhibited.

The old man would now keep an eye on them, or on the surroundings – watching for demons - crazy was a too weak word for it. It seemed like neither Bobby nor Dean had thought about the possibility of Sam trying to free them.

Sam had woken when Dean settled beside him. The way Sam curled into Deans embrace made him seem smaller than he was and the intimacy was even more intense than it was those last nights and Jess realized that this was the first time no one but her and her parents watched. Bobby outside making rounds. The near darkness covering them...

There were whispers and faint movements, soft noises, almost-sounds not much louder than someones breathing and with the same rhythmic quality, but she couldn't tell what she heard, not for sure and when it stopped she strained her ears for minutes, but nothing. Till she wasn't sure if had not imagined it.

The smell of coffee and sizzling butter woke them about at the same time it woke Dean.

“Ge' of' m' Sa..qu..tch,” Jess was fairly certain she interpreted the muffled sounds out of Deans mouth right. Sam was using him as a pillow and Bobby, who cooked breakfast didn't bat an eye on that. Maybe they were not the only ones who knew.

“Few more minutes,” Sam said very much awake with his eyes firmly shut.

“Oh come on, Bobby ’s made breakfast.”

“I call dibs on the first pancake.” Sam's tousled head raised from Dean's shoulder.

“You can't call dibs on pancakes,” Dean tried to get up, but Sam put more weight on him.

“I believe I just did,” he argued.

Dean flipped them over and and caught Sam in a mean headlock. Mean because Dean shoved his armpit up into Sam's face and telling by the wicked grin, that wasn't an accident. Dean's glee over trapping his little brother with his smelly armpit didn't last long and soon he gave surprised cry.

He jumped back like he was stung. “You bitch!”

Sam laughed.

“You bit me,” Dean sounded numb with disbelieve.

“Serves you right for being a jerk,” Sam answered smug and dodged his brother, retreating to the
bathroom, so fast it was obvious he knew Dean would retaliate for the bite.

Maybe Bobby didn't know. Because while their displayed behavior was as intimate as it could get, it did not exactly scream incest, it screamed messy-brotherly-prank-war, but not incest.

What she thought she heard last night was only her knowledge paired with her worry for Sam. She had to stop worrying. They had put Sam through hell, but he was getting better, he was growing more distant to her, but he was getting better. At least it was what she told herself.

The gnawing feeling inside came from not knowing for sure. From seeing Sam with Dean and thinking he had to be okay, he looked okay, he said he was okay yesterday. Before he started crying.

Sam visibly mustered up his courage the whole day and when he finally did, it seemed almost casual, like he had not ignored them for hours.

Jess thought about what her mother pointed out to her. How Sam seemed much more stable today. She could not see it. She understood her mother's reasoning; Sam roughhousing with Dean might seem like he gained confidence. But Jess knew Sam better than her mother did. And Sam's confidence did not sit right, especially now.

“Dean, do you give us a minute?” Sam asked him. Dean mumbled, *Sure*, and left, like he had seen this coming for hours. They were alone and Sam did not know where to begin.

“It's okay Sam,” she said.

“No, it's not,” he disagreed. “I wanted to talk to you a lot sooner, but I didn't know...” He bit his lower lip.

“How do you feel?” her mother asked.

“I'm okay,” came the standardized response and then Sam caught on what he just said and to whom and he corrected. “I am better. It's been a lot to take in. But physically I am good.”

“Good enough to run?” Jess' father asked.

~ He expected Sam to stall their escape. Even if he was fit enough to free them and try to run, the boy had to be scared after what-

“Bobby and Dean are no danger to us,” Sam answered.

~ She had seen this coming. It would not do to spare Sam now.

“They have helped your father torturing you, Sam,” Angela stated. She observed as Sam first withdrew, but Jess held his hands and she steadied him.

He met Angela's eyes. “It wasn't torture,” he seemed so certain. “I am fine. It wasn't as bad as you might think.”

“Would you say the same thing if it had been Jess who had been strapped down and water-boarded until she lost consciousness?”

He tightened his arm around Jess. “I would've never let them do this to Jess.”

“You did not *let* them do this to you either Sam, they just did.”
“It's not the same thing,” Sam argued, Jess stroked his arm to calm him down. “What they did to me was necessary, they helped me.”

“And now they protect you?”

He shook his head. “I know how Stockholm syndrome works, Angela and I am not suffering from it.”

“Just because you know how it works, does not mean you can't fall victim to it’s mechanics,” she explained. “As long as you do not accept that you were powerless you cannot look at the danger you are in.”

~ She knew her mother meant well. But Sam simply wasn't in a place to be pushed again.

“It's not Stockholm syndrom,” he told her mother again. “I know it sounds like it, but they really are trying to protect us. I am not held captive here. I am sorry for the situation you are in because of me, but-”

“It's okay baby,” she said and laid her head on his shoulder. “I love you and I do understand.” She really did. He had to give in. They would have killed him. “You are doing the right thing. And I believe you, that you wont let anything happen to us.”

He looked at her like something alien and marvelous.

“But you have let me be there for you,” she asked.

His amazement rippled with shame.

“You are slipping, Sam. You can't go through this alone, so you trust them.” She did not name Dean specifically. “I can be there for you, if you let me.”

He shook his head.

Why was he fighting this so hard?

He untangled from her, held her at distance. “It's all true, Jess,” he said. “What they said is the truth. There are demons. They are real.”

She did not believe him. Not the demon part. Because seriously who would believe that? Neither did she believe, he believed what he just said.

“I didn't know, Jess. If I had known I would have never left my family, made you part of my life...”

~ ...he told them what his father had told him.

This bastard. Should anyone ever shoot John Winchester he had it coming. Tom had seen his fair share of abusive parents, but John was a rare breed. To be physically abusive and mentally scarring not only in equal parts, but in a manner which worked together seamless -the bastard had blamed Sam for his own mother's death, he had kidnapped him and tortured him and still came out as the good guy in his children's eyes.

While Tom listened to Angela trying to break Sam out of the brainwash he was caught in, he began to doubt it would work.

Sure Sam acknowledged he understood what Angela wanted him to understand, that none of this was his fault, that he could not let the guilt they induced in him bind him, but in reality he
understood nothing.

He said demons were real. Like it was a joker calling all others arguments invalid.

Tom watched Jess attempt in her own way, telling Sam not to shut her out, not because of her, but because Dean's influence on him was what would really break him eventually.

“You perceive all this wrong,” Sam told them finally. “I get it, you can't think differently because you have not seen what I have seen. And there is nothing I can say to make you believe.”

~ Demons. Sam believed there were demons. And not just, because Dean could listen in. He tried really hard to make her understand he truly believed this.

He had only seen them twice himself. Not the incorporeal demons not possessing anyone, but he knew about those too. He knew. Like he firmly believed the things he read were true. Like the saltline and magic chickenscratch and amulets sheltered them from the evils of the world.

She wanted to cry, because this, this was exactly what Sam had been afraid of before they took him and broke into his mind.

~ He was surprised when Jess brought up Dean again. He had assumed when it finally sunk in that he really believed what he told her, she would-

-he did not know? Yell at him? Ask how he could believe such nonsense; He would have had no answer. Because the only answer was that he had seen it. He remembered it, the hunts, the research, Bobby's bedtime-stories.

And only now that he told her, he knew what step he took.

How real he made this whole nightmare for both of them.

It became terribly real for Sam, his two worlds collided for good and at least one world would crash and burn in the process.

But Jess dragged Dean into their drama, like he was responsible and not a bystander suffering the fallout.

“I can't Jess. I am sorry.” He left. There was nothing he could say.
“You are wrong,” she whispered, because Bobby was here. Though he talked on the phone. “It's not that easy to break Sam,” she told her parents.

“Jessy, what they did was far from easy.”

“Don't you think I know that, Mom?”

“I am not sure you do,” her mother countered. “They fed Sam psychotropic drugs and had him undergo torture that creates an illusion of rebirth.

Water-boarding has the same lasting effects on the brain as electroshock therapy. Sam's father knew exactly what he did and I wouldn't be surprised if this wasn't the first time he did something like that to his children.

Many rituals, like exorcisms for example, are terribly close to what we understand as white torture; in an exorcism the victim is restrained, dehydrated, exposed to loud prayers day and night inducing sleep deprivation, this alone can kill a formerly healthy person. Some years ago I read in an article how a man forced his daughter to drink salt water because he thought she was possessed by a demon. The girl was four, had the neighbors not brought her to the hospital she would have died from salt poisoning. Do you really think you know what it does to a child to know it's father would kill it?”

Her mother was right, she did not know. But Sam wasn't broken, he had not given up. His act was temporarily.

“I know what it did to Sam that his brother did not help him,” she told her mother. “This is not about John, ultimately it's Dean. Sam tries to placate him with his submission. John can only inflict on Sam what Dean allows him to do. John's violence cannot break Sam, but Dean will. I will not let him.” She shook her head for emphasis. “I cannot let him.” She had no plan how to stop Dean, not yet.

Bobby perfectly took over Ellen’s schedule. He let them out of the shackles and put them on again when it was time. He fed them two, sometimes three times a day and chatted with her mom.

Jess suspected her mother was gathering more information to substantiate her theory of Sam's irreversible condition.

At least her father still thought there was hope for Sam. Even though he made hints about being in her mother's boat when it came to fleeing. He even parroted her moms words, you cannot argue against religion.

Religion. This was not religion. This was Sam's family and Sam ran away from them once. If he really had believed then, he would have not left.
From what she understood Sam had questioned his father even before he left. Had ugly fights with him, Bobby suggested that much.

While Dean idolized their father. But she knew better than to start badmouthing John to rile up Dean. It would make Dean angry, angry enough to do something what could jolt Sam out of the place he fell. But she did not want Sam to think she attacked him, by attacking his father and somehow she thought it would lead there. She had to think and she could, because she had nothing but time.

“Laundry, Sam, seriously?”

“I ran out of clean underwear days ago.”

“Since when you're above stealing my stuff?”

“You ran out of clean underwear yesterday.”

“Turn them inside out.”

“You're gross.”

“Whatever princess, don't forget to scrub the bloodstains out of my jeans while you're at it.”

“They are washed in already.”

“No.”

“You lie!”

“Can't prove that.”

“Where did you get bloodstains in the last week?”

...

“Dean?”

“Jo.”

“I didn't hear you.”

“Jo.”

“Jo made you bleed?”

“Contain your glee, it's not what you think.”

“I think sparring with a hundred pound girl made you bleed.”

“No, I scraped my knees 'cause I tried not to crush her when I rolled off. As a gentleman would.”

“Yeahhha-I don't believe you. Partially because you do not even know what a gentleman is: but mostly, 'cause I know a washed in bloodstain when I see one.” Sam threw the stained jeans at Dean's head and went outside.

“Hey-”, Dean followed him with the jeans in hand, certainly to carry out their argument, because the two of them did nothing but bicker the whole day.
Idgits, Bobby mumbled into beard.

The problem with subtly prodding Dean and pushing him to make a mistake was not that she did not know where to hit. But when? Because they always were together. They even shared a bathroom and by now she was sure it was not because Bobby or Dean thought Sam would run if he was not watched. They always were together, because it was what they were used to. But she would get her chance.

It was morning again. They left the bathroom together. Again. But this time it was not shoving hands and pushing elbows into each other, but polite distance. It spelled wrong.

Dean’s neck was red, his eyes downcast and his gait too straight. He was leaving. She knew it before he headed outside and the rumble of his car was heard.

“Where’s your brother think he’s going?” Bobby asked, alarmed, nearly out of the door-

“Leave him be, Bobby,” Sam said. He had picked up a book, one of these countless books he and Bobby leafed through day in day out.

“Okay,” Bobby said, looking pointedly at Sam.

Who pointedly did not return his gaze.

“You two are a’right?”

Now Sam looked up from the book. “Sure. You know Dean, he just needs to move,” Sam lied smoothly. “You know how he gets when he's bored. There is only so many times he can wash the Impala and clean the guns.”

Bobby’s pulled an impressive Do-you-really-expect-me-to-buy-that-looking. But otherwise he did not request another explanation.

Jess thought about in what a playful good mood Dean had been when they entered that bathroom. She put two and two together:

Things had been looking so good for Dean since his father left. Sam had been so open, so dependent and Dean had it easier and easier to put a smile on his face. All the little touches Dean had been allowed, not only at night, but in the light of day, with Bobby looking the other way, and them ignored by Sam.

And now something had not gone as he thought it would. Maybe there was something Sam was not ready to let him do.

She could only guess.

Dean was cooking. Yesterday's events put behind him, or so he thought. Jess would see to it that wound stayed open. Maybe Dean had told himself everything was okay, because Sam slept beside him, like the nights before. But he did not count her into the equation.
“I don’t get you.”

He was surprised. They had not talked in two days.

Beside her, her mother shifted nervously. She had not told her parents of the plan.

Their plan was to convince her to take the first chance to run with them. Without Sam. That was no plan she would ever consider.

“I’m an open book, sweetheart, ask away.”

“I mean, I get you are delusional, you think demons are real. But you’re not stupid.”

He folded his arms over his chest. Good, she made him tense. He was alone. Sam and Bobby renewed something called Devil's traps. It would take some time, Bobby said he needed Sam's help, or else he would not get it done today.

“Maybe you just don't want to see Sam is playing you again.”

“Is he,” Dean said with a nod, that said he thought Jess was talking trash.

“He said so.”

Dean shook his head and grinned.

But she wasn't fooled. She got him.

“And why would you tell me?” he asked her.

“Cause I don't like what Sam has to endure to win your trust.”

“You dunno shit,” he said, believed he was calling a bluff.

He turned his back to her again.

“I know everything, Dean.”

Her mother pinched her arm, something she did with Dad when he overstepped lines. But Jess wouldn't stop:

“I know you tell yourself it's okay. Because you both were so young when it started. That it's just your thing, it's not incest. You can tell yourself whatever you want, but it's not what Sam thinks.”

His hands gripped the side of the stove, his shoulders tense.

Her nerves did a little dance and a part of her brain informed her it could be hours before Sam came back, maybe she should have waited, but there was no going back now. So she steadied herself so her voice would not betray her, “Sam knows what you did is wrong. He has not known so when it started, he was too young. It took him some time to realize just fooling around is actually something to freak out over, but by then it was too late. He couldn't make you stop anymore, it had gone too far, he didn't want to hurt you. He could not loose you, you were all he had.

You probably don't know, but I know, because he told me, how many times he stood under a shower to stifle his crying, because he felt trapped. And afterwards he crawled under the covers with you and prayed your embrace could be just an embrace this night – that for once, it could be innocent.”
She paused, she wasn't done yet, but she wanted to see how he reacted first.

He turned very slowly, his skin seemed to brim in the slow motion. He projected the same cold fury as when Sam had come onto him, had tried to play him.

Now she couldn't let herself be afraid. He could not do anything to her. Sam would see. So even if he did, she'd win.

As he locked eyes with her she drove her point home, “Do you really think, someone who was able to get away from you, would come back to you willingly?”

She was absolutely sure he would attack her, his features were distorted in rage. He would shut her up and he would enjoy to do so, she could see it in his eyes, the glint.

Then he relaxed his jaw and hit her with a comeback, “Dude, you're mighty pissed Sam's not flashy-thinged anymore, huh?

Because if he told you everything, how come he never told you about hunting?”

He smirked.

Later her mother chewed her out for taking such a risk. She played with fire, her mom said.

She had played with fire, but unforeseeable, the fire had consumed itself between them. Dean had not turned to violence. He had not shut her up, as she had counted on. He simply turned her reasoning against her. He was good.

Didn't matter. Next time, or the time after that. Somehow she would shield Sam from him. It didn't matter to her, if he lashed out against her, or if she wore him down with logic.

If Sam were not playing him, Sam would not turn a cold shoulder on her like that. He did that to keep his act intact.

She would reason, Sam was afraid of him. Dean wasn't stupid, he knew what he had done, how he had failed Sam. He just needed to be reminded of it.
Dean sidestepped him and nearly ran into a tree doing so. Sam stared at his brother to let him know, he had seen it. How he had done it again. And Sam would not let it stride, would not talk about it as they always did.

He wanted to know, he needed to know, why Dean behaved like they were some kind of like poles repelling each other.

Dean ignored his staring. Fine.

He should have done this days ago, in the bathroom. He should have known it wasn't over. Nothing ever was, no matter how hard Dean tried to pretend he was not hurt, those wounds didn't just left scars, they festered and split open sooner or later.

“What is your problem, Dean?”

His brother made a face. “What's your problem?” Dean deflected.

“Don't patronize me like I am the drama queen here.”

Dean bit on his smirk, brow furrowed and he didn't say, If the shoe fits, but he did his best, to show he was thinking it.

But Sam was not having any of this, he would not let Dean anger him. His brother did this with him since they were kids. If there was something really bothering Dean, he averted Sam's attention by pissing him off, so they would not talk about it.

“As you wont open mouth and tell me how I made you mad at me, I have to guess. Feel free to jump in and correct me when I get it wrong. Is this about the blow job?”

Dean cringed.

They didn't talk about it. They didn't call it by it's name. It just happened, it never had needed explaining or arguing, it had just worked without.

But those times were over.

“I am sorry, if I send mixed signals,” he kept talking, even though Dean's back twitched and he didn't need to see, to know Dean rolled his eyes annoyed with him, and wanted to take off. “I am sorry that I need a bit longer than days to come to terms with everything I ever believed changing into something else, something I can't-”, he was not getting anywhere with his explanation, because it sounded like an accusation, like he was mad at Dean for not giving him more time, when actually he understood. He got it, how hard this was for Dean, and he was so grateful Dean didn't do what he was entitled to do, once bitten... Any sane person would stay away from him, would not love him still.

“You don't hear me, Dean,” he said and breathing traveled into his tone, maybe he sobbed, but he didn't have the words, he never learned them, not for what they shared. “I am really sorry. I am
sorry I am giving you a hard time, I am sorry I am a chore, I am sorry I can't take your forgiveness,” he spoke through gritted teeth, because he hadn't intended to sound like a whiny-

Dean had turned around.

He wouldn't have been able say any more, couldn't carry this conversation all on his own, but Dean's gaze didn't ask him for more. His big brother had caught on the tone and maybe only on that; words never worthy between them.

Dean moved and then like a miracle he had passed the bounds he had established between them.

He pressed their faces together, side to side. It made Sam's stomach flip, always had, always would. He drew in breath, their chests touched and he was slightly offended when Dean said, “Shut up, Sam,” because he wasn't even about to say something, he just needed the air. He knew Dean was seconds away from kissing him. Like his very own sixth sense, he always knew, even though Dean had no special tell, no common reason to kiss him. Too rare, too out of nowhere, but Sam always knew.

Dean just turned his head and brushed their lips together, like mending their silence. Lingering, soft, falling away. Sam had to stop himself from following Dean's lips, when Dean tipped his head back, doing the trick of looking down at him from below.

He marveled over how Dean was still able to say everything he wanted to say by touch. How years echoed in it, and promises and forgiveness and love. It made him shiver.

And his shiver made Dean smirk.

Maybe it was an visual illusion, but Dean's smirk always seemed more affectionate up this close.

“You ARE a drama queen,” Dean stated, then he shook his head sad and added, “No real guy turns down a bj first thing in the morning.”

He knew how rejected he had made Dean feel, but it wasn't even only about Jess; it was about Dean. “I-”

“Dude,” Dean stopped him. “Even in a chick-flick the guy gets a break from all that touchy-feely-talk after the kissing scene.

You are allowed a voice-over monologue, but that's it.”

Sam huffed a laugh. He tickled his fingertips to the sides of Dean's shirt, not quite touching, not quite framing his hips and asking them closer, what he did, spelled, I wish I could do more for you.

Dean stepped out of their shared space. Cut off their communication.

This time it was him who got rejected and that drove home how off things were between them. Dean had never said No to him. Not when he asked for something sexual. Because if he did, Dean would have to admit there were boundaries. And if there were boundaries, there could be a right and a wrong. Which was a demented way of thinking about it, because they had very clear limits set. Things they never had done, lines they never had crossed. But it was Dean's wrapped logic and he depended on it, so who was Sam to judge?

His cheeks started to burn, as he noticed Dean's stare, noticed he was caught. “I don't have an inner monologue,” he denied.
Dean didn't buy it.

This was how they made their way back to the cabin, him silent, not thinking, his brother sneering at him, their shoulders bumping.

If Dean had really been affected badly by the bathroom incident, he wouldn't come close now after he confronted him about it.

“Why don't you just tell me what it is?”

He would have expected an annoyed snort. Instead Dean eyed the cabin with dread and whiplashed into a smile, shaking his head. “I am fine,” he said.

Which made the hair of Sam's neck stand. From Dean, saying he was fine, wasn't a hint he wasn't, it was a scream for help. Because Dean was hard to interrogate on his feelings. He knew how to make things not about him. Therefore, when he only had this one sentence left, this one lie – then he was on his last legs.

~

The books scared her, but other than her daughter, she had no fun past time, like provoking a psychopath.

Bobby Singer was a strange man, in his way more destructive than Sam's father. Like trickling water, slowly eroding people's feeling for reality. One more reason to read the books he studied and never talked about with her or Tom. He spoke about anything with them, but not *Hunting*. Like Ellen, he saw no point in trying to convince them – Jo had tried, or Sam and even Dean, when Jess poked him hard.

Her daughter robbed her the last nerve these days. First they had been afraid Dean would hurt her. But he hadn't. He had tried to ignore her. Angela had watched with some fascination, how impossible her daughter made it for Dean to stay cool and sassy. How sparse words and well laid suggestions wore him down, made him react.

For a time Jessica seemed to capture a victory, because Dean actually pulled away from Sam.

Angela was far from calling it a win. Jess had not thought this through. Change never went smoothly. Just because she made Dean uncomfortable, didn't mean, he would keep distancing himself from Sam. He could easily turn around and do the exact opposite: Leave with Sam.

All which held Dean here was his father's order. She knew this from Bobby, read in his scattered remarks, *The boy has no sitzfleisch – itching for the road – bored silly with nothing to kill* – That last one Bobby had not muttered for them to hear. But for Sam. Sam had *smiled*.

It made her halt and remember again and again, that this was the boy, Jess had brought home. Sam had known about those things his family did when he introduced himself shyly to her.

Kill.

Hunt.
Those terms made her wonder, what they killed? Who? Werewolves? demons, witches, people who were unlucky enough to be at the wrong place in the wrong time. Do something innocuous to get them killed. Have the wrong religion. Wear the wrong clothes. Fall for the wrong person.

How long before Dean convinced himself he saw something dark in Jess' eyes? How much was needed to convince Bobby? Just Dean's word? A witch trial of loose loose?

Right now the young man was avoiding Jessica whenever possible. If it hadn't been for the fact, Dean didn't want Bobby to realize he shied from being alone with Jess, Dean could have slipped Jess grip. But his cover up was his Achilles heel. Always smiling, always dandy.

Angela had been so focused on when Bobby would find out something was wrong, she had not even thought about Sam. Only by accident she witnessed the exact moment Sam figured it out:

They were bickering about something, Angela didn't listen, she read a handwritten(Bobby Singer's handwriting) translation on Japanese vengeance demons, but she was aware of them. How they sat in each other's space -Sam's initiative, Dean had let it happen.

Then suddenly they were silent.

She didn't know what they had argued about, so she had no idea, if the pause had just developed, or.

It was or.

Sam was looking at Jess.

His brother ignored the sudden silence, like he tried to ignore everything about Jessica.

Angela could practically see Sam think. Till Dean elbowed him, asked, “Wanna head down to the lake, before Bobby turns in for the night?”

Sam didn't answer right away and when he spoke up, he didn't answer either, “I don't understand how he can sleep on this smelly thing.”

Over the last week Angela had determined the smell, she had first noticed more faint on Ellen and Jo and now on Bobby. It came from sleeping on the bed in the backroom.

“I rather take him stinking like a toilet, than uptight and cranky from sleeping on the couch,” Dean reasoned. “The man needs his beauty sleep, or else…” He shuddered playful and made his younger brother grin.

“Dean?” the tone spelled trouble, Dean immediately caught on it.

The playfulness reined in, Dean waited.

“Would you give me a few minutes? I need to talk to Jess.”

Dean shrugged a Sure and climbed on his feet.

“Don't go down to the lake alone.” Real concern.

Dean didn't take it serious. But Angela did. Sam really thought it was dangerous out there.

“Whatever.”
“Dean.” The look.

Dean rolled his eyes.

“The lake’s not safe,” Sam reasoned.

“Consider it payback for all the times you jumped into the deep without your water wings on,” Dean joked and muttered to himself, *Give me a heart attack, every fucking time.*

“We didn't weave those devils traps together -for nine hours- so you can get yourself kidnapped.”

“I already drink, swear, fornicate and steal, I'm no challenge. Demons want someone like you – you innocent, harmless young man.”

If looks could kill. “Yes, on second thought, they will probably bring you back anyhow.”

Those arguments had become such a constant, Angela did not follow them anymore, because she had figured out days ago: Sam always won. Not when it came to small things, but when he really wanted something from Dean, he gave him a certain look, and no matter what exchange of arguments took place afterwards, Dean always did as Sam asked.

Dean headed outside and Angela knew with certainty, he would not go down to the lake alone. She had even stopped trying to determine, if Sam continued those arguments after he played his trump, so that Dean could save face, or if Sam really didn't realize what power he had over his brother.

“What is going on between you and Dean?” Sam asked Jessica as soon as they were alone.

“Nothing.”

Angela took notice of how defensive Jess was. She had not been prepared for Sam to find out.

“I just talked to him,” she gave in.

The bed dipped, when Sam shifted uncomfortably. “About what?”

“About you.”

“Jess, what did you say?”

Everything, Angela thought. Jess had not left anything untouched.

“That you left once,” Jess answered. “You're gonna do it again.”

“You said that?”

“It’s the truth.”

Sam shook his head, like he couldn't believe it. Then he said, “You have to stop saying those kind of things to Dean.” And maybe he had a plan, spoke up a glimmer of hope in Angela, a plan Jess endangered by her attacks.

“Why?” Jess asked.

“Because he doesn't deserve your anger.”

“I am not angry,” Jess said ripe with vitrol. “At the guy who abuses the man I love – I'm not
frickin' angry, I'm furious!”

Sam shut his eyes in denial. “You know exactly, that it isn't like that.”

“You seem to be the only one who thinks so,” Jess called him on the truth. “Or does Dean look to you like he has a clean conscience?”

She had said something that got Sam thinking...

“You got under Dean's skin,” he said, like it just had occurred to him. “How long have you been picking on him?”

Sam's tone, indefinite, left Angela nervous.

“A few days, a week.” Jess still didn't back off, take a gentle turn. Didn't she sense, that she had gone too far?

“You're gonna stop,” Sam said.

“No.”

“Listen to me Jess, You are going to stop.” Sam's voice had not changed, he- it didn't sound like a threat, Angela couldn't explain to herself why it felt like one.

But at least it had made Jess pause. For a second, “Or what? Am I not allowed to talk now anymore?”

“No like that, not to my brother.”

~ He caught eye of Angela and immediately looked away again. But even that could have not eased the impression he just left on her, on Tom, on Jess, for who his words just sunk in. Sam was aware, no matter how much he would have wanted to deny it, that he had John's cold blooded scariness. And that he hid it so well only added to the shock value when he made the room temperature drop.

He could feel how Jess waited for him to take back what he just said, but he couldn't.

He had threatened her. There was no way to smooth it over, even if he backed down now. Even though he said it in anger and wouldn't- and Jess should know that. He could still see she didn't believe he would ever hurt her, and if he had only scared her, he would have apologized, but what hit her, wasn't the threat.

It was that he had picked sides.

And he couldn't take that back. It would've been a lie.

...
He had threatened her. There was no way to smooth it over, even if he backed down now. Even though he said it in anger and wouldn't- and Jess should know that. He could still see she didn't believe he would ever hurt her, and if he had only scared her, he would have apologized, but what hit her, wasn't the threat.

It was that he had picked sides.

And he couldn't take that back. It would've been a lie.

~ The next few hours Tom bit his tongue bloody.

He should have said something right away.

He would have said something right away.

If not for the fact, that Sam had taken him completely by surprise.

And then there had been Bobby, who had entered, like he had known the conversation was over, with Dean on his heels, chattering his ear off about a supply run.

But mostly it had been looking at the boy he once would've trusted with his daughter's life and having John Winchester's son staring back.

Now he couldn't say anything anymore.

Because Jess had started to cry silently an hour ago. With how she had reacted, when Angela had tried to touch her, he knew, he would only make it worse for his little girl. No matter what he would say.

And he had a lot to say.

He had not thought the night in which they tortured Sam could be topped, but this night built up to become worse for Tom. Jessy had been so strong. Almost three weeks she had stood her ground, against anything, even against them, these last days, when Angela had tried to make her see reason. Now her silent crying crumbled into sobs she wasn't able to hold back anymore. Hugging her legs, like fighting cramps, she cried as soundless as she could.

Sam sat through his night shift, reading.

His brother minded Jess more than the boy did.

Tom knew Sam had been through a lot, but right now, he hated the boy enough to do worse to him than his father did.

Jess would not calm down. She became exhausted in intervals, but the crying never stopped.

Dean's phone buzzed, half of the night was over and he announced in a soft voice, he would wake Bobby, quiet, like any of them slept, like any of them could sleep through Jessica's internalized sobs shaking the bed. The boy was unbelievable.

Only when Sam spoke to his brother equally soft, it occurred to Tom, they probably didn't want to be heard. Thought they couldn't be heard.
A whole night of hoping the muffled sounds would stop, made one's ears sharp.

“Let’s camp out on the porch,” Sam whispered.


In the half-dark Sam's expression wasn't to be seen, but his pause could be interpreted. “Go wake Bobby,” he ordered his brother.

It seemed like Sam had no intention of trying to sleep with Jessica crying in the same room.

If there were any justice in the world, he would be forced to stay.

Sam grabbed the pillow from the ground and left. Fled. The door fell not entirely shut behind him.

Dean made some light when he reentered the room. Bobby seemed irritated, though Tom could not tell for sure, the man always seemed grumpy, even when Dean woke him up.

He blinked at the light and looked at them, at Jess.

“She' still cryin'?”

Dean's drawn up shoulder, like an aborted shrug answered just as well.

“Where is Sam?” Bobby asked and suddenly he sounded not sleepy, not grumpy, but clear and sharp.

“Sleeping outside,” Dean answered and as Bobby moved in that direction he asked, “Cut him some slack, Bobby.”

Bobby spun around and Dean's mouth snapped shut.

“That's none of your business, boy. Go to sleep.” The older man pointed at the floor and held Dean's gaze, driving home he should not even think about following him outside.

Dean let out a breath and his knees gave in to the floor. He settled on the improvised mat of old army blankets.

Tom drew his attention away from Dean, who kept an eye on the door and two ears on the development behind it, yet seemed to relax into his staring, all strain gone.

He did not really care how Dean felt about the treatment his brother had given Jessica. And while he was surprised, Bobby argued with Sam outside, Tom doubted, it would change anything for the better.

Sam's comebacks shortened and Bobby's voice grew loud enough to travel...”...never let the woman you love cry herself to sleep. Never! You never know when it's the last time you talk to her!”

~ Bobby didn't even leave him a chance to come with by choice.

Dragged in, he tried to let Bobby know, he understood, that he-

“Don't tell me! Tell her!” Bobby shut him up and gave him a shove.

Sam stood in the middle of the room frozen. Tell her what?
What could he possibly do or say, to make things better?

He could feel Bobby's stare burning in his neck.

Never had he seen Bobby so angry, not at him. Had he really made it on one level with his father with what he had done tonight?

Make the hard choice no one wanted to make. March through the fallout, eyes straight ahead.

Jess was in mortal danger because of him, that her feelings got hurt, didn't compare in relation to that...Yeah, he kinda had used his father's ideology.

Not that he could have gone through with it. In cramped conditions with Jess and her parents, he would have snapped sooner or later. Because just as Jess wasn't close to ready to give him up, he wasn't close to ready to treat her like any other civilian.

No wonder his father always ran. Because it was easier. Probably also because he usually pissed people off to a point where they wanted to shoot him. And the way Tom was staring at him right now, Sam managed that too.

For all his standing awkwardly in the middle of the room and his even more awkward approach, talking to Jess was easier than he would have expected.

He knelt beside the bed and gave her the only comfort that wasn't a lie. “I love you.”

~ And just like that, Jessy forgave him.

It would have been a lot easier to hate Sam, if Tom had not felt the exact same thing his daughter felt: He loved the boy.

Sam had a good heart and a gentle soul.

There was no deceitfulness in the way he held Jessica, nothing but pure, desperate love. A hint of happiness to be able to be there for her, buried under loads of shame and black despair.

Sam did not believe there was a way out.

He had tried to let Jess go. And now had seen she wasn't ready to leave him behind.

He was a good boy.

It broke Tom's heart that they would not be able to save him.

Everything changed after this night, Sam sat with them again, ate with them. He didn't ignore his brother, but he spent a considerable time with them, instead of Dean.

Also the nights.

Evenings with Dean.

Nights with Jessica.

It seemed so casual. It was anything but.

They did not talk about demons or escape, even Angela did not push and when they had a moment at night, the early mornings, when everyone but Bobby slept, Tom had asked her-
It wasn't what he had expected to hear: Angela's silence had nothing to do with Sam. Angela had given up on the boy a lot sooner than he had. It was about Jess. Angela didn't say anything, because Jess had to let go on her own. She didn't want her daughter declare opposition to them. The more she insisted, the stronger Jess would feel the need to stand by Sam.

According to Angela, Sam's progress would not last. He would relapse. Right now he was driven by how much Jessica needed him. Sooner or later, his brother would demand Sam's attention back.

Tom wasn't so sure about that, Dean maybe drank a tad more than before, but he didn't seem upset to him. At least he thought so, until Dean used his first opportunity to be alone with them...

~

He sat on the bed.

The thing with him was, Jess thought, one could never be sure if Dean behaved socially inept on purpose, or accidentally.

It wasn't accidentally this time. He knew he made her uncomfortable and he gave her a smile that didn't reach his eyes.

“Well played,” he said and there would be more, so Jess remained quiet.

An uneasiness crept up her spine, rooted in an insecurity, that had not existed three days ago. If Dean tried to get back at her now, if he did anything to her that didn't leave visible proof, would Sam believe her? Or if he left visible marks, would Sam believe Dean that he had been provoked. That Jess hadn't stopped talking like that to his brother. That insecurity spoke in her mothers voice to her mind and Jess met it like she met Dean, with utter ignorance.

“I have to give you, you know Sam pretty well, but sorry sweetheart, not as well as I do,” Dean told her. “See, I know why Sam has turned away from you and it had shit to do with me. It's because he feels guilty. As if the crap we're in is his fault. But under his emo-curly-hair he thinks so and therefore believes he doesn't deserve to be with you. 

-takes one to know one, Jess thought during Dean's monologue-

“Believe it or not, I want Sam to be happy and he is happy with you, so that's that.

You play your jedi-mind tricks on him with the result that he stops brooding darkly, it's all fine. But I promise you, you ever play rough with him, like you did with me? I wont leave it at threatening you.”

She could have nodded submissive, but that wouldn't have been her. “I don't play mind tricks on Sam, that's your forte.”

Dean laughed dryly and shook his head. “I am not smart enough to play mind tricks on Sammy.”

“You are aware the Ditzy Blonde is the oldest con ever?”

Dean didn't reply to that. He was too good of a liar, to go for outright denial, not when he knew someone saw right through his dumb act. “I don't expect you to understand, or believe me,” he said. “I guess it also must be easier for you, to think of Sam as a victim. Makes it all more normal.

But it just isn't true. What you said missed the truth at such a wide angle, it hit another one straight
Sam was miserable. He hates this life. Everything that comes with it makes him unhappy.

What we did wasn't the reason why he left. It never was...”, he swallowed hard, before he adjusted his sentence, “As fucked up as it sounds, it was the most innocent thing back then.”

She didn't know what to reply to that, because she knew it was closer to the truth than the accusations she had thrown at him.

He wouldn't have understood, that what he did was worse. That all his love had fucked up Sam so badly, he wasn't able to acknowledge what had been done to him.

...
He wouldn't have understood, that what he did was worse. That all his love had fucked up Sam so badly, he wasn't able to acknowledge what had been done to him.

Sam so very carefully asked what she talked about with Dean.

“How do you know we talked?”

“Because Dean,” he nodded over to his brother on the couch, “is really uncomfortable.”

Huh, she had not noticed that. But Sam, of course, had.

“I didn’t-”

“I know,” Sam stopped her, careful, soft, not to disturb the thin ice, but late, because through a crack on it the questions dropped, how he knew? Did he expect her to be good? Not to make any troubles, or else?

Jess punched down that voice inside of her, because it wasn't her and she didn't want to become it.

Sam had read in her silence. “Dean is only that uncomfortable around people he recently opened up to. He looks like wants to get behind the wheel of the Impala and put at least three states between you and him.”

“I know the feeling,” she said. “I will feel about as uncomfortable in a minute. I have to tell you something.” This was it, go for broke. She had to say all what Sam would not address, even if he would give her the answers she feared for:

“I am not cool with how close you are with him, I know it shouldn't be my main concern, as I am cuffed to a bed,” she attempted a joke.

And Sam, on the same wavelength, said, “I don't know, being cuffed to a bed get's old after a few weeks.” As soon as he said it, he winced, “That was a really bad joke.”

“The worst,” Jess confirmed, “Especially since you are not cuffed anymore.”

Sam gulped, but didn't say anything. There was her way in. Sam knew how fucked up this situation was. He wasn't as delusional as Jo or a happy-go-lucky psychopath like Dean.

Sam made nice with her. But that wasn't what she needed, she needed to know what was really going on in his mind. She needed to know if her mother was right and he was really so far away their worlds did not touch anymore.

“I hate how he notices things about you I don't. Like why you avoid me. I thought...” she swallowed that feeling, cut short, “It doesn't matter what I thought, I was wrong, but Dean? Dean has figured you out. He knows how you act when you feel guilty, how you punish yourself,” because now she knew it was the truth, Dean had been right. “I don't want that, I don't want you to stay away from me, because you think you did me wrong somehow. Because even though I do not understand you as well as I wish I would and even though I don't know why you act like you do, I still love you and want you with me.

Please, don't leave me.”
His reaction wasn't the one she feared. He kissed her.

Any kiss of Sam's made her feel immortal. From the short pecks to the long deep kisses after they made love. These kisses preserved something inside of her. Something that would not fade bleached by time and rained on by sorrow. Sam's kisses were what she imagined heaven to be, safe, loved, eternal.

They were the perfect lie.

What he promised when he opened his mouth, felt like a kick to the stomach, “I will never leave you.”

She needed him to say it. Before he did not admit to it, she could not change his mind. “No. What you mean, is you will not leave me alone. But will you leave me?”

He sat so close to her and God she had missed that. “No, Jess I wont.”

“Not even for Dean?”

He shook his head. Like that was unthinkable – like that wasn't exactly what he was doing.

“I think you do get this wrong, I never had this kind of relationship with Dean. A relationship-relationship. We are brothers,” he tried to reason. Sam was good with reason. A born lawyer. “It never went that far. As stupid as it sounds, what should have been appalling, was the most innocent thing of the life I had before I left.”

“Dean said the exact same thing. Down to the very word,” Jess informed him. “I think you underestimate how far it goes between the two of you. How deep it runs.”

Sam turned his head to where Dean was lying on couch, walkman blasting music so loud it could be heard from the earphones. His eyes shut, meditating like a pro.

She could see what made Sam smile.

Jealousy stung persistent, but Jess ignored it. It helped no one. It only made things ugly. Ugly emotional accusations hurting Sam for something he wasn't to blame for.

When he looked at her again, he was very gentle, like he knew he was hurting her, “I am sorry for lying, but I don't know how to tell you...that I already left you.”

Now he had told her.

See, wasn't so hard.

At least for him, because he was still able to breathe, talk, “But I am not leaving you for Dean. If there was any way, I'd leave Dean too. To make sure none of you get hurt, I would leave all of you. If I could, would end this war for all of us, tonight.”

A shiver crept down her spine. “What's that supposed to mean?”

“Sam,” her mother clicked into the conversation.

He shook his head. “It's okay Angela, I know how that just sounded. But I wouldn't do something as stupid and cowardly like that. I am maybe the cause for a lot of bad things, but to remove the cause after the effects have been set in motion, wont be a solution.”
Good to know Sam found a rational reason not to kill himself.—

“Ow!”

Oh, please, she had had not punched his arm hard enough. Not by far. “Are you nuts!” How could he even think about something like that?

“From your point of view,” he answered with an edge in his voice and rubbed his arm. “Yes I am crazy enough to think about killing myself because of a demon. But from my point of view, to avoid to watch people die over protecting me, is worth some consideration.”

“Does Dean know about your considerations?” she asked.

“No,” Sam replied somewhat firm.

But what the hell had he expected, that she would be a picture of serenity when hearing about his suicidal thoughts?

“And you're not going to tell him. First, because I am not going to do it and second, because he won't just aim for my arm.”

If that should have appealed to her sympathy, Sam was on the wrong track, “Talk like that again and neither will I,” she spit out.

“Ah, young love,” Dean cut in, “So passionate.”

Sam had turned around, and the strain of his body told Jess how much he hoped Dean had plucked his earphones out seconds ago, had not heard what they were discussing.

“What ya crazy kids are fighting 'bout?” Dean asked.

Sam relaxed and turned back to her, an unspoken plea in shaking his head.

Of course she did not say something. There was having an emotional response and then there was making things harder for Sam. She would not do the latter.

“Okay,” Dean pouted, “Don't tell me,” his mood was awfully good, “I going for a swim. Not that I need the company, but Bobby hates water, or water hates him, dunno? And I don't want you to throw a bitchfit again, because I-”

“It's fine!” Sam shut him up. “I am coming.”

Watching Dean swim captured his attention for a while. About as long as it took for Dean to get bored and easy and playful and he tried to get Sam come in. First by splashing water at him, then he edged closer. Sam saw it coming a mile a way: Dean used the dock Sam sat on as leverage and took a tight grip Sam's calve to pull him into the water, but let go, because Sam just went with it and slid in the cool lake.

They were suddenly so close, like they were touching because the water between them wasn't really space, more a connection and Dean's eyes were huge, he was holding his breath.

Nothing made Dean as helpless as when Sam gave in, no matter into what. He could have done anything to Dean now. Dean would do anything for him. The thought made him a little sick and fueled the rush of power it it always gave him, ignited it into something desperate. He took the initiative and kissed Dean, eyes closed and open mouthed. Dean kissed back, dirty and wet, just
like Sam needed, and his brother laughed into the kiss, giddy with arousal and with victory over Sam's sadness, because his laugh had pulled Sam into this mindless place of joy, because Sam had smiled along and rubbed his nose against Dean's, stealing peckish kisses in between, Dean rolled his eyes about and cheapened the romantic glow by licking slick at Sam's lips just to annoy him.

Like all the best times between them it was more than just sexual. It was so many things Sam had never tried to keep count. He wasn't even hard from kissing Dean like this, he felt like his skin was too tight and like his heart would've leaped out of his chest if Dean's hand were not placed over it and at the same time he was completely at ease like only when Dean was in reach. Like Dean was gravity and the free fall, all in one.

His brother broke Sam's hold on the wooden dock behind them and ducked him under. He had seen this coming too. The cold water flushed over his face like a blessing, like the rush of memories. Water would never just be water anymore. It was salvation. A second chance to put things right. Drowning the fires of his nightmares.

He shook the water off his head and was 'helped' by Dean, who wiped Sam's hair back and grinned like the Chesire cat. “Oh look at that, baby, I got you all wet.”

Dean's dumb dirty pun ended in Sam swallowing lake water because he lost control of his limbs, laughing. He coughed and retaliated, but Dean dodged the splash of water and mocked him, Baby 's a mad wet wildecat.

“Quit calling me baby.”

“Why? Cause you're all grown up now, Frances?”

It clicked for him, where Dean's mind was and he had to grasp at the dock again. He had never noticed, but keeling over in laughter wasn't something you could control. “You-”, he started and had to start again, because his face cramped in a smile, “You watched Dirty Dancing way too often if your mind goes there as soon as you are in a lake.”

“Whatcha talking 'bout?” Dean argued, but not the fact he watched Dirty Dancing, there was no denying that, Sam had prove, “You can't watch a Swayze-movie too often.”

“You can. You did. And you had the time of your life.”

Dean gave him the indulging smile reserved for little brothers who can't do a descent comeback.

He had just getting warmed up, “Come over here.”

Dean eyed him suspiciously and asked, “What for?”

“It's more shallow here”, actually his toes just grazed the ground, he couldn't really- “I can stand here. And we both know you want to re-enact the lift-scene.” Sam had seen the movie too often too, second-hand exposure though to living with Dean.

His brother didn't come over. Of course not. Dean wouldn't start a fight where Sam had the advantage of solid ground under his feet and Dean hadn't. Especially because Dean was the better swimmer and would always get the upper hand in the deep.

Sam thought about goading Dean some more, see if he could make Dean close the distance of five feet between them. The messy scramble for dominance would lead to messy rubbing themselves against each other and end somewhere on the muddy shore-line, with messy orgasms. He had a better idea. He closed the distance.
If only to see Dean swallow in surprise.

His brother itched to use the advantage Sam gave him. But he wouldn't. Dean had changed. Or become more himself. Or more afraid. Sam didn't know. Because Dean had always been careful with him as soon as it was just the two of them. Careful not to scare him, careful not to hold him back, careful not to push him, careful not ask or want or be more than a soundboard to Sam's need. Behind the agreement, just fooling around, no need to freak out over it, lay a whole catalog of rules Dean had made up, to make sure Sam would be okay. Dean was an artist when it came to carefully handling Sam. His masterpiece was leaving Sam so Sam could leave for Stanford. To this day he didn't know how Dean had done that. How he made it 'okay' for Sam. When a relationship like theirs should have ended with blood spilled and broken hearts and both of them ruined forever. Sure Sam had been angry, but at Dad. Never Dean.

He had been bitter and so sure, that Dean would show up, change his mind, choose him in the end. But he didn't and after a while Sam had had a life Dean wouldn't have fit in anyhow and found his answer why Dean hadn't come. Or he thought so. Nothing was ever as simple as it seemed with Dean.

Like right now, treading water, they had frozen in an almost embrace, Sam's head in the groove of Dean's neck and Dean pretended to allow this comforting moment because Sam needed it. Sam had no fucking clue what was really going in Dean's head. What he wanted.

He knew what Dean needed, but that wasn't the same thing. Because Dean needed Sam to lean on him, that was no secret. He just wished, Dean would see that it went both ways. That Sam was there for him too.

Dean stroked his back reassuring and expressed everything Sam knew about him with only one question, “What did you and Jess fight about?”

Oh, Dean, Sam thought and replied a little acrid, “She is shackled to a bed – what d'ya think?, she is worried about me, like you. Shackled to a time-bomb, just like you are and all you do is worry if the bomb is okay. He didn't say all that, because Dean wouldn't understand.

“She is tough,” Dean reassured him, “You-”

His hand between Dean's legs shut him up.

Never bought him much time:

“Sammy,” Dean tipped his head back and arched into Sam's touch and wouldn't shut up, “She is goin' to forgive you.”

Sam bit down on his tongue, not saying, I don't want her to forgive me.

The slick underwater-movement of Dean's hand over his thigh made him swallow before he asked, “Can we please not talk about Jess.” He stroked Dean harder, who still did not return the favor. He just licked his own lips and searched Sam's eyes.

He seemed to find his answer; before long he shut his eyes and clung to Sam during his climax.

Dean breathed hard into his ear for a few seconds, kissed his cheek and then informed him fondly, “You're an idiot,” before he ditched him:

Rubbed himself dry at the shore and left like he hadn't left Sam hanging, like they hadn't been in the middle of something.
Mostly Sam was horny and a little cold. But yes, idiot was true too. In his defense, nothing was ever simple with Dean. The simple answer would have been that this was payback for the rejected bj. *Beware the simple answer*, had became Sam's mantra a long time ago.

His brother made only sense to hit you harder with the absurd. The rest of the day, Dean was all soft touches and stern looks. He was the picture of civility with Jess and they both watched him like they knew something about him.

If Sam hadn't been with Dean every second of the day he would believed Jess told him about...his consideration.

Dean watched him like he knew. After midnight, after the door had shut behind Bobby, Dean wrapped himself tight around Sam, slipped his hand under his waistband, gave him the delayed handjob. His thumb rubbing hard over the head of Sam's dick, he had Sam coming in an embarrassingly short time, even in regard of hours of warm-up.

Sam only realized how much he had needed the darkness to truly relax, as Dean sighed into his neck and rested his hand on Sam's belly.

He never heard Bobby come back, he instantly fell asleep and didn't wake until Dean let go of him in the morning.
It had been impossible for her to make her daughter see reason. She loved this boy with abandon and so far he had not done anything yet to wake her from it.

What he had not done was actually Angela's point. He had not helped them escape. He had not said that killing 'monsters' was insanity and that he just played along to protect himself. He had not comforted Jessica when she broke down by his own initiative – no, he had to be told to do so.

Sam had threatened her daughter. He had crossed a line, but Jess just wouldn't see it.

Luckily Angela was not alone. Even though Tom too assessed Sam's situation as inescapable, he voiced this differently to their daughter and Jess did not shut down completely on him...

“...look at it from this point,” Tom tried another angle, “If we run and Sam helps us, you know where he stands. We run and he does not help us, you know it too.”

Jess huffed annoyed. “There is only one flaw in your plan: Sam doesn't know where he stands.”

Angela tried not to let show that she thought her daughter was wrong. Sam knew exactly where he stood.

Jess glowered at her.

This was the reason why one did not do therapy in the family. They knew all your expression, which ruined the illusion of impartiality.

“Okay,” her daughter agreed only to defy her, “We will run. Sam will surprise you.”

There wasn't much to plan anymore. They already laid down a direction. Sam knew about it from the original plan, but that didn't matter to Jess. And they had no other way to go anyhow:

Not up the road, because there they could be followed by car. Not down to the lake, because that was where Dean and Sam would be at the time. Not west, because there the terrain was too hard to climb. It had to be east -downhill, away from the lake.

The right time would be the evening when Bobby's vigilance would be impaired due to tiredness and Sam and Dean often headed down to the lake together. Bobby would give them the momentum. They would wait, till he headed to the car in his evening routine, that would set them in motion, they would escape through the window in the back room and have a headstart of maybe five minutes.

They would have no weapons. Short of a knife, Bobby never let anything lie around for them to grab. That was the only thing he ever got angry at Dean for: Dean's habit of littering the room with firearms.

They would also have no shoes, but two pairs of socks would have to do.
But they had a plan B. More than one. They couldn't agree on it and none of them truly thought plan A would work:

To escape together.

Her mom was no runner and her dad had seen more athletic days too. They had a real chance of getting caught, even by Bobby.

While Jess had a real chance of outrunning anyone when she did not let herself be slowed down. Their best chance was for them to provide Jess to run to get help. Which was no option worth consideration for her. Not as a plan A.

They spent another day waiting, because it rained and then -two days after her parents had teamed up against her to get her to leave Sam behind- they carried out their stupid half-assed compromise of a plan. Did she mention stupid?

Jess had no idea how long before they were getting shot at by Bobby. But it didn't feel like five minutes.

Tom stopped dead in his tracks when the first shot fell behind them, but his wife took him by the hand and screamed at him to keep running.

Jessy was visibly slowed down by them.

A look over his shoulder, the sun blinded him and he couldn't say who followed them. He still felt the echo of the gunshots in his breast, so loud and near had it been. But none were fired now.

He heard a voice behind them, one, shouting, not at them, but close, too close-

"Jessy! Run!"

His daughter turned around to him. Seeing her mother and him had stopped.

She looked behind them up the slope, where Bobby came after them. He was alone.

Time stretched while his little girl was visibly torn, stopping because they stopped, because they would not run with her, because it wasn't the smart thing- "Be smart, Jess. Run. Get help," the hissing sound of the gusts of wind in the high trees carried his voice away from him, so he barely heard it himself, but Jessica did.

And she swallowed the fear of losing them and took off.

Tom had never been more proud in his life. They would never catch her.

Jess' white shirt was not more than a flicker between the brown tree trunks as Bobby reached them. He breathed heavily, the gun in his hand aimed at the ground. He eyed them and they had an understanding. Like Angela had anticipated, Bobby would not follow Jess and leave them.

He just stayed with them, watched them, the gun a wordless threat.

The trees were bending over their heads from the light storm of warmed up air, drying up the land after last day's rain. It felt like holding breath under water and Tom sensed his wife's fear. Other than him, Angela wasn't as sure that Bobby wouldn't get rid of them here and now. He squeezed her hand harder and the quiet moment ended with Sam and Dean breaking through the woods in full run. Bare-chested and heaving breaths.
Bobby waved them the direction of Jessica's escape. Dean never really slowed down, but soon was physically stopped by Sam,

“Stay here,” he said, holding Dean in place.

“What? No!”

“Trust me.”

“I am faster,” Dean argued.

Sam shook his head, “Than me, not her. If she doesn't slow down, neither of us is gonna get her.”

“She's on socks.”

Sam bared his teeth in a short, joyless smile, “You've never seen her run,” he said before he clapped his brother on the chest to make him stay.

The sun in her back, she was floating. The overall sensation of adrenalin carried her over the rough ground and pushed her through brushwood, blacked out the stabbing wound in the sole of her left foot and drowned out sound.

Pacing herself she knew she had been running for close to forty-five minutes when she heard Sam's voice calling for her.

The light-footed taps of her run became harder beats as she slowed down.

He was still calling for her. Not too far away and coming closer.

The terrain was flat enough and the high redwood trees so sparse, she saw Sam soon, further away than he had sounded.

He stopped as soon as he detected her. Held up his hands, “It's okay, Jess!” he called out to her, “I'm alone. I made Dean stay back.”

Back where?

He came closer, slowly. She still could outrun him if she did now.

Sam stopped, holding up his hand again, like he saw she considered getting some distance between them. “It's okay,” he repeated and now Jess heard how out of breath he was. He must have run as fast as he could to catch up with her, he had exhausted himself. “It's okay. I'm alone,” he repeated, before he said, “I hoped you would wait for me, like we planned. But I understand you didn't, I know-” he heaved breath again and came a step closer, but Jess couldn't make herself move. She wasn't sure, but-

“I've been a little too convincing,” Sam apologized in a pained voice. “But I needed you to be mad at me or you wouldn't have escaped with Tom and Angela. Dean wouldn't have let me go after you alone and our plan wouldn't have worked.”

The original plan, Jess thought, the one Sam helped to develop -had been for Sam and her to run and hide and then circle back for her parents, free them, hardwire a car and sabotage the other cars.

She let Sam come close. Her heart thumped wildly but not from running, just from relief.

Sam returned her hug just as desperately tight as she felt inside.
“I’m so sorry,” he said.

He had nothing to be sorry for, she could really do with him never saying those three words again. Jess took a deep breath, burying her face in his chest. She had the feeling he would never have to say sorry as soon as they were out of this goddamn woods, after they had freed her parents and this nightmare would be over. They would be okay.

Sam let go of her, “Come on, sit down,” he asked her voiceless, “You have to put on my shoes.”

“I’m good to go.”

“Jess,” he shook his head softly at her, didn't look her in the eyes and spoke so quiet- “Your sock is soaked through with blood,” -she barely heard him, “Please, let me take a look at your foot.”

They sat down on the ground and Sam peeled away her sock. His already pursed lips, pressed harder together.

“How bad is it?”

“Not too bad,” he said but wouldn't look her in the eye.

Even with socks pushed into them she was swimming in Sam's sneakers. He behaved strange, something was wrong, but for the life of her Jess couldn't imagine what. They were together, they had a plan. Everything would be okay, then why did Sam-? “Sam, what's wrong?”

He stroked her upper-arms with flat hands and looked upset and said again, “I’m sorry.”

What for? The injury? It wasn't that bad-

“We will walk back,” he said in a steadier voice. “I don't want to, but I will restrain you if I have to.”

No. It couldn't be-

-she subconsciously had taken a step away from Sam and his grip tightened on her arms.

“No, you-”

“I'm sorry,” he said and Jess felt an anger surge through her she had never felt before in her life.

~

“He should've been back by now,” Dean said for the thirty-six-time in the last hours. Tom had kept count.

The young man was shivering and pacing and hadn't gone up to the cabin to get dry clothes, but stayed exactly where Bobby had directed them all, just behind the line of magic symbols on the ground.

The more nervous Dean became, the more Tom was silently jeering.

He sat leaning against a tree and watched the woods go dark, night fell over them while Jessy got away.

“I should have never let him go alone.” Twentieth-third-time Dean mumbled that.

Angela squeezed his hand. He turned his head down to her where she rested against his shoulder and caught her gaze. They would be okay. Jessica was out of harms way. Anything else they could
“I will go search for them,” Dean declared. That was a first.

“Get your ass back here!” Bobby barked.

“I-”

“Can it! I'm not having two of you stumbling through those damn woods at night!”

“Something-”

“One more word and I'm comin' over ther'.”

Dean did hold his tongue, but he looked more taken aback than scared. “And do what?” he asked irritated.

“Bend you over my knee like the frickin' child you are.”

Dean made a face, “Oh Bobby, that's wroong on so-o many levels,” he drawled the vocals for emphasis, shook his head and crouched down, seemingly more relaxed. Only lasted ten seconds before he mumble, “It's not like there are demons after him, but hey.”

Bobby gave the young man's back a frustrated eye-roll and head-shake.

Their nerves were on edge. Who knew, he thought, maybe Sam did get lost in the woods. Then they would search for him and be too busy to do anything else. Too worried about demons to prepare for the mundane arrival of law enforcement officers.

“Shh,” Bobby made an almost sound.

That had Dean stand at attention in the fraction of a second. He signaled them to be quiet and stay down, then his eyes bore down into the same blackness Bobby fixated, ears sharp, gaze unfocused.

Tom heard nothing but crickets at first. But then, there was a shuffling sound. Another one and soon it was easily distinguishable a noise of something moving towards them from down the slope.

An animal, he told himself, or Sam. Only Sam, because he lost Jessica and came back. Tom was sure Sam hadn't been fast enough to get their daughter, but being sure did nothing to make the feeling of dread go away. A feeling fed by the pale white spot he saw first.

His heart fell. That pale white spot became more discernible and long before Tom saw his daughters face in the dark he recognized her shirt.

Jessy limped and her hands were at her back, bound and she was dirty and her hair mussed up, scratches on her face and on her arms-

“Finally!” Dean whooped his relief, patted Sam's back as he passed him and asked, “What took you so long? Did'ya take a detour for a roll in the hay or-”

“Shut up!”

Sam had given his brother a shove hard enough to make him gasp. The empty look on his face was gone and pure rage stood there doubled with hurt.

Dean wasn't the only one frozen in place. Tom had tried to get to his daughter, but the brothers
stood between them and Sam radiated so much violence, so much grief, his lower lip trembled as he said:

“You don't know how fast she is. I only got her because she still trusted me.”

He let go of Jess' arm. She remained exactly where she was. Met no one's eye. Sam freed her hands from the belt and walked away.

The embrace Angela and him pulled Jess in was more for them than her. She barely reacted.

...

Chapter End Notes

Next CH will be twice in size, but it will also take me a week to edit. Till then, Bee
Chapter Notes

This is not nearly as well edited as I'd feel comfortable with, but since it's not going to get any better (because a certain source author won't help me, *grumblegrumble*) I am posting it as promised today – please ignore anything that sticks out like a sore thumb, I am just so sick of editing at the moment I really can't process critique, no matter how constructive
tired and sleepless, Bee

The embrace Angela and him pulled Jess in was more for them than her. She barely reacted.

~ Angela asked Bobby for help with her daughters wounds, but it was Dean who then took a look at them.

Sam was still absent. Bobby vanished too.

“We have a med-kit,” Dean chattered on while he put a box down on the table, “And anesthesia,” he held up a bottle of bourbon.

“Alcohol will increase the bleeding,” Jess stated dispassionately. It was the first thing she said since Sam brought her back.

“You won't be bleeding when I'm done,” Dean held the bottle out for Jess to take, “You will be fine. But getting stitches hurts like a bitch, you don't wanna do that sober.”

Jessica gave him a seething look.

“I will show you how it's done,” Dean took a gulp straight from the bottle. “See, easy as pie. Your turn.”

Jess drank, a big swallow, no moist eyes, no coughs, Angela wouldn't know that her daughter was into hard drinking, but knowing Jess it was probably pure stubbornness. Not to cough in Dean's presence, was a principle, practice or not.

“Respect,” payed Dean his deference before he took the bottle back. They had a little staring contest and traded the bottle three times, before Dean started his work.

Angela had a foreboding all of her daughter's anger for Sam's betrayal would unload on Dean and that soon. She wished Bobby would be back. He had left for outside minutes ago.

Sam had officially chosen a side. Nothing was protecting Jess now.

~ She had to give it to Dean, he knew what he was doing. Though he had her foot in his lap, that was a stupidly trusting thing to do. But the suturing, he was a pro at: his hands steady, teeny tiny stitches, absolute concentration, even though Jess talked to him. They talked about inane things.

Jess complimented him, he could have been a surgeon...

“Eh, I don't know,” Dean made conversation, “My stitches are only this pretty when I drink.”
“You don't seem to know any surgeons, because drinking,” she took another swig from the bottle he had left her to nurse, “Drinking is their occupational disease.”

Dean nodded to that. And to his work, he was done.

“Let's play a drinking game.”

His nod morphed seamless into a shake of head, “No, no, I've played drinking games with girls like you.”

“Yeah? And what kind of girl am I?”

“One who plays drinking games.”

“Don't be a drag. Let's play I've never.”

“Oh, you're so gonna loose.”

“Sure. Cause we play it witha sspecial condition. There's only things allowed we've done to Sam.”

He took the bottle from her, “I think you've had enough.”

“Gimme back, because, I've never fucked Sam up so badly he doesn't know right from wrong.”

Dean had already turned his back to her and talked to himself, “Great. Nothing keeps you awake on a night shift as the ramblings of mean drunk.”

The door opened. Bobby.

Dean picked up a blanket, “Here,” and tossed it Bobby, “Get that to Sam, it's cold in the car.”

“How did you-”

“Know that he is in the backseat of the Impala?” Dean interrupted, “I'm observant, after only eighteen years I figured out there are two places Sam goes to brood. And because these woods have no poetry section my money is on the Impala.”

“He shouldn't stay out there alone.” Bobby sounded so worried. Over demons. It would've have been funny. If it was on TV and not real life, she snickered to herself anyhow.

“He shouldn't come in here,” Dean argued, “I got Jess drunk.”

“You realize I can hear you?” she stated.

“What did you do that for?” Bobby asked Dean, ignoring her.

“Because he is wwussy,” oops, she slurred, “With uns'eady hands, who doesn't like to drink alone.”

“Ya still want the first shift?” Bobby ignored her again.

“And getting blamed for our shitty situation before she passes out? Wouldn't wanna miss that.”

“Go outside, watch your brother.”

That was it, “Jus' outta curiosity, Bobby,” she asked the old man, “You know that they are fucking, right?”
Dean froze for a second, before his poker face came back on.

Bobby just shook his head at her and told Dean, “Get out.”

“Bobby-”

“I cover the first shift. She's just,” he gave her a dismissing wave, “Background-buzz to me. Now get out, boy.”

Dean left.

“You didn't answer my question,” Jess told Bobby.

“You didn't ask nice.”

“You're the worst of them-”

“Jessy,” her mother interrupted her, “please-”

“He is,” Jess repeated and spit at Bobby, “You play the teddy bear, which makes you the worst psycho. Do you know how old Sam was when Dean started this thing with him?”

“Half a year.”

She hadn't expected an answer, especially not this answer.

“That was when they lost their mommy,” Bobby told her calm, “And since then Dean has done everything for his boy. You can shut up and get some sleep, sweetheart, 'cause ya aint gonna get a rile outta me.

I learned a long time ago, that you pretty much never get a 'Thanks' when you save someone.”

~

He had found one of Dean's T-shirts in the trunk and now that he had curled up against the vinyl of the backseat, warmed from baking in the sun the whole day, he felt too comfortable in his own skin. Too comfortable for the sickness that crept under it. Something in his flesh that lived from his pain and reveled in destruction. He had always felt trapped, but now... it made him want to claw his flesh from his bones so he would never feel anything anymore.

He wanted to get out of the car. He wanted to run and never look back. He wanted to run far enough so he could put a bullet through his brain and be found by a stranger, not by Dean.

But Dean always found him -like an abandoned dog that didn't know better but to come back- he found him tonight too. His brother brought whiskey and a blanket and when he saw how Sam shivered he shed his leather jacket and tried to wrap it around Sam-

“Dude, I'm fine.”

Dean's face fell. He backed off. “You're still mad at me,” he mumbled.

That sickness lapped Dean's pain up – their pain, their brokenness, like it hadn't been fed enough already. “I'm not mad at you. I was never mad at you-” he sucked in breath and next thing felt the sickness recede, fizzle out, because he sensed Dean believed him. Not so much his words, but his sobs and his tears.

His brother moved closer, cradled his head to him, carded fingers through Sam's hair and exhaled an old grief against Sam's temple. “I dunno if that makes anything better,” Dean told him softly,
“But you should know she's not blaming you.” She is blaming me, echoed.

Dammit – he was almost mad at them, Dean with his martyrdom and Jess with her stubbornness. “No, that actually makes it worse,” he told his brother and turned his head up to kiss Dean's cheek, dismissive. Blindly he reached to where he suspected Dean kept the bottle.

“Oh, no, I'm not getting you drunk too,” Dean wrestled the whiskey away from him.

“Why not?”

“Because you're one handsy drunk,” Dean said, like that was a reason-

“I'm going to be handsy with you tonight anyway,” he stroked his right hand over the inside of Dean's thigh, up to the heat under butter-soft threadbare cotton and with his left, he stole the bottle.

Dean laughed, commented, “Smooth.”

They traded the bottle back and forth five times -Dean drinking much more than him- before Sam felt warm enough to rub his hand into Dean's flesh. Dean felt so good, so alive, so pure it made Sam hungry. He nuzzled his brother’s neck and scraped his teeth over the tender skin, licked it teasingly and made Dean moan and his cock twitch under Sam's hand.

Dean tasted like salt and whiskey and smelled like leather and guns and felt like damp soiled clothes, shared sweat. Home.

Sam drew him closer, because Dean didn't know what he was to him. How beautiful and precious he was, how much it had cost to walk away from him.

“I haven't been leaving you, Dean.”

He had not even been leaving Dad.

Dean would not respond. Didn't believe him. Had no idea, how much Sam wanted him. How desperately relieved he was for Dean to take him back. To give him this.

He licked into Dean's mouth and before he had to stop for breath, he sucked and bit the lower lip in a way he knew would make Dean slack-mouthed, open and sensitive.

Him, on the other hand, filled the full flesh between his teeth with a lust of a whole different kind: He wanted to bite down and taste their blood.

He struggled for breath and took his time to look at Dean, who only at this times when they were this close would let him look, really look.

It tore him up, the conflict between his desire to climb on top of his brother and make him his, cover every inch of Dean and will them to meld together. And the need to be gentle, to ask for forgiveness...

“What do you want, Sammy?”

Everything. “You,” he had to swallow, so thick the word felt on his tongue, “I want you, all of you.”

The faint glimmer of light from the cabin was the only light out here, but it was enough to see Dean think too hard about this.
A line they had never crossed.

Sam didn't know if it would make things better or worse if he committed to Dean like this. His mind was not speaking to him right now, but he knew his skin wanted to melt with his brother, his flesh wanted to soak up Dean's blood and his bones wanted to break under those hands. He wanted to save Dean and devour him and it should have scared him how he wasn't able to tell these two apart at the moment. But he wasn't scared, Dean pushed him flat into the seat and still, after all those years, they moved like one person, limbs settling against each other, quick to press their bodies together.

Dean was still bigger than him like this, broader, more solid, able to keep them both safe.

He wrapped his legs around Dean and let his brother kiss and hold him and coil their clothed groins together, chafing, biting contrast to Dean's sweet touch.

Finally, Dean went up on his knees and took his shirt off. Sam stayed still, aware what would come next and he let Dean do it, in the cramped space it was easier if only one of them called the shots and so he let Dean unclot the them, went with the motion and then he let Dean take him apart with his hands, stroke, pull, grasp, swipe up every drop of moisture and rub it into their erections.

Sam knew his brother liked his body, the look, the feel, the over all length -it hadn't always been like this: Up until Sam's first real growth spurt Dean had been affectionate, mostly comforting, not very demanding. Sure Dean always had told him he smelled good and felt good and touched him good, but it had been praise, not desire. Only before Sam hit fifteen, right when he felt his most awkward and self-conscious, he noticed the guilty glances, the insane risks Dean took under Dad's nose, the frustration their fooling around left Dean with. And he had been so unsure that he broke the golden rule and talked to Dean about it, because he thought now that he had grown out of chubby and cute, become bony and awkward, he wasn't enough anymore. He wasn't pretty like the girls Dean was with-Dean hadn't let him finish that thought, had pushed his hand down Sam's pants and told him how pretty he was; then Dean had come, just from pushing against him, touching him and telling him how damn fine he looked to him.

Only a few weeks later Dean had broken down, his desire became action and had laid out Sam on his stomach and mounted him from behind -Sam had been sure then Dean would fuck him and he would have let him. But Dean had rubbed himself off against his butt, pressed between his cheeks, fucked his thighs, all the while biting and licking, gasping aching endearings hotly into Sam's neck, his hands roaming over the skin those words were about, stroking the barley there muscles appreciative and for the first time Dean just took, called him his good little bitch when he realized how well Sam responded to the rough treatment. Sam had gotten off on the pressure forcing him into the hard mattress, but what had tipped him over was the slick friction against his balls when Dean had come between his thighs and kept trusting for another eternity until he gotten too limp to keep going. It wasn't the last time they did that, and it always made Dean wild to have him under him like that.

So it came to no surprise to Sam that tonight too, he ended up on his stomach, but then-

Dean didn't just push down on him, into him, like expected, he pulled Sam's hips up and-ohhGod, Sam's balls tightened as Dean buried his face, his tongue there.

No one but Dean had ever done this to him. It was so filthy and so good and Dean pumped Sam's dick too, hooked the thumb into the skin of his sack and Sam broke out sweat and then came from the rough upward strokes and Dean's tongue in his ass.

He collapsed, not too far to go to anywhere, with the car door ahead of him and Dean holding him
His brother smeared his own jizz between his cheeks and teased him mercilessly.

“Fuck, Dean-”

Dean chuckled, breathless, and just as asked, “You want me to-?” Two of his fingers rubbed a steady circle against Sam's hole, but weren't breaching, not yet.

It occurred to Sam how typical it was, to have this question thrown in like it wasn't a first, like it was just any other option. “Yes,” he wanted it, he wanted his brother to loose it already, “I want you to.”

Dean was gentle, one finger after another, too damn careful, but it didn't just drive Sam crazy, it drove him to the edge fast again.

He had been fingered before, did it to himself too and even Dean had done that for him, had been over two knuckles deep in him, but this time, it was worlds-different, it wasn't to get him off – Dean would fuck him, so this was to get him wet enough to take it and he felt Dean shake with concentration.

It was too much for Dean, he wouldn't let go, he would fuck him sure, but Sam doubted he would really enjoy it.

“Wait,” he reached for Dean's knee to tap him.

“Jeez'sSAM,” Dean hissed, he had to be pretty close. And he had to think Sam was calling this off. Dean let him turn around and Sam saw him flinch and shiver like he was possessed.

“Just lie down and let me be on top,” he explained and guided his brother for them to do the switch. While he was at it he collected Dean's jacket and the blanket and pushed it under Dean's head-

Dean chuckled.

“Shut up,” he ordered before Dean could-

“So considerate, Sammy,”-make fun of him.

“I want to ride you hard and not worry about giving you a concussion,” he said while he straddled Dean, his ass brushing Dean's bent thighs.

“Giddy-up, cowboy,” Dean said grinning like a loon.

And really Sam should have seen that one coming the second he mentioned riding.

He twisted his leg between Dean and the bench, to kneel, cursed himself for not taking into account that Dean's hips were wider than his and this probably wouldn't work – not enough space, all the while he had to hold on both backrests to balance himself.

His brother didn't comment on the graceless shuffle or the wiggling, or Sam's heel digging into his ass, but when Sam finally succeeded to put himself into a position where he had his hands free and was able move without falling off, Dean laughed, shaking his head, “Do I wanna know what'ya did to get so bendy?”

And that was why he needed his hands free, Sam thought before he dragged blunt, but effective
nails over Dean's nipple, “I said: Shut up.”

Dean's chest quaked under a swallowed chuckle, but his roaming hands betrayed an underlying strain, how the grasped, but never stayed long enough in one place to spell satisfaction and came to rest on Sam's hardening dick – trying to make this good for him.

Like his own erection didn't pulse needy against Sam's butt.

He hated it when Dean was so damn self-sacrificing.

“You'll want to-

Dean didn't get much further with his good advice, because Sam had not stopped pushing his prick between his cheeks and burrowing down. The stretch was almost killing him and his mind was so focused on letting Dean in, that he barely heard his brother cough and gasp and didn't feel at all that Dean had clawed at his thighs – only after he stayed still, he felt the scratches burn and felt Dean's fingertips soothing them away already.

He tried to move up a little and made Dean gasp at the pull, just when his brother had wanted to say something.

There was no going back, it felt like they were glued together, but Dean wouldn't move, so Sam had to impale himself deeper and pray he could move up from there again.

The last inch felt like getting stuck and then Dean rolled his hips into his and Sam fell forward with a cry, his body riding out the motion before he realized what was happening.

Holding on to Dean, -or Dean holding on to him, they rolled their hips together and it burned so badly it had Sam shaking, going forcibly slack in Dean's arms, arch his back impossibly and sob into Dean's chest.

“-use more spit,” Dean huffed, “' was about to say, you genius.” He stroked Sam's hair, like that would soothe away the burn crawling up Sam's entire spine. Just on instinct he rocked back into Dean's minuscule thrusts.

But it got better.

On Dean's undulating hips, Sam managed to move and when he started to feel Dean's cock slide in and out of him, it was only for the first three times that it felt like getting punched.

Dean fucked up into him and only now Sam realized his brother was fucking him, it was really happening.

He had to kiss Dean, even if it broke up their rhythm again. Dean's mouth was dry from panting and his tongue a delicious rasp against Sam's.

It felt good -just like the aching thrusts into him, it riled him up and got him going and he would be fully hard again in a minute or so, but...

He had thought it would feel deeper. Earth-shattering. But it didn't feel like that, because Dean wouldn't let go, not like this, not when this was new and there was a chance of messing it up.

Stupid, Sam cursed himself.

Dean's eyes were wide open, glowing pale in the blackness here, his hands grasped on Sam's hips
like he held on for dear life and even though the strain told of the intensity of what Dean felt, he wouldn't shut his eyes, wouldn't escape to a gentler oblivion, from here, here where he fixed his stare on Sam's body, his face, the shadows of gleaming gray liquid movement Sam became here, here in the darkness where they belonged.

“You're so fucking pretty,” Dean said shivering and Sam knew that Dean could barely see him, but meant it so anyhow. Said it with every drive of his hips up into Sam's downward push. Their fucking was too hard, too needy, too forced and still: Dean held back.

He knew just how to press Dean to start taking what he needed. He leaned forward into a deep kiss, raised his ass too far, like he did not care that Dean's dick slipped out and then he didn't move back, didn't assist when Dean's hips sought him out and the hard prick spasmed helplessly against his thigh, he just kept kissing Dean until his brother broke off that kiss with a growl and Dean tried to curl his hips into an unnatural shape to get them going again-

-only then he moved. “Wait,” he said and pushed Dean down. Telling him to wait, really saying it out loud always worked on Dean, and it wasn't fair, but Sam had to win a second of Dean's cooperation to untangle first his left leg and slip it between Dean's thighs and then slip the other one between them too -trapping Dean's prick snug in the middle. There was no way Dean could fuck him in this position and he let this realization settle in for Dean, while he arched to kiss Dean, who whined,

“Dammit, Sam, move!”

He did, he flexed his thighs -squeezed the trapped hard-on.

Dean huffed and puffed and Sam really felt for him: That had to be frustratingly close to doing something for Dean's dick.

His brother wrapped his arms around Sam's torso and cussed up a storm and tried to get some leverage with one foot planted in the leg-space and then stopped-

Probably because if he tried to move any further now, his dick would be bent into a shape it wasn't built for.

His thighs had Dean in a vice grip.

Laughing now would probably get him killed, so he did the next best thing and bit Dean's neck, sucked hard, letting the hail of insults, from What the hell-? to You fucking freak! slide, because he knew it was only a matter of time till-

“OhGod, please, Sammy, let me come”

-it would rain whispered pleas. He smiled into Dean's neck. He stroked his brother's face and kissed him sweet and asked,

“Tell me how much you want me.”

The white of Dean's eyes moved slittering in the dark and he said with feeling: “I hate you.”

“I know, now tell me how much you want to fuck me.”

Dean's body strained against his again, but Sam knew all it did was put all the wrong pressure on his brother's dick.
“I can stay like this all night, Dean,” which was the biggest bluff in history, because Sam was close too, -about a minute away from shamelessly rutting against Dean's belly. But this minute was a threat real enough for Dean:

“Dammit, you freak-” his brother heaved a sigh.

“Your freak,” Sam corrected.

“Fine, I want you, I want to fuck you and when I'm done I'm going to spank you raw, you pushy little bitch.”

“Promise?”

“God, you're sick.”

Even after all these years Dean had no idea how sick exactly, “What do you really wanna do to me, Dean?” Sam asked as gentle as possible, rubbed himself against Dean, “Wanna play with me, big brother?”

Shit, Dean hissed and shuddered, his hands terribly gentle, but dipping into neediness here and there.

He felt Dean swallow, before he spoke up, more to himself than to Sam:

“I really fucked you up, didn't I.”

“You still believe that do you?” he propped himself up and eased the pressure of his thighs a bit. He stared down at his brother who truly believed he was part of what made Sam sick. “You have no idea, have you? How many times you put me together, how many times you told me you're proud of me, you love me, that I'm good enough-

“Fuck, Sammy, not now,” Dean whined, because that was all the more reason for Dean to make it wrong to want him, Sam realized now. Dean actually was hung-up about the whole incest thing, even after all these years.

“-more than good enough, Dean, you didn't tell me that, you showed me. You pushed me down and ate out my ass, licked my balls and swallowed my cum and when you were done you had a look on your face like you still hadn't gotten enough of me, like you still want more, because you love me so much it hurts. I want it to hurt you and I know that's sick and it's sicker how much it gets me off,” he ground down again for emphasis and rubbed his thighs together. “I'm sorry,” he spelled spit-slick against Dean's temple, kissing down the side of his face and have Dean breath, Oh, Sammy, into their kiss, before they ground their tongues together harsh and Dean thrust up into gap of Sam's thighs, now slack enough to allow him. Dean's hands spread his ass cheeks, fingers rubbed dry rough strokes into the cleft, made Sam burn with need and want more, but every coordinated thought left him when Dean brought his right hand up, spit into his hand and then smeared the spit between Sam's cheeks – it had happened too fast, one second Dean had been rubbing his hole roughly and sucked at his exposed nape, the next he pushed two fingers into him, wet and perfect.

And Sam wanted more, but Dean's left arm tightened around his middle and held him close, squishing his dick between their bodies just so he couldn't-

“No, Sammy, stay,” Dean asked and worked his hips in stuttering thrusts and lazily toyed with the rim of Sam's asshole before he dipped his fingers in again and breathed in cooling Sam's neck, “...so good,” he said exhaling and pushed Sam over the edge with those words -he started to feel
himself coming and he had to rut harder against Dean, who came first, a bruising grip on his ass he
fucked the insides of Sam's thighs through the spurts, like always -like coming was just not
enough, Dean needed to push until his strength would give out. He was still riding out the motions
after Sam himself had climaxed easier. As easy as falling came for heavy weight.

Dean stilled under him eventually and even in the afterglow Sam was able to feel all the places
he ached from their fuck, most of all his left ass-cheek where Dean's hand kneaded a warm apology
into his flesh and then rested there with some satisfaction, split care/pride delivered by the same
hand. The hair of Dean's head tickled Sam's ear and he thought he wouldn't be able to fall asleep
like this, but for the life of him he couldn't move, he was too heavy.

They woke up to too bright sunshine, Sam with a crick in his neck and a terrible
headache, sweaty, overheated and their limbs knotted and hurting -Dean moaned and whined like
someone had stoned him last night and forgot to kill him.

“We're probably too old for that.”

“Probably?” Dean was in a huff, “You ever try to fall asleep on me again, I'm gonna pinch your
balls so hard your grandchildren will feel it.”

There was a direct relation of how bad Dean felt to how ridiculously scary his threats became. “I'm
sorry. Wanna go down to the lake and work the kinks out?”

“Are you trying to kill me?” he blinked against the offending sunlight.

“You know you will feel better afterwards.”

Dean pouted and mused silently over the wonders of cool water before he shrugged, then froze up
and and shivered- “Maybe after I puked.”


Good thing his brother wasn't psychic, or Sam would be on fire now.
Chapter Notes

Again a reminder that my schedule will not allow me to answer comments regularly, or at all. And since Jo is in a delicate phase right now I wont read them to him for at least the next three weeks; but they are still appreciated; also the 40 chapters is an estimate, I am still editing, it could be a couple of CHs more or less? rather more than less;
Bye, Bee

~

Something had changed between the brothers, permanently. At first Tom couldn't help but notice how Dean had become more bold. The day after they had slept outside, he touched his brother in an overt sexual way, for anyone to see who looked. But his attitude changed soon enough, something put a dent in his libido and Tom didn't figure out what, but realized it didn't matter. The more permanent change came from Sam anyhow-

Sam was gentler with Dean, more loving and he was ignoring them like he had before – yet Tom was not sure these two observations connected in any way. It was just, that Sam stopped to pretend there was anything left to fix between him and Jessica.

His little girl had not talked about what happened in the woods, but Tom couldn't get the picture out of his head of how disheveled she had looked. She had put up a fight, had been pushed to the point where she fought the boy she loved, but she wouldn't talk about it. Couldn't. She had loved Sam and he had violated this love in the worst way. Tom didn't care anymore what reasons Sam had, how delusional he was – he just wanted to hurt him, badly.

He wasn't even angry, that the boy was so gentle with his deranged brother. That he showered him with the same love Jessica had fallen for. Actually he started to feel a little sorry for Dean.

Sam's shy smiles, his subtle compliments, how he payed special attention -so sincere. His brother didn't stand a chance.

No one would. Until Sam had hurt his daughter Tom had to remind himself every hour that Sam couldn't be trusted. But now it was easy. One look at Jessica and anyone saw the damage.

Which was why Sam wouldn't look at her.

~ The careful listening Angela did was paying off. She knew why Dean was strutting around like a caged animal. What it was that Sam tried to take his mind off with subtle touches and nights in the car.

Their father was hunting a witch. And because demons were able to track cellphones he had not called to check in. Not even now that the pastor and him were two days overdue. Which according to the sparse dialogue between Bobby and Sam, wasn't long enough to worry, but long enough to
know not everything had gone as planned.

Dean didn't talk about the witch-hunt, but he was climbing the walls and Angela didn't like the idea of a twitchy, bored psychotic.

“We need a TV,” Dean told his brother and Bobby, both reading and not really listening to him, “Or I am going to pick up...knitting.”

“No one wants to see that happening,” Sam replied and kept on ignoring Dean with ease. Sam was able to read under heavy fire – Bobby's words, but Angela believed it wasn't just an expression.

“I could teach you to draw,” she proposed to Dean. “Makes time pass,” she kept the proposal casual.

Dean stared holes into the air for five more minutes, before he took her up on the offer.

He smiled at the rough sketch she had done on Bobby and listened intently on her instructions. After she showed him the basics, he made very fast progress, so he either had the talent for supreme eye-hand coordination, or,

“Have you ever taken an interest in arts before?”

“Not really. Sammy 's the artist in the family.” He grinned and looked over to Sam, who rolled his eyes and hinted a headshake, like this was an old joke between them. “One of my girlfriends,” Dean went on, “once gave me guitar lessons, but-”

“Dean” Sam interrupted in a warning tone.

“Huh?”

“Could you not make dirty puns towards Angela when she is so nice to entertain you?”

“Oh, Sammy, what'ya take me for?”

“Someone whose mind can't think finger exercise without going there.”

Dean shrugged at her, grinning, like he couldn't argue with Sam's accusation, but he did argue out loud, throwing a statement at a reading Sam:

“Robyn and I never even got that far.” He added sullen, “Got stuck at first base.”

Sam's hand traced and captured the line he read, before he looked up and asked, “Who?”

“The girl.”

Sam frowned and obviously tried to remember before he asked, “When was that?”

“In '93,” Dean replied and drew a broad stroke to outline the background of his sketch.

Sam froze, but then shook his head like he couldn't remember and finally asks, “Where?”

“Lebanon, Kansas.”

Sam kept shaking his head, “You had no girl there-

“Sure, Robyn was-” Dean paused his drawing, “…of course,” he nodded, pressed his lips together
and pointed at Sam, “We never told you.”

“Told me what?”

“You were at Bobby's during that time, do you remember-”

“Sure I remember, being stored away for two months with no call from you and Dad, worrying myself sick, because I had no clue what you were hunting. Yes, I remember that. What I don't remember was that you found a girlfriend while you were hunting.”

Dean let the tone just roll off him. “Yeah, Dad was hunting, I was left behind at Kansas, at a boys home. I gambled away our lunch money and then I was caught stealing, damn, Dad was pissed.” He shook his head about the incident. “He was in the middle of a hunt and couldn't pick me up. Went to a boy's home.”

“You wanna give Sam the long version?” Bobby injected himself into the conversation.

“What long version?” Dean asked completely clueless.

“How you only gambled the lunch money 'cause John had not thought to leave ya enough to last three weeks?” Bobby replied dangerously conversational.

“Oh, come on Bobby,” Dean whined, “Just don't.”

“Don't what?” the older man replied growling.

“It's hard enough when Mom and Dad are divorced, but to drag the kids into it is a shitty move,” Dean tried to lighten the mood, “So don't make me badmouth Dad just because you've got issues with him.”

“Ain't doin'. You are my issue with him.”

“I told you Sonny's Home for Boys wasn't such a bad place. Hell, it was a frickin' holiday.”

Sam shook his head, his nose scrunched up in something like disgust- “Only you would confuse juvenile detention with summer camp.” -pity.

“Compared to John's grade-A-parenting,” Bobby grumbled, “Kiddy-prison is summer camp.”

“That's enough, Bobby,” Dean tried to stand up for his father.

“No,” Bobby clapped the book the shut. “It ain't anywhere near enough. He didn't even tell me where you were. I had to cope with Sam's sleepless nights and his attempt to run away, only to hear that you were left alone two states over. I could've picked you up! I would've, had I known, dammit!”

Angela saw how deep Bobby's words hit Dean, he had to swallow before he tried, “Look, Bobby, I'm sorry. I hadn't known then that Sammy was with you.”

“You're sorry-” Bobby sounded like he didn't even know where to begin to point out how wrong Dean was to think he had to be sorry.

“And you didn't call Dad to check up on me?” Sam asked.

“I tried, okay!” Dean hunched up his shoulders under the supposed attack.
“That's really not my point and neither is it Bobby's point to blame you. Dad didn't take your call,” Sam stated, “That's why you didn't know I wasn't with him. He ignored you!

“After the stunt I pulled—”

“No! There is absolutely no excuse to ignore your kid's calls,” Sam got loud, “You could've been in trouble, but he expected you to watch out for yourself, to watch out for me -don't roll your eyes at me, Dean, you know I'm right!”

Dean chewed on this silently for a few heartbeats, before he told Sam without looking at him, “You're unbelievable, you know that – Dad does his best, but for you? Nothing's ever good enough.” He didn't get loud, but the disappointment rang so clear, Sam didn't dare to speak up and Dean finally looked at him, “You really think, I don't know he made a mistake? Newsflash for you: He is human, he's not perfect. But I don't care as long as he makes it home alive.

But thanks, for a second there I was actually glad he is not here, or I would hear the shouting in stereo. Just like in old times.” Pencil and paper got thrown down on the bed and Dean stormed off.

~ Of course Sam was able to smooth over things with Dean quickly. Two hours later Jess heard them laughing and bickering outside like nothing had happened.

Sam was trying hard to be good and the accusation of Dean's, that Sam didn't respect their father enough -wasn't thankful for John's special brand of love, that hit Sam much harder than he let on. In Sam's mind John had sacrificed his whole life and his eldest son's future to protect his demon-cursed second born. Nothing Sam did could make up for that and Dean was a master at reminding his little brother.

Just like Sam was a master at taking Dean's mind off things, rising up the challenge of Dean's pranks, laughing at stupid little jokes, touching Dean in a way that made his older brother's eyes glaze over with obvious lust.

The problem was it wasn't faked, not one little bit. Sam loved Dean, a lot. He was actually holding back.

Like when he tried to stifle his worry two days later, when Bobby decided they had waited long enough and a supply run was in order. He appointed Dean. Sam tried to argue, but he swallowed most of his worry.

He followed Dean outside and Jess heard the tone of mindless chatter -the tone of Sam searching for an excuse to cling to Dean until his brother had to leave.

~ “And we're going to need tampons.”

The look on his brother's face – pure terror.

“Is that going to be a problem Dean?”

Dean's eyes narrowed, but amusement shone through, almost something like pride, then he shook his head, “No. But why didn't you tell me? I would have thrown you a first moon party, welcomed you to womanhood. Just because Dad and me are guys doesn't mean your family-”

“Real mature, Dean.

Dean's eyes looked lively in the sunlight, it made Sam ache just to look at them. And they were standing close- “What size?” Dean asked completely serious.
“What-?”

“What what? There are different sizes, right? And I am not going to make myself an idiot bringing back the wrong size, brand or whatever.”

He laughed, Dean would probably take offense, but he needed to be able to smile about his sweet big brother once in a while, “I will write you down instructions.”

“Good,” Dean agreed dead earnest, “And maybe I should get a pack for Jess too.”

“But then the door opened and Bobby interrupted.”

“Screw you.” His nerves were tingling, Dean was about to kiss him-

But then the door opened and Bobby interrupted.

“Still hea’?” Bobby asked and looked to the side like he knew exactly that he was interrupting.

But Dean hadn't stepped away, used the moment Bobby didn't watch to grin at Sam up close, like they had kissed, like he was feeling it still.

Sam didn't want him to go, not alone, all on his own.

“Ya not thinkin' of draggin' the kid along, 'r ya?”

“Naw, Bobby, just saying our good-bye's, ya know how clingy Sammy gets-” First Dean's eyes, then his voice cleared up, “Do you hear that?” sharp and quiet like a blade.

Dean looked deep into the woods southwest, from where the only road headed down to them.

*Mmh*, Bobby made an agreeing noise like he heard it too.

The twittering birds and the soft breeze and his own breath was all Sam heard.

“A car,” Bobby nodded and Dean moved. Sam followed inside.

Bobby stayed outside, shotgun cocked.

He had caught the shotgun Dean had thrown at him, picked up the holy water and watched his brother get the salt and only in passing, already on the way outside again, saw Jess and her parents stare wide-eyed.

Dean's whole posture relaxed as soon as he stopped beside Bobby, “That's Dad's truck,” he informed them and now Sam heard it too.

That Dean was sure it was Dad didn't change procedure. They took position and watched the truck come down the slope, pass the devil's traps and the saltlines. Only then Sam allowed himself to relax too.

...
Chapter 26

That Dean was sure it was Dad didn't change procedure. They took position and watched the truck come down the slope, pass the devil's traps and the saltlines. Only then Sam allowed himself to relax too.

~

It had come to the point where Tom hoped it was John Winchester and not an innocent park ranger who fell into the hands of these mad men.

But they heard car doors, not shots fired and soon Dean hurried to open the door for his father.

Who dragged a limping girl behind him. Young, a teenager hardly. Her feet were bare and bloody, her skirt and blouse torn and she was shaking.

The pastor and Bobby followed, but just like Dean, Bobby gave the girl a wide berth. Disgusted and cautious.

When the man finally pulled himself together to move closer, Dean actually looked like he wanted to hold him back.

“Iron?” Bobby had stroked her hair back and revealed a gruesome metal collar around her neck. She hadn't even flinched from his touch, only gone still and tense.

“Welded on,” John said, “Won't come off till after-”

“Why did you bring her?” Sam, who was last to come in, interrupted his father.

“We might still have a few questions. Besides, we can't just waste this one like your regular devil-whorshipper.”

“Yes,” the pastor agreed, uncharacteristically cold, “She is a special case.”

“Why?” Sam wanted to know.

“Later,” John pushed her to move and she whimpered in pain, but looked up from the floor for the first time and saw them.

Her eyes went wide and hope flared up in them, making her seem only worse off, desperate – and Tom wanted to say something, reassure this poor girl that at least she wasn't alone anymore – but she was shoved out of sight into the back room. And the pastor followed John, grim and just as brutally ruthless as the rest of them.

Huh, Dean made sound at them, or Sam, at their direction anyhow, “So, did anyone else expect Winifred Sanderson, instead of a Willow?”

“A what?” Sam asked.

“A nerdy girly cutie,” he explained and when his father reentered the room he asked him, “I mean you did say century old witch that baths in the blood of virgins-?”

John fixed his gaze on his sons, “She is a soldier. Never mistake her for anything else.”

~

Dean's Yes'Sir were not words to him, Angela observed, it sounded exactly like people responded to a priest during mass. A thoughtless prayer of true devotion.
“It's the perfect disguise if you think of it,” Sam said, “Young, harmless.” There was not a hint of empathy in his voice. “I guess after the lore depicts witches as old crones these days, pretending to be a feeble old woman doesn't do it anymore.” The boy had dissociated completely from reality by the exact opposite means his brother used: While Dean didn't think about these things at all – to the point where he made jokes about his assumption a witch would look like Bette Midler in the Disney Movie – Sam on the other hand used the premise of *Demons are real* to rationalize every detail to death. He thought about it until it wasn't a hurt person anymore he saw, but an accumulation of 'facts' he was able to theorize about, cold, efficient, like his father.

Angela was sure the young girl would die soon. And they would be next.

John had brought her with as a stepping stone for his son, for Sam to kill. First someone he didn't know – in order to protect all of them. Then someone closer for a good reason – to save Tom's and her souls. And last Jess, as a mercy – so she didn't have to live like this. All very rational. One step after another. This way you could make people do anything.

“Mom, it's gonna be okay,” Jess had embraced her, because she was crying and it should have been the other way around. But it wasn't, because deep down, her beautiful, headstrong daughter couldn't believe Sam would hurt them. And maybe it was better that way, if Jess didn't see it coming, like Angela did.

~

“You shouldn't have brought her,” Sam mumbled, towards his father, but looking at her mother.

Sam was looking at them for the first time since that night. And now that he did, he couldn't take his eyes off Mom, or her. Even though Jess made no attempt to hide that she was pissed at him, not just all of them, but that she blamed Sam specifically for her mother's tears.

“I mean it,” he hissed at his father, “... should get ... … …” the rest was too quiet for Jess to hear.

“That's enough,” John looked up from his notes, “We wont kill her. Not today.”

Sam tore his eyes away from them and bore down at his father, “Don't you care at all how this is effecting them? They think we're crazy. They fear for their life!”

“Better scared and safe than dead.”

Sam chewed angrily on his father's indifference and then spit out: “What if they try to get away again?”

Now John looked up, “What do you mean again?”

Dean had taken a stand at Sam's side so fast, like his father's tone made him teleport, “A few days ago they-”

“They ran,” Sam said it like he did personally blame his father, “Jess got hurt.” Sam was pulled so taut it would need little provocation, if his father only dared to blink- “I had to chase her for an hour through the woods, do you think she was safe then?”

-John did more than blink. He got up, “You-” -Dean that was, “-let your brother outside the devil's traps for an hour?”

John had done it, he had hit Sam's berserk-button:

He lunged at John.
Dean had a hard time breaking Sam and their father apart, even though John barely did anything but stand his ground.

“Sam!” Dean shoved hard, “Sam, dammit, stop-” another shove, so hard Sam wheezed for air. Dean threw a glance behind him, as if he wasn't sure, his father wouldn't come at them.

And Jess couldn't blame him, because John stood perfectly still and waited and that alone was fucking scary.

Not scary enough for Sam obviously, because he tried to push his brother out of the way.

“Sam!” Dean's voice was sharp, but his hands softened, held Sam instead of pushing at him.

This anger? -no, the hate Sam felt for his father, it ran deep, but what was giving her the chill, was that John looked like he too only waited for a reason to hurt Sam. It was less obvious, but it was there, the same anger, the same violence, like they were mirrors to each other.

Dean's hands on him were all that kept Sam still. And Dean didn't take them off him when he turned around and addressed his father:

“Sam’s just frustrated, he didn't mean no disrespect, sir. Right?” that last part was directed at Sam again and quieter Dean added, “You know that Dad does what's best for us, all of us, so stop, okay?”

Sam's jaw worked a stubborn angle, but his eyes had caught Dean's and those were stern, close to disappointed, because Sam was ungrateful again.

Sam nodded, gave in, still taut, still angry but unable to go through Dean, to hurt Dean in any way.

Sam said he would get some fresh air and left. But not before the usual silent exchange of looks with his brother, Dean worrying and Sam promising to stay close.

Dean was like a leash around Sam's neck. Or maybe a noose.

“When were you going to tell me, Singer, that they ran?” John focused his soft spoken wrath on Bobby.

Who shrugged, got up for coffee and answered, “It happened, we handled it. Forgot to take pic’jures, my bad.”

“You call my boys alone in the woods, handling it?”

“It was my call,” Dean threw himself into the sword, “I let Sam go after her alone.”

“You did what?!”

“John,” the pastor spoke up.

“I gave you one order, ONE! Not to leave him out of your sight!!’

“John!”

Dean had paled. That his father actually stopped at the pastors command, didn't change that – Dean looked like he would be sick. Beside Jess her mother had grasped her arm. Something bad would happen, Jess could feel it in her bones and then she saw, how Bobby held on to the coffee pot, old, heavy and made from metal. Perfect to bash John's skull in.
“I’m sorry, Dean.”

...What?

Dean looked like he had the same thought as Jess, because had John really just-

“I know you must have had a damn good reason,” -apologized.

Okay, now she’s seen it all.

The pastor heaved a heavy sigh, got up, passed out a glare at Bobby and the coffee pot and stepped in close to John. “We talked about this,” he said very quiet, like he didn't want anyone else to hear, “Not even you can endure her presence without breaks. You carry too much she can weigh on.”

John nodded, jaw tense.

“Get some air, John,” the pastor ordered softly, “And while you're at it, get your head out of your ass and talk to your son. Explain what he is feeling is her presence and how this feeling will only get worse. He needs to know.”

“Did you mean the witch?” Dean asked the pastor the second his father had left.

“Yes,” came hesitantly. “It seems that she effects Sam as much as your father.”

Of course, it was the witch's fault. It couldn't be that John Winchester was just a psycho who liked to lash out against his kids.

“But she is bound,” Dean said, like it was a question.

“In any possible way,” the pastor replied. “But evil like her cannot be completely bound, it's existence hollows out nature and troubles all living beings.”

Wow, Holy Jim really knew how to spin a horror story. Dean looked actually scared. These people...

“At least her presence gives us an edge at hunting,” Bobby mumbled.

Dean frowned at that. “Hunting what?”

“Deer,” Bobby 'explained'.

Dean didn't get it either: “What about a pissed off witch in our safehouse makes shooting Bambi easier?”

“Ya don't shoot Bambi, ya idjit, ya shoot Bambi's mother.”
Sam didn't feel the tough logs dig into his back, it grounded him barely not to float away from the pleasure of the most obscene soft pair of lips tracing his hard prick.

He had closed his eyes and the sounds became much louder, his own ragged breathing, the sucking and slurping and the birds tweeting —busybodies that they were, like the morning belonged to them and him and his brother had no right to make any sounds of themselves. Then he heard a cricking noise and his eyes shot open—

—but they were still alone, here at the side of the cabin that was turned away from the sun, where the colors seemed more deep.

Deep like colors were only in the shadows that fell away from stark brightness: Dean's shoulders clothed lush indigo, his hair rich golden-brown hues, his lips so pink they looked raw, the green of his eyes clear like glass, everything about Dean so full of contrast, Sam could see every hair making up his stubble,

so he stroked over Dean's prickly check and wished he could pull him up for another kiss. He still chased the taste of their first one earlier. Biting his lips he had it there: Dean with a hint of coffee, it was mostly memory, but one that was more real than anything outside their stolen moment.

He scratched the backside of his fingernails over Dean's scalp, like he knew Dean liked it, and felt so hypersensitive, the hair tickled him unbearably; he let go and grasped both hands on the dirty log wall behind him, trying to focus on more than how his brother nibbled the crown of his dick and sucked hard for every drop of pre-come. Dean was so openly enjoying himself when he was giving head to him, it was addictive. Sam wanted to last forever. But with every breath, he felt more moist, like it wasn't just him who was hot, but the sun made everything sweat with fast evaporating dew and Sam really felt that he became one with nature when Dean started his corkscrew move and then did that thing with his tongue—oh shit, he just melted, it was crazy how good it felt.

Dean sucked hard before he let go and stared up at him, questioning what had made Sam chuckle.

He had to swallow first, his throat too dry, “Anyone ever told you, you suck cock so good it's a psychedelic experience.”

Dean grinned smug, “Well, you just did.” —and Dean would never let him forget it. Brag about it forever.

“You never actually did suck anyone-elses cock, right?”

Dean curled his nose, “Guys reek,” he said and nuzzled Sam's balls, “But you Sammy,” gave his cock a good tug, “You're as sweet as pussy,” Dean locked eyes with him before he flicked his tongue over the exposed slit and licked away the liquid he steadily pumped out of Sam.

He pumped harder and finally asked, “Gonna give me some cream, pussyboy?”

And yeah, Sam did burst into giggles about his stupid brother's idea of dirty talk, “You're lucky
you have a lot of other things working for you, Dean, becau-auh-”

Dean was jacking him harder now, angled his cockhead to bump up against Dean's pillowy lips, closed like for a pouty kiss and that was so fucking obscene it almost looked funny, but it felt...

“-gawd,” Sam heard himself gasp and then he had to hold on Dean's shoulders not to fall over and Dean took him back in his mouth, not too far, only so he could taste everything of Sam, every drop of-

cream, Sam thought and that's how he came: giggling, almost toppling over.

Dean swallowed a few times, before he muttered with some affection, Gosh, Sammy, you're a freak, like he had not started it. Like he wasn't always the one who started it.

But he knew Dean only was as silly with him, knew for a fact he rarely talked during sex with girls, only talked to him, only let go for him – so there was no way he would ever give him crap for it. He just fell to his knees, to Dean and kissed him.

And when they came out of it for air, Sam feeling like oxygen finally made it into his system again, Dean looked down where Sam's limp cock hung out of his fly and chided, “Sleazy boy.”

“You're one to talk,” Dean's lips looked like he had sucked off the whole football team. “Don't think I didn't notice how you came in your pants three minutes after you went down.”

Dean shrugged, “I'm low-maintenance.”

“That's one word for it.”

“Keep it up, smartass. You can blow yourself next time.”

“Actually, I can do that.” A mental picture to keep Dean busy for a while.

After said while -they were heading back inside, to wait there for Dad and Bobby's return- Dean was still staring, “You're shittin' me,” he proposed his scepticism.

“Nope. God-honest-truth.”

“Jeez, what 'd they teach you in Stanford?”

To laugh with his brother was...liberating. Sam had needed that, more than the bj, actually. Yet still, entering the cabin came like an unwanted cold shower.

~ After an unusually early breakfast Bobby and John had left together for the supply run Dean never made. Sam and his brother had left the cabin as soon as the car was out of ear-shot. To what cause, Tom didn't know and didn't care. They hadn't been back since.

The pastor watched them, did not mind them much, only forbid Angela to go into the back room.

So she sat with them on the bed and from there had managed to get the young girl talking.

When the poor thing finally found the courage to answer them, telling them her name, -Madelyn Cooper, her dad and her friends called her Maddy, she seemed unable to stop.

She was only fifteen.

Tom had thought this whole situation couldn't get worse. But it was one thing to know in an
abstract, that the men, who kidnapped your family and you, were serial killers. It was a completely different level to talk to one of the victims. The reality of it made his head spin.

Maddy was from Oracle, Arizona, John and the pastor had taken her outside a coffee-shop. In broad daylight. They had welded the collar on her neck and burned her badly then. Had stripped her naked and inserted needles into every birthmark, scar and freckle on her body.

The needles were still there.

“...can't take them out, th-they hurt so much,” her speech was broken with shivers.

“You forgot to tell them how we cut through your tattoos,” the pastor spoke up conversationally.

“They're n'ot tattoos,” Maddy sniffled, “They're just henna. 't'was for my birthday. I'm not a witch, I swear. It was just pretend – please, just let me go. I will never do it again, I swear. Katie got me the Ouija board as a joke. We didn't even use it, we're not witches, please, you have to believe me.”

The pastor sighed and shook his head.

“Don't pretend you don't get off on this,” Jessica spit at him.

“We did what we had to do.”

“Stripping her naked?”

“We had to bind the magic woven into her skin.”

“How convenient. I bet she had lots of magic on her tits and between her legs.”

“Jess,” Angela tried to stop her.

And now their daughter was giving Angela the stink eye.

The door opened and Dean was tumbling through, laughing, followed by Sam who wore a matching grin -for about half of a second. Then Sam's back arched slightly and he took a studied breath, like he was suppressing nausea.

“Angela?” Maddie asked if they were still there.

“She's been talking to them?” Sam asked the pastor.

Who didn't get the chance to answer,

“And you let her!?” Sam stormed off, Dean close behind and they heard Maddy shriek, then beg and cough, and then Dean was saying,

“That wont hold, let me.”

“Please don't, I will be quiet, please-eoghh” her pleas were muffled.

They had gagged the poor girl, taking away the only relief she had found.

“What were you thinking?” Sam charged the pastor.

But the man was like smoke, Sam's anger went right through him. He just shook his head sadly and replied, “Nothing she can tell them, could be worse than what they imagined from the second
they saw her for the first time.”

Sam’s eyes fluttered to them, but never really touched them, he was shaking, upset, he never had wanted them to see the reality of this-

“She can't stay here,” his words clipped, “-with them – She needs to die.”

Tom wasn’t the only one chilled to the bones by the turn Sam had taken – sure, Sam had suggested it before, but now he sounded like he wanted to do it himself, like it was nothing, like he had killed so many times it was a simple chore to him, something you got done before you had dinner.

Even the pastor had been rattled by the boy’s words, he shook his head and warningly stated: “That's exactly what she wants, Sam, didn't your father tell you?”

Sam huffed a laugh, “When does he tell me anything-”

“Sammy,” Dean begged.

“We cannot kill her, not yet,” the pastor established. “If we kill her, her spirit will report back to the demon. Your father is working on a better solution. Until then, you cannot give into her taunts, do you understand me, Samuel?”

Yes, Sam said barely audible.

...
“We cannot kill her, not yet,” the pastor established. “If we kill her, her spirit will report back to the demon. Your father is working on a better solution. Until then, you cannot give into her taunts, do you understand me, Samuel?”

Yes, Sam said barely audible.

~

“Have you ever done that?” her daughter asked Sam hours later. After he returned, replaced the pastor as a guard and shackled Angela, to free Jess.

“Done what?” Sam asked back, standing so close to Jessica. He stopped sorting through the freshly cut wild mint he had brought back. Gave her all his attention.

“Kill someone?” Jess specified quietly, casual, unconcerned with how Sam could react. She rubbed her left wrist, where the daily use of shackles had marked her worse than on her right wrist.

“No,” Sam answered, his voice so small one could forget he was a tree of a man.

“No, because they haven't been human or No, because you haven't?” Jess wanted to know and only the absence of an accusing tone was her saving grace. Jessica hadn't been talking to Sam since their escape failed and Angela wished her daughter had held the grudge. Sam was extremely unstable since his father was back-

“Technically, witches are human,” he said, “Not all of them are this bad. Some are even good.”

“You didn't answer my question, Sam.”

-oh Jessica.

Sam turned his head away, because the answer was, Yes. Yet still it seemed he had difficulties to simply lie to Jess. Finally he shook his head, “No, I've never killed something that was still human.”

But he would. If he had been allowed he would have killed Maddy already.

“Sam-” Jess touched his arm, but stopped when the door banged open.

~

-Dean.

Goosefraba. She had decided to be smart about this. So she ignored it when Dean shouldered by her like she didn't exist. She simply backed off, went back to the bed – where her mom had a silent meltdown.

“What's that?” he asked – so damn obnoxious.

Sam snatched the pale purple blossoms from Dean's hands and arranged them with the others to put them into the vase he had prepared.

“Oh good, you're just decorating,” Dean sprouted more shit, “I was worried you were making salad.”

“It's wild mint Dean, with the white candle it will cleanse the room -and don't start,” Sam said before Dean could make a face, “You know this stuff works!”
“Yeah it does,” Dean made Duh-face, “After the visit of malicious mother in law or something like that. We're under one roof with a century old witch that even bound fouls the air and rots the ground – that's when you go for the flamethrower, not the herbs,” he picked at the green leaves and shook his head about Sam's attempt to make himself feel safe without actually having to kill someone.

They were truly scared of Madelyn. Not like the pastor, who got off on hurting a girl. No, Sam was sure Madelyn was dangerous. He was so sure, he would kill her. Her mom had been right, you couldn't argue with that. At least not as long as you couldn't prove them wrong somehow.

She had to free Madelyn. If Sam saw that Maddy was just a young girl, if he only had a moment of doubt, he would remember. He would realize that there was a way out. He had gotten out before, he could do it again.

Afternoon came and she was shackled to the bed. But she had manged to palm a car radio antenna from Dean's Ghostbuster-kit.

Not much to do but wait and stare holes into their captors, yet still she almost missed it, and was sure, that Sam had not seen:

John nodded at Dean, prompting him to say,

“Gonna take a swim. I'm back in forty.”

He grabbed his things and Sam, who had missed that his father actually ordered Dean to go, was looking nervously at John, like he expected him to forbid Dean to go.

“I'm with you,” Sam said, still looking at his father, but then hurrying to keep up with Dean.

From the window Bobby watched them leave, and then the three men moved like one. Didn't waste a second to get into the back room where Maddy started whimpering and screeching in fear.

Mom was crying again, Dad held her and Jess stared at her toes. She really needed to trim her toe nails.

Jess was prepared to cover her ears, because she was sure she didn't wanna hear what three men were doing to a fifteen year old girl.

Turned out they were praying at her. Well, the pastor and Bobby were, John was silent.

It didn't sound like they were hurting her, or doing anything else. But she had to be so scared – rightfully so, they were probably going to kill her when they were done praying.

Perhaps it should have worried Jess how little she felt. If she felt anything it was the dread of a missed opportunity. She understood how it was easier to buy into the crazy, preserve some of your empathy, by channeling your coldness like Sam did and stay warm to those you love.

She had become like this too, and she wasn't even delusional like Sam. She was just tired.

“It's gonna be okay, Mom,” she wrapped an arm around her, on top of Dad's arm, and promised, “We're gonna get out of here. I'm not gonna make the same mistake twice.” Leaving her parents behind, that was. Trusting Sam -well that risk she would have to take again. Without help an escape would be impossible.

“...noo, please, don't,” Madelyn made a distraught sound, “Just let me go, I wont tell anyone –
Please somebody help me, please-Angela!"

Jess felt bad that she wished it would be over, but it was what she was feeling when her mom was shutting her eyes to what she was seeing before her inner eye.

“Okay, you're right. Just please, stop touching me – just stop, I will tell you everything. I've been with demons, like you said-”

-that was a mistake, Jess thought-

“-I prayed to Lucifer and killed babies and ate them-”

Madelyn made a sound, like-?

“No, truth is,” she chuckled again, “I don’t always kill them first, most times I fillet them alive. And I usually bath in the blood of virgins, but with your beautiful, slutty firstborn, John, I will make an exception. When he touched me, I could feel his essence, like sunlight, like a little boy, a little boy blue,” she singsonged like she gone crackers and then snapped harsh:

“What John! You don't like A little Boy Blue?” the singsong was back, “I got another one for you: Mary had a little babe,

looked kinda like a squid,

it soon became apparent

that it was the devil’s kid,

so she tried getting rid of it:

Threw it down the well!

Had not hurt one little bit,

it fell and fell and fell,

opening a door to hell.

Demons poured out of the gate,

Mary wept about her fate and wished that she was dead! We did her a favor, don't you think, John?

Are you sure you don't want to hear my version of Little Boy Blue? You will never guess who's blowing who.”

Wow, that took an unexpected turn. But being in Maddy's position she would have probably done the same when she realized that they were too crazy to have mercy:

Push back. Make them loose it and hope for a quick end.

But then they heard the girl shift on the bed and she started begging again and shrieking and apologizing. But at least she didn't call out to Mom anymore.

...
Chapter 29

But then they heard the girl shift on the bed and she started begging again and shrieking and apologizing. But at least she didn't call out to Mom anymore.

It didn't end with them killing her, it ended because Sam was back a little bit earlier than forty minutes and he was furious.

His father and him had a shouting match, that rattled the windows and this time Dean didn't even try to get in between. This time it took both the pastor and Bobby to make John back off and take a walk.

~ Sam looked at them. Mostly at Angela, her puffy red eyes and her fear.

Tom hated him. He hated him so much he didn't have words for it.

Now with his father gone, Sam's anger had imploded and he looked like he would start to cry too.

And he actually did. He collapsed on the first chair, buried his face in his hands.

Dean stood by, helpless.

Sam wiped his tears away, took a shuddering breath and faced them and said:

“I'm sorry.”

He was really good at playing one's heartstrings:

Voice wet with emotion, wearing tragedy like a veil.

Had he told Jessy too, that he was sorry, when he dragged her through the woods? “Don't say you're sorry Sam. You're about to kill an innocent person. It can't be done fast enough for you, because it bothers you to have her around. That's not something you can be sorry over.”

Sam did open his mouth like he wanted to argue, but then slumped his shoulders in defeat. Earning himself a comforting gesture from his brother, who reached out and laid a hand on Sam's back.

“Sam?”

Maddy sounded so hopeful, it killed Tom to know there was no hope.

“Are you the Samuel all hell is whispering about,” she said and suddenly Dean moved-

but Sam held him back by the arm, listening intently to Maddy's speech:

“The special boy, dear to the King, nursed with magic to destroy the foul breed of hunters from within, are you our Sammy?”

In the last hour, they had broken Maddy, made her accept the role they cast her in. The brain was an amazing structure -feed it with information and it puts it into order, even if the order only made sense to psychotics like Sam.

Whose eyes widened when Maddy asked:
“And is this Jessica with you?”

They had told Madelyn their names, who they were – before their communication was shut down. But to Sam it probably sounded like-

“Jessica, the lamb to the slaughter, in her blood you will be baptized, my boy. You will come out of the fire again, you’ve seen it in your dreams how we are going to kill her – you know she is dead, she burns, burns like Mommy!”

Dean dislodged his arm from Sam's grip.

Split, hope and dread toggled over Sam's features, he too thought Dean went to Maddy to kill her.

But he didn't.

He had gagged her again and strode with long steps towards the door, calling outside:

“Dad!!”

~ “What happened?”

Angela noted how Sam wouldn't meet his father's eye – he looked exhausted, it was Dean who answered for him:

“She 's been saying things.”

John nodded at Dean, an assurance it would be fine to let him close to Sam.

John was gentle now. Of course, he had Sam exactly where he wanted him.

She felt like Cassandra, only she had not told anyone what she foresaw. Though she had tried to tell Sam his father was manipulating him long before she actually knew how inescapable the circle was, Sam was caught in.

“Sam?” John asked.

The boy was wringing his hands, trying to keep himself still and then shook his head because he failed. “Dad, she is getting stronger, she is reading my mind.”

“No, son, she is not,” John's barely there voice was soothing, it remembered Angela of Sam, when he was gentle; the perfect lie. “Look, she knows a lot and guesses the rest, she can't read minds as long as she 's bound.” Words that spelled safe, when in reality he only stoked his sons fears.

“Then how does she know about the dreams?” Sam argued.

“What dreams?”

“Of Jess,” Sam said. “Jess dies in these dreams, the same way Mom did.”

John paused and Angela knew what he would do, he would use this against Sam. Carrot and Stick:

First hurt Sam by torturing Maddy, which he knew would upset Sam, if only because they were here to witness it.

And then give his son what Sam needed most, answers, explanation, reassurance the reason he found was sound-
“They’re just dreams, Sam.”

“But-”

“We won’t let anything happen to Jessica.”

That...broke the pattern Angela had predicted. John just passed up a perfectly good opportunity to make Sam believe he was seeing the future.

“They don’t feel like dreams, Dad.”

John swallowed and came closer, looked down at Sam, sitting there like he was five years old.

“Maybe they are memories,” John offered, “You were there too that night, you saw what I saw. The ritual we subjected you too can-”

“I had these dreams before – before I got my memories back.”

John didn’t say anything to that, he looked like he was in pain and instead of another try to make Sam see his dreams were just dreams, he said nothing. He stroked Sam's bangs from his eyes and leaned down to kiss his head and this comforting gesture, this was when Sam was convinced again, that he was doomed, was not human himself, a witch.

“Dad,” he sobbed, “What’s happening to me?”

Silence again.

But Sam stared up to his father, pleading an answer until John nodded,

“I’m gonna find out.”

And that was when Angela realized she had one fatal flaw in her perception: John maybe was manipulating his children, but he didn't know he did. What made him so good at it, what made his insanity so believable, was that he truly cared. He was so delusional, that he actually thought not saying out loud that he thought Sam was cursed by the devil did spare his son somehow, he thought his silence was mercy.

Like when he allowed Sam to take them outside while he and Dean would torture Maddy. Like they couldn't imagine her screams and her fear. Like their empathy was just as impaired as his.

~

While the three of them sat there, on the little log bench behind the cabin, far enough away so they couldn't hear the screams clearly anymore, Jess found out something scary about herself:

She as able to distance herself from what happened inside to the point where, when she shut her eyes not to see her Mom's ashen gray face, she could truly enjoy the fresh air. A warm wind eased the heat of the day. Cigarette smoke traveled by her and suggested the pastor had to stand guard nearby.

They probably poked and burned Maddy right now -Dean had a thing for fire- yet still the thought didn't feel as close as when she had been able to hear how they molested her.

Empathy wasn't just a reflex, you had to work for it. Like Sam did, like Sam forced himself to...sometimes.

Her thoughts always came back to Sam. How she had caught him looking at their wrists when he
shackled them together, her Mom in the middle. And even after all those weeks it still seemed to bother him, it was still hard to look at what had become of them – captives, victims, people with bruises on their wrists that just wouldn't fade anymore, even though Sam always carefully placed cloth between their skin and the edged metal.

She opened her eyes to brown earth growing into brown trees, spreading out into green crowns flooded with sunlight. High above them, dozens of dragonflies patrolled the clearing. She hadn't really been appreciating how beautiful the forest was when she had been running – her foot still hurt, the stitches itched like hell.

It would have been a really nice afternoon, if Bobby had not returned with game, strung up the doe and started to gut her.

She would forever associate the smell of mint with the scent of blood and deer urine, because her father had started to pluck some of the wild mint, growing to their feet. He fiddled with blossoms and leaves, arranged them so they looked strikingly similar to a sitting dragonfly and he offered it on the palm of his hand to Mom. He made her smile.

Mom laid her head on his shoulder and relaxed, for what seemed like the first time in an eternity.

Sam could have probably picked a better moment to appear right beside them like the silent giant he was.

Shy, he offered Jess to come with him, down to the lake.

“No,” her mom grasped her hand.

“It's fine, Mom,” she squeezed her hand. It was Sam.

“No, Angela is right. It was a stupid idea.”

“No, it wasn't.” She was not afraid of Sam – pissed, mad as hell – but Sam would never do anything that could make her afraid of him. “I wanted to talk to you anyhow.” Her mom squeezed her hand again, painfully so and Jess nodded a promise to her. She wouldn't do anything stupid, even though Sam would never hurt her, she wasn't going to push him anyhow...but then she caught eye of her father's gaze, how he got his hopes up and she said, “No. I'm not running without you. Never again.” She didn't care, Sam heard too, if he knew her at all, he should know she wouldn't leave her parents alone again. “I'm just trying to get away from the smell.” She nodded towards Bobby, who was arm deep in the abdominal cavity of the doe.

Sam opened her cuffs and offered her his hand, looking down at her foot.

“I'm fine,” she declined. Limping, but fine.

When they passed it, Jess couldn't help but think, that that animal smelled sick. She mentioned it to Sam. They made small-talk about how unnaturally resistant Bobby was to bad smells. Sam recounted a terribly stinking old dog Bobby had years ago, smelling so bad he repelled thieves with his presence alone.

On their way down, they passed more narrow tree trunks and rich undergrowth, all glinting with spiderwebs illuminated by the setting sun. She missed how Sam used to point things like that out for her -obvious stuff she had seen anyhow, but Sam pointed out what he found beautiful, because he wanted her have everything he had.
Chapter 30

On their way down, they passed more narrow tree trunks and rich undergrowth, all glinting with spiderwebs illuminated by the setting sun. She missed how Sam used to point things like that out for her - obvious stuff she had seen anyhow, but Sam pointed out what he found beautiful, because he wanted her have everything he had.

~ Jess slipped her hand into his and he felt his heart sink.

It was such a Jess-thing to do, first refuse his help and then take his hand anyhow. Because she wasn't as flinty as she set out to be, tough - sure, sometimes downright brutal, hitting hard, but never cutting deep. The only girl he had ever met who would start a bar brawl, was the same who ended up picking glass from the wound of the guy who had offended them.

The very first time she had pulled something like this, the thought had popped into his head, that he did not simply like her. He wanted to spend his life with her. They had known each other for less than a week. He didn't say anything then or later or ever mentioned marriage, though mostly because everyone else did all the time. It was the running gag for their friends, had started with Brady introducing them, Jessy, this is my future lawyer – Sam, meet your future wife.

“What you're thinking, Sam?”

“That I should have told you the truth.” Jess would have smacked Brady on the head for trying to set her up with a psycho and would have went on with her life. Would have never thought about Sam Winchester again.

He watched her step out on the dock, placing her foot careful, but not visibly limping. She walked to the end and gracefully sat down, tucking her left leg up and pulled the sock of her right foot to bath her calf in the mildly cool water.

He sat down beside her, but not as close as he used to and she noticed. She bit her lower lip and stared off at the bare surface of the lake, the unseen deepness of green waters. She bathed her eyes in the colors. Brownish-green was Jess' favorite, aside from pink. But she would deny liking pink on her dying bed.

Heaving a heavy sigh she glared up to him. “Can we for a minute...just pretend that you're not crazy and there's no reason for me to be pissed at you and no reason for you to give me these dewey-eyed looks?”

The impulse to laugh made him grit his teeth. No retreat, baby, no surrender – the motto Jess lived by. He loved her so much and it cost him everything not to say it out loud.

“What if...what if he never met Brady. “I just thought about him too.”

“Also, it would make more sense, if I got hurt because he's a klutz, than....that I got hurt running from you. Is that how it starts? You make up your own reality until it fits?”

“I guess so.” He wouldn't know.
“Well your reality sucks, babe, mine’s better. Especially since Brady owes me his life. Which even to him should be worth a six pack and the largest pizza on earth.”

“Yeah, that’s kinda the only argument I have left”, he told her: “Why would someone think up a horror show like my life?”

Jess had inched closer, very stealthy, and now she was leaning back against him. Didn’t turn around to look at him when she answer, “Because they are your family. Because you love them.”

An invalid argument, because, “I love you too, Angela and Tom are my family too. I would never put you through this hell to play along for someone’s fantasy.” He put his arms around her, give her at least something.

“I believe you,” Jess said, like that was the problem.

To her it was. He was just insane. Not cursed, not pursued by demons, not the reason everyone close to him was dead or in mortal danger.

“You're right-”

“I usually am,” she quipped.

“-my reality sucks. Are you letting me stay in yours for a while?” He stroked his fingertips over her sun-warmed shoulders and held her closer.

“As long as you want, Sam,” Jess promised and put her arms over his.

~

She allowed Sam to help her up, when Bobby called for them. They weren't supposed to stay outside the magic circle for so long. On the way up to the cabin, something moved in the undergrowth, black and skittish, and Sam put himself between her and the danger – which turned out to be a really sick raven. Dying probably. When birds looked slightly sick, it was usually almost over for them.

She is attracting death, Sam mumbled, to himself, not so much for Jess to hear. Because in her reality, Sam wasn't scared of a fifteen year old girl, but just bitching about Brady's irresponsibility.

It was hard to uphold the fantasy, because her parents weren't in on it. So Sam didn't stay with them, but made himself scarce. Wasn't there when his brother exited the cabin, followed by their father.

The sun had begun to set and Dean looked pale in the washed out light. He didn't just look it, he was pale.

Ohh, poor baby – he had been so stoked, when John had said, I want Dean with me.

Me? - like he got picked first by the team captain.

As always, you made an impression, John had given him a -kind-of-explanation. Those were John's special.

Madelyn had talked about Dean. Had threatened him. Probably thought John's favorite was the way to get herself a quick death.

They weren't aware now, Jess was sitting there against a tree – within grabbing distance of Bobby, of course – weren't aware she heard them:
“I’m proud of you,” John told Dean.

Dean glanced up wide-eyed, and then flinched away. Jess didn't even want to guess what John had asked of him, that made Dean uncomfortable even when Daddy praised him a good boy after they were done.

But then John drew Dean in by the neck, gentle, and whispered something and Dean relaxed.

Nodded grim, when his father looked him in the eye.

John's hand was a perfect fit to Dean's neck, he stroked his thumb over Dean's cheek and gave him a sad smile – it gave Jess the creeps when John was physically affectionate with his sons. Not for the same reason it made her sick when Dean pawed Sam, no John...it was simply uncanny, because it seemed so right. They weren't afraid of him, not really; not even when Sam and John were at each other's throats, not even then Sam's bodylanguage would spell fear, only anger. And Dean, even after John made him do whatever, he simply relaxed into his fathers touch. He wasn't needy, like he was with Sam. With his dad Dean was almost normal.

Just like hugging, patting, having his boys near, made John almost human.

John looked up, right at her. So much for not being aware of her. He had kind eyes. Sad eyes. Like Sam.

Who just walked around the corner and took in Dean's state, before he asked his father, “Will you finally kill her now?”

“Day after tomorrow, son, at the hour of divine mercy.”

“I can't go back in there, Dad, she makes my skin crawl.”

John nodded, understanding, fatherly. Patient for once, he explained:

“She's gotten strong again, that's why we have to wait for a day when the sun does not share the sky with the moon.”

“I know, it's just...”

Sam knew. Like it was obvious you should kill witches on what was that? -a day where the sun does not share the sky with the moon? What did that even mean?

“What is it, Sam?” John asked concerned, when Sam was silently chewing on something.

First he shook his head, then, “She doesn't really seem to be afraid, she lies in there like a cat who got the cream,” he was livid, truly scared, “Maybe this is her plan, maybe-”

“Son, I got this. We're safe. It's her presence you feel, nothing more.”

Sam bought it. He didn't see the look Dean exchanged with their father, nor the hinted shake of head from John reminding Dean to be a good boy, Sammy didn't need to know everything. How had John once called it? The benefits of lying?

...
Sam bought it. He didn't see the look Dean exchanged with their father, nor the hinted shake of head from John reminding Dean to be a good boy. Sammy didn't need to know everything. How had John once called it? The benefits of lying?

Tonight Bobby and Dean cooked a hearty supper, two menus. Mashed potatoes with roasted liver and onions for the one's with the better stomach or chislic with cold beer for the more delicate – Dean's idea. He feigned impatience and impending starvation, as if liver did take that long.

Later the real reason revealed to be his uneasy stomach, when he complained about the foul stench coming from the back room. But really, what did he expect if they left a girl in her own waste?

Madelyn didn't get anything to eat. Or any water, until Mom threatened she wouldn't eat until Sam had given Maddy something to drink.

Dean argued with him, to take on the task, but Sam wouldn't have any of it. When they returned from the back room, Sam was placid, but Dean glared at Mom, telling her,

“Just so you know, she spit the water out.”

“Dean,” Sam warned him to leave them alone.

After this encounter, everyone calmed down, they ate and afterwards Jess felt the first chill of the night settle in. She holed up under the blanket with her mom and watched Sam replace the withered mint with a fresh bunch – the leaves crackled like they were completely dry already.

And they had to be, because after Sam lit a few white candles, he held the stems over the flame and they went ablaze.

The sweet minty smoke filled the whole room.

They sat close around the small table, huddled together, just like Jess and her parents were huddled together, both parties caught up in their own worlds. The darker it got, the more the bed with it's lamp and the table with the candles became like islands that drifted apart. Jess watched the table like through a telescope:

A bottle went around, and after their glasses were filled, the bottle stayed with Dean, who drank straight from it. Sam watched him worried, the little furrow between his brows. They were silent, antsy.

Then something weird happened:

A collective shiver went through them. Whereupon the pastor got up and left.

He came back with his guitar and told them song and praise did cast out the cold.

“Nuthin' spirit'l, tha' 'll only rile hea up”, Bobby reminded them mumbling.

“Is that so?” the pastor snarked at Bobby.

“Gonna strum something hip, old man?” Dean snarked back, because some days Dean was just as protective of Bobby as the other way around.
“You mean something like this,” the pastor asked and started to play...

That was unmistakably Kashmir by Led Zeppelin.

The pastor didn't play the whole piece, only about the first minute, until he earned himself standing ovations and applause from Dean, “All those years you've been holding out on me, Pastor.”

“Who do you think introduced John to fine tunes?”

“That would've been Mary,” John argued good-naturedly, “You just bugged me with Zeppelin until I got used to it.”

The pastor toasted John and after draining his glass told them, “I got one you all should know.” He began...

On a long and lonesome highway, east of Omaha

And actually at the second line they all joined in,

You can listen to the engine moanin' out its one-note song
You can think about the woman, or the girl you knew the night before

Even Sam,

But your thoughts will soon be wandering the way they always do
When you're riding sixteen hours and there's nothing much to do
And you don't feel much like riding, you just wish the trip was through

but it was Dean's voice clear as a bell that rang above the gruff gravel of the older men's voices

Say, here I am, on a road again
There I am, up on the stage
Here I go, playing the star again
There I go, turn the page

and soon Sam was mostly watching Dean, mouthing along well-known words, while Dean sang sounds and emotions and Jess saw what Sam saw.

Well, you walk into a restaurant, strung-out from the road
And you feel the eyes upon you as you're shaking off the cold
You pretend it doesn't bother you but you just want to explode
Most times you can't hear 'em talk, other times you can
All the same old clichés: "Is that a woman or a man?"
And you always seem outnumbered, you don't dare make a stand

Sam's eyes narrowed, like he was there in these last verses, had lived them, the eyes on him, on
Dean, the feeling of being the stranger and he became quiet and watched his brother sing the
reprise with adorable enthusiasm.

Dean went on to sing about the hard live of a rock star on tour, a life on the road. He hit all the high
notes losing Bobby and John and when the song was over, he smiled to himself, like the song
wasn't about how lonely it was.

“Man,” Sam shook his head, “I hate this song.”

“Then why ’r ya smilin, ya goofball?” Dean laughed at him.

Sam smiled only more and slung an arm around Dean and kissed his cheek.

Dean's eyes glittered in the candlelight like they were on fire. He snuggled closer to Sam and
asked,

“Hey Jim, wha'twas this old Irish folk song you always sang for Sammy when he was a wee
thing?”

“You have to be a bit more specific than old Irish folk song.”

Dean rolled his eyes, “It goes something like this:

Would you go, lassie, go?

And we'll all go together
Where the wild mountain thyme
Grows around the blooming heather
Would you go, lassie, go?

Dean's voice was something to behold. The pastor had let him finish the verse before he started to
play the melody.

And I will build my love a bower
And yon pure crystal fountain
And around it I will place
All the colors of the mountain
Would you go, lassie, go?

And we'll all go together
Where the wild mountain thyme
Grows around the blooming heather
Would you go, lassie, go?

It was like the look of adoration Sam had fixed on him went right into Dean's voice...

And If my true love's gone
I will surely find another
And to her I will sing
Things that make her know I want her
Would you go, lassie, go?
And we'll all go together
Where the wild mountain thyme
Grows around blooming heather
Would you go, lassie, go?

Sam made this funny little frown he did when he was especially mischievous.

“Wha'?” Dean poked him.

“That's Scottish, Dean, not Irish.”

“You always hafta find somethin' to bitch 'bout, dontcha?” Dean said and managed to catch his brother in a hold to ruffle Sam's hair as thoroughly as possible.

Sam grinned so wide his dimples multiplied.

Jess wished it would've been easier to hate someone who made Sam so happy.

Someone who loved with such abandon it made him beautiful, made one blind to the faults of this love.

It was hard to remember -when one watched Dean sing love-song-lullabys to Sam- that beauty, wasn't the same thing as goodness.
Chapter 32

~

The temperature dropped overnight and the cabin cooled down extremely fast. Angela guessed it wasn't built to retain the heat. But, as with everything unpleasant, Maddy was blamed for the chill. Sam replaced the candles religiously, and made hourly smoke sacrifices – which did at least help a little with the smell that had developed, since they were not allowing Maddy to use the toilet.

But both magic as well as the fire in the fireplace did little to make them warmer and soon Sam got into a new argument with his father to move them somewhere else, away from 'the witch'. Not once Sam used Madelyn's name.

His father wouldn't have any of it. They needed to stay restrained.

Instead they got hot coffee and blankets, and Sam wrapped the off-black hooded sweatshirt, the one he usually wore like a security blanket, around Jess' shoulders. Her daughter hadn't packed anything warmer than a T-shirt, but that wasn't the reason why Sam gave her the hoodie.

It was a different form of magic – the one with actual function. The same magic by which Angela only had to ask Sam to get Maddy water and he did it.

Compassion.

He never argued that Maddy wouldn't swallow it, he never brought up the topic that Maddy wanted to die, because he knew it would hurt them. He was deeply compassionate and terribly scared for them. He barely left Jessica's side and after a while her daughter would pull him close and let herself be held.

Angela wished she knew what it did to her to find comfort with Sam after everything he had done. But Jessy was so silent since their escape failed...

So it was cold and naturally Angela assumed that was why the men were busy with gathering wood, until Sam started to question why all the wood for the pyre had to be perfectly dry...

“You wanna do what?” Sam asked like he hadn't heard his father the first time he said, that they would burn Maddy at the stake.

“It is the only way,” the pastor tried to calm Sam.

But Sam shrugged his hand off, “You can't do that. That is gruesome!”

“We have no other choice,” John said stern, “With the life she lead, she is going straight to hell. And she knows it, that is why she is not afraid of dying. Even if her soul gets trapped in our world, she is a witch, she'll make one hell of an angry spirit. We can't risk her reporting to the demon.”

“So we burn her remains,” Sam shrugged and remembered Angela that it wasn't about saving Maddy's life. Sam simply didn't want to witness her screaming prolonged death.

“Doesn't always do the job,” Bobby argued, “She could latch on anything left behind. A witch 'specially -an amulet, -stored away hair, anything really. We can't risk that.”

“No,” Sam said, he was pacing, like an animal caught between the three older men. Shooting Dean
a glance, who was sitting at the table, following the conversation unconcerned.

Sam shook his head again. “We execute and bury her at a crossroad,” he offered, “To trap her spirit there.”

The pastor shook his head sadly, “We are not talking about a criminal with a potentially violent spirit. Witches practice at crossroads—”

“I know, but she doesn't serve Hecate or other crossroad-gods,” Sam argued.

“We don't know that Sam,” John matched his tone. “Demons frequent crossroads too and I know for sure, that this one made deals.”

Sam paused, asked more timid, “You do?”

“You haf'nt told'em?”

“Not now, Bobby,” John sounded unnerved.

“I thought we're done with tha' shit,” Bobby charged him, “And now I hear you ain't even tellin' them-”

“It's private.”

“Private my ass!”

“Would you two shut up?!” Sam became livid, “We are not burning someone alive!!” He tore at his hair. “How are you even sure it's going to keep her from reporting back? Like Bobby said, burning does not always get rid of a spirit.”

“There is a qualitative difference between burning cleansed remains and ritual death by burning,” his father explained, calm again.

“Says who?” Sam turned to Bobby, “Have you ever read something like that, or have prove?”

Bobby shrugged his shoulders, prompting Sam to turn to his father again:

“Where does your intel come from?” he questioned.

“From two decades of research what it does to a human soul to be burnt alive,” John answered with frightening intensity, “There is little else I have so much material on.”

The sudden muteness that had settled over all of them, that had driven out Dean's devil-may-care attitude and quenched Sam's anger - Angela couldn't make sense of it, until she remembered, that two decades ago Sam's mother burned to death too.

“To give you the short version,” John said calm, with layers of emotion underneath, “You just have to look at who is executed by fire: Witches, traitors, deviants or rebels, those who were driven by something so strong, they were considered a threat even in death.

Because it is the only way to impair a spirit for a sustained period of time.”

“Mom wasn't a witch,” Sam stated softly, half a question.

“No,” John confirmed, and then added grim, with a hint of- “But that demon sure was afraid of her.” - pride.
“Why?”

“That's not important,” John tried to stifle Sam's scrutiny.

And only riled him up, “What do you mean-”

“She was a Champell,” Bobby answered instead.

“Singer!” John was furious.

“Champell was Mom's maiden name, so?” Dean expressed.

“This,” John warned Bobby, “Is none of your business.”

“The hell ' is,” Bobby chewed him out, “Your boys have a right to know! They need to know. There is no good reason but your stupid ego-”

“Know what?!” Sam interrupted.

But both men stayed quiet.

“John, Bobby is right,” the pastor got in between them, “I don't know what it is about Mary you don't want them to know, but I know when you act on sentimentality. Now is not the time to make mistakes, no matter how much you want to preserve her memory.”

John swayed, more than that he took a deliberate step away from Bobby, ignored the pastor.

“Dad?” Dean got up and came closer – he wasn't asking for anything, he was simply concerned for his father. He would have let the topic go unquestioned.

It was Sam whose eyes, as he finally met them, forced John to answer:

“Historically speaking the Champells were -before they were slaughtered one by one- they were the oldest hunter-clan in America.”

“Hunter as in hunter?” Sam inquired skeptic.

John nodded, “Mary's great grandfather was the first to kill a Rawhead by artificial electrocution.”

“Mom was a hunter?” Dean matched Sam's skepticism.

“Raised in the life,” John answered.

“And you knew this,” Dean was upset, “And you never...” he stopped and made a non-committal sound.

“She didn't tell you?” Sam assumed.

John nodded and then a small smile played around his lips, “I always thought her father didn't like me because I was only a mechanic. Looks like it was more about me being as civilian as they come -back then.”

“How did you find out?” Sam wanted to know.

But John tried to escape this answer with a carefree shrug, that reminded one of Dean.

“John don't be stubborn,” Bobby tried almost gentle, “If I found the pattern and you found the
pattern, it's only a matter of time till the boys do too. Ten years is a typical time you get in a pact—"

“Mary did not sell her soul!” John got loud without actually getting loud. “She was burned, not taken by hellhounds. She is not in hell!”

“Wait,” Dean edged in, “—wait, you lost me. Why are we thinking Mom made a pact?” he asked Bobby.

Who seemed to know that he had exhausted John's compliance and therefore held his tongue.

“Dad?” Dean insisted, his worry more commanding than Sam's anger.

His father swallowed and nodded and explained, “She survived exactly ten years longer than all the other Champells.”

“That would mean...” Sam started, but then was reluctant to finish his conclusion. “She let her whole family die, to buy herself ten more years?”

“No,” John denied, “Mary wouldn't have done that. I don't know what kind of deal she made, but...” he shook his head.

Angela wondered if this was all true. If Sam's mother really had grown up with these beliefs or if John just reinvented history.

“But that doesn't make any sense,” Sam pointed out, “You said that this demon came for me, did something to me, that she died because of me! If she was a hunter she would have known how to protect us...” the muscles of his face moved under his skin, unsure what expression to form and then he bared his teeth and said:

“...unless, that was what she sold...”

John shook his head, growled, advanced, “Sam,” his son's name a last warning.

But the realization was too strong for Sam to stop, even when John was face to face with him he kept talking—“...she sold me.”

John shoved him against the nearest wall to shut him up, Dean, at the same time, came in between, “Dad, don't! Don't.” He broke his fathers grip on Sam

“It's true,” Sam said to John's face, because John's reaction just confirmed it for him.

“But it's the only explanation.”

“I said shut up!”

“Dean,” John intercepted, because now it was Dean who was close to hurting Sam, “Your brother is right.”

His father's concession knocked the air out of Dean. His arm stayed pressed against Sam's chest as an afterthought, the strain gone and he looked at his father, like he had betrayed him. Like he begged him to take it back.

John shook his head slightly, like he wished he could take it back too, “Sammy is right. But you have to keep in mind: Mary was nineteen years old when this deal was made. Her parents were
killed. She was alone, she made a mistake. The demon somehow tricked her, she didn't know what she did. That is the only explanation.”
“Dammit,” Dean cursed, and made Tom startle - adrenaline was pumping through him still and he watched like through a looking glass how Dean fixed Maddy back on the bed, gagged her again; it took him a moment to realize Dean's curse had been one of relief.

“Talk about dumb luck, huh? What were you doing inside anyhow?” he asked his brother.

“Woke up from a nightmare,” Sam explained monosyllabic why he hadn't slept outside like ordered, why he walked in on Jess' and Tom's effort to free Maddy.

He had known it wouldn't go down as Jessica planned, but that everything would go wrong...

Well not everything, the pastor would not hurt anyone in the near future and Maddy was still alive. Barely. Sam had almost cut off her arm at the elbow. Tom gagged on the memory of all this blood splashing down on Jess, because the girl wouldn't let go of Jessica's throat.

Maddy had lost it completely when they had cut off the ropes – dehydrated and psychotically scared she hadn't realized they had tried to help her. First she wouldn't come with them and then, when Jess had went to free Angela, Tom witnessed how Maddy started to pull the sickly long needles out of her hands. He had tried to stop her and got punched in the face. When he had been able to see clearly again, he saw his daughter on her knees, choked by Maddy – her fear lending the young girl brutal strength.

That was the scene Sam had walked in on.

There went Jessica's plan to convince Sam that Maddy was not a threat.

“He needs a doctor,” John finished his examination on the pastor.

“I know someone in the area who doesn't ask for names,” Sam offered coolly.

“Really?” Dean grinned.

“What? Just because I went to college, doesn't mean I forgot all my basic training.”

“Well, until you know...you forgot,” Dean quipped.

But Sam failed to smile along.

Dean caught the hint and shut up.

Until Bobby brought Jessica from the bathroom, most of the blood washed off her face, and John asked Bobby to take the pastor to the address Sam provided – then Dean realized how badly hurt the pastor really was and turned to Tom:

“Did you have to hit him so hard?”

“Hy dad didn't do that,” Jessy's hoarse croak sounded terrible, “Hh did and yes, 'ad to, -only did
what *Hh* had to. If *Hh* had had more time, *Hh* would've tied Holy Jim to a bed and prirrigged him with needles. But not all of us have to luxury to get our freagg on like that.”

Dean's eyes narrowed, but before he actually could answer something to Jess' provocation, Sam stood in his line of sight, tall and straight, using these three inches he had over Dean to look down on him. “Don't. In her position we would have done the exact same thing,” he sounded detached, “Actually I think it was an impressively brutal attack and you would think so too, if it hadn't struck someone we care about.”

“She almost got herself killed,” Dean said, an attempt to belittle Jessica.

“But that's not Jess's fault, is it?” Sam glanced over to his father.

“She is still taking the monster's side, even after-”

“You don't get it, do you?” Sam interrupted his brother sharply, “You can't treat captives like self-reliant people, you can't start to blame them for fighting back, or you will start to mistreat them.” He paused, lips tight, accusatory and with a tip of his head he added, “Like your average sadistic prison guard,”

-Tom had been wrong, Sam wasn't cold, he was seething-

“Not Jess almost got herself killed, *we* almost got her killed.”

Dean didn't look like he understood a word of what Sam was telling him, like he only endured it because his little brother was upset, like Sam only took the blame for 'misbehavior' to spite him.

“Dean?” Bobby asked, “Gimme a hand with Jim, would'ya?”

Sam waited for Dean to be out of the room before he told his father, quite calm too, “I told you, what would happen if you left them close to the witch.”

It was like he dared his father to say the wrong thing.

But John was not like Dean, he wasn't as straightforward, he bent, “Yes, you did and I didn't listen,” -to snap back and ask like he cared, like he was listening now:

“You said you had a nightmare about this?”

-like he was not pushing the conversation away from how Jess got hurt, to how Sam had coincidentally managed to get there in time.

“No,” Sam understood his father's implication, “I just couldn't sleep. I went to check and re-check the saltlines and the sigils, because like you always say, there is no such thing as too safe. But I still couldn't sleep, because they're not even close to safe in here, with her.”

“What do you want me to do, son? Move her? Now, hours before we kill her?”

“I want you to end this.”

John studied Sam, as if, just like Tom he wasn't sure how Sam meant that.

“But I know you would if you could,” Sam took a deep breath and by that banished the emotion from his voice again, “So what I really want now, is that this witch dies screaming.”

John tipped his chin up, the hint of a nod.
Tom shared a look with his wife. She swallowed and nodded. She didn't need to say it. They would be next.

Actually, Tom was pretty sure he would be next.

Come morning Jessica allowed him to take another look at her throat. It was bad. She was injured, she would have needed proper care, but other than Jim she couldn't leave here. The demons searched actively for her, for Sam – he didn't say all of that of course.

He bit his tongue too, the first three times Angela begged him to get the witch to a hospital.

But the fourth time...

“She stopped bleeding immediately after Dean applied the tourniquet. The wound looked worse than it was.”

“She will lose the arm, Sam,” Angela argued.

He had to do this now – it would only make things worse the longer she clung to hope – so he looked Angela in the eye and said, “Three pm today, she will be dead and then that won't matter anymore.”

He meant to get up and leave, but Jess had stealthily snuck herself under his arm again. She hadn't slept much and seemed tired now, exhausted.

He held her closer, the fleecy fabric of his own hoodie draped over her he felt it before she said,

“I'm khold,” hard sound softened to spare her sore throat. She buried her cool, wet nose in his neck, fit her familiar body against his and she sniffled. What if she got sick? Sam thought and then for the first time since he had heard the crash and started to run towards the cabin, knowing something terrible had happened, for the first time since he had seen the witch's hand wrapped around Jess' throat, he allowed himself to feel the panic.

It had him shivering and let the words slip, “I almost lost you.”

“She didn't mean to hu't me, Sam, she is just a khid.” Jess turned in his arms, both hands, warm on his chest – how were they still so warm when her torso felt frozen, was she feverish?

She looked at him and it took him a long time to identify the feeling behind the tightness around her mouth and lack of shine in her eyes, the rust of tears that wouldn't come...it was bitterness. It took him so long because he had never seen Jess bitter, which was close to broken and when she said,

“I love you.”

the conviction behind it startled Sam. She loved him even though, “You believe I'm going to murder a kid, an innocent and still-”

“You're not ghoin' to do that,” she said, shook her head, lacked conviction which made this:

A plea.

Burned by the fact that he reduced Jess to this, to begging, he tried to let go, get away.
“You should’ve killed her’ – when she attacked me,” Jessica held on to his arm, “You didn’t. You don’t want to do this, Sam, you know that Maddy is not a witch, you know.”

“What I know is that ‘Maddy’s’ name is Magda, she is over a hundred years old and has promised herself to a demon when she was seven. So if there had been anything good and pure in her, it’s long gone. The only thing she cares for is power, as all witches do.

I don’t want her to be burnt to death because I can’t prove to you what she is. I wrecked my brain, but there is no safe way...I can’t conjure a ghost here for you to see. Especially not as long as the witch is alive, but even after she’s gone; any spirit could give up our pos-”

“Sam! This is crazy,” Jess stopped him, “Do you even hear yourself?!”

Yeah, he did, he knew what he sounded like, he just...he couldn't bear how desperate Jess clung to the hope he wouldn’t be able to kill something that looked like a kid...was a kid, in her eyes, “I’m sorry.”

~ Why did she even try to argue?

She let go of Sam's arm and then...he stayed, cradled her close again, kissed her forehead-

--this was why she tried--

--and he put touches as light as a feather on her to guide their mouths together.

By this kiss she felt her heart take root in her body. She would save Sam and if it was the last thing she did.

Dean had seen the kiss, had followed their conversation, was silently suffering for Sammy, who was so torn.

Sam couldn't be moved, he was too scared. But Dean...

“Boys!”

John called them outside, unhurried, probably had another chore for them.

...Dean. He had no one who protected him, now that Bobby was gone.

Sam let go of her, to follow his father's call, was the first out of the door, Dean close behind but not close enough-

“You’re gonna stop this,” she said to him.

She had confused him enough, that he really let his father wait and asked, “Stop what?” misunderstanding, thinking she meant anything he did right now.

“You're going to make sure Maddy doesn't die. I don't know how you do it, gall the ghosts, help her escape, tell ya dad you had a vision she is a saint, anythin', but you're gonna stop this 'ight now.”

Dean was just shaking his head about her, ready to leave-

“O’ I’m going to tell your father that you molest Sam evah since he was a lil’.”

His back straightened and he glanced outside before he shut the door, and then when he walked...
towards them checked through the window again, where Sam was and suddenly he was in Jess' space like he never was before when he had gotten angry and it was like a physical sensation of violence on her skin just from the rush of his movement, but he didn't stop there, he grabbed at her neck-

her mom cried out a No,

-but all he did really was pull her up an inch, make her body work against her instinct to fight or flee, but stay still to avoid more damage-

“I warned you, about making things harder for Sam,” he said softly. “This is the last time I do. Next threat out of your mouth, I put you on my shit list. Right beside that bitch we will barbecue extra crispy. Got it?”

She felt his breath on her cheek and swallowed painfully against the revulsion, to tell him, “I doubt it will make the things ha'der for Sam when John heas what you do to him,” she had to swallow again, her mom whimpered, begged her to shut up, but she couldn't. She had known he would hurt her, but this girl was just a kid. Sam would never come back from killing a kid. “Ya not doing this foa' Sam. Ya sgared of your fathah,” she did her best to gloat and not let him see fear, “Of what he would do to you if he knew you a deviant, a monster-”

Dean laughed in her face. He took his hand off her and straightened. Why did he-?

He nodded and agreed, “You're right, he would be furious, he would tear me a new one. But not before I blow out your dad's kneecaps.”

He smiled at her like this was a game and he just showed his hand, knowing from the start he would win. “What?” he sneered. “Thought I would take it out on you? Do something Sam can't forgive? How stupid do you think I am?” He took a step back and the grimace of a smile was replaced by calm determination. “I know how far I can push Sam. You're off limits. Your parents aren't. You mess with my family - I mess with yours.”

The door opened. “What's keepin-” Sam started, took in the scene and then asked, “What going on?”

Dean gave it a shrug and replied casually, “She is freaking out over the,” he made quotation marks with his fingers: “-Girl-”

Sam focused on her and she looked away. She could have told him, that Dean had hurt her, had threatened her dad – Sam would have known she wasn't lying. But he would side with Dean, would protect him. Because he loved him.

Sam was someone who consciously did terrible things for the people he loved – Dean had made him so.

She felt Dean's eyes on her before he left, but she didn't meet them, for she knew they would betray what she thought:

She may not be able to save Sam, but she knew now that she was perfectly able to kill Dean with a smile on her face.
Chapter 34

She felt Dean's eyes on her before he left, but she didn't meet them, for she knew they would betray what she thought:

She may not be able to save Sam, but she knew now that she was perfectly able to kill Dean with a smile on her face.

~ The hours rushed by, Angela tried not to look at the clock. Tried not to listen to John discussing the finer details of murder with his older son:

How much fire accelerant was the right dose so Maddy would not die too slow and asphyxiate from the fumes and therefore not die from the fire – death by fire was the very point of the ritual. And on the other hand the ritual required enough time to say the right words, so they couldn't just drench her in lighter fluid, because that would have been too fast. A dilemma. Fortunately Dean liked the challenge and figured out how to arrange what little dry wood they had found, so it would meet his father's demands.

What a talented smart boy. John didn't even acknowledge it. But Dean seemed fine – the absence of criticism was already the highest form of praise he expected from his father.

It was two minutes before Three.

Angela looked at her daughter, who was calm, who held her father's hand, who was crying, because neither of them found the courage to speak to Maddy in these last hours of her life.

Angela felt hollow, she had no fight left in her, but her daughter...Jessica had always possessed a strength that couldn't be taught. As her mother she had nurtured it, but she didn't pride herself to have put it there. Still, there were no other words to express what she was feeling, so she said, “I'm proud of you.”

Jessy frowned a bit and then said nothing.

Maybe she should have done so too, but instead she said, “You did everything you could.”

Jess shook her head, “I kshould've listened to you, I kshould've outrun Sam, gotten the police here, might have been too late too, but I kshould've done that.” She stared straight ahead for another second, before she shrugged and threw an arm over Angela, holding her. “But I know what you mean, Mom. Just don't ask me to 'un without you guys again. I 'an't do that. I only did be'cause I was shua Sam wouldn't hua't you.”

A lone tear rolled down her cheek.

Sam. Who loitered behind his brother and his father, when they came to get Maddy.

Sam, who looked at them haunted, but wasn't moved by Maddy's mad, scared growl, “You think killing me will stop anything, John?!?” her voice was thin from dehydration.

They dragged her into view, “Too little, too late!” Maddy struggled so urgent, they had to carry her to move her, “We got to you 22 years ago and placed a snake in your midst!” she spit at Sam and then laughed at John, “You lost both your boys years ago, when Sammy seduced his brother, sweet-talked him into sucking his little dick-”
Dean backhanded her hard, “Shut -the fuck- up!”

But Maddy just laughed – she was only skin and bones covered in dirt and blood, but her body reared up all its strength and she was thrashing wildly, slipped Dean for a second, who muttered a curse, while his father pressed her onto the floor.

They waited it out for her strength to fade into spasms and then a mad hissing whisper erupted from the shaking girl,

“Samuel! I can see it in your eyes, a seers eyes, a demon in the flesh, a god among insects. There's nothing you can't have if you step up and take it. Kill your father before he kills you and I will show you anything you need to know to rule this world!”

“You're scared,” he dropped the words down at Maddy from above, with disdain and Angela didn't have to look at Sam to hear the smile.

“Don't be foolish Samuel,” they pulled her up again and Sam opened the door for them, while she kept screaming at him, “The hordes of hell will kill anyone you love, just to get you angry and break you in for Lucifer. I can teach you to protect them. Teach you magic to make Dean forget all his pain, get Jessica to trust you again, love you, share you with your brother, make them get along...”

That was the last they heard of Maddy, before the silence.

Before the screams. Angela covered her ears and for the first time since had been a young girl, she prayed.

~

Billows of smoke carried through the open windows. The smell was harder to shut out than the screams. Not that Tom had tried to cover his ears. It wouldn't worked anyhow and it made no difference, muted or not, as long as he lived he would never forget the sound of it. There were no words to describe it, but he understood now, how the mythology of hell -of the most terrible place human imagination came up with- was all about burning souls.

As soon as the screams stopped, Sam and his brother re-appeared. Started to clean Maddy's room, carried out the soiled mattress and carried in buckets of water and soon the smell of bleach mixed with the smoke and the moistened smell of watered down human waste.

The brothers worked together as always, like one person, not one disturbance, until Dean cursed silently about Witches, so damn unsanitary and Why they have to spit blood everywhere.

Then Sam paused. He didn't look at them, but Tom saw it going through his head. Dean probably didn't know how insane he sounded, how vicious – but Sam was still bothered how they perceived him, how they perceived his brother.

Sam let Dean clean up the fresh stains of spit trailing Maddy's last steps. He looked outside for a moment, tense and unmoving. Then,

“Dean?”

“Hmm?”

“Dad's gonna take a while, right?”

“s gonna watch the fire,” his brother answered eyes to the floor, on his task.
Sam nodded and his gaze grazed them on the bed, and then wandered between them and Dean. “That last thing she said about you, it's not true, right?” he asked his brother, “You didn't threaten Tom, did you?”

Dean got up from the floor and went to the bathroom to wash his hands. Made his non-answer answer for him and the silence ease Sam into realization...followed by the question:

“What the fuck is wrong with you?”

Sam actually sounded like he was surprised, like his brother had not threatened them before. Pointed a gun at Angela-

Dean just heaved a heavy sigh.

“Nothing, Sam,” Angela spoke up, “Your brother just sees reality a bit clearer than he lets on,” she took Dean's silence and ran with it, “He knows these things are pretend, he knows given the right circumstances he can make it work for him. Make us into demons who sprout lies about him. So that your father doesn't believe a word Jess would say.”

Tom held his breath. This wasn't wise, he didn't know why Angela did this now -come between the brothers, try to turn Sam against Dean.

“He didn't mean it, Angela,” Sam sounded gentle, reasonable – at least he hadn't taken offense, Tom thought, while Sam kept trying to reassure them- “He wouldn't hurt you, he...” -trailing off, because he had seen the same tell on Dean, Tom had seen:

Raised eyebrows that said Sam didn't know what he was talking about.

“Dean?”

“Sammy-” his brother tried.

But Sam grew livid, “They're civilians!”

Dean met Sam's anger staying still, letting it come. They had stepped close again, like they couldn't talk over a distance. Dean shook his head and Sam answered nonverbal, bristling from anger, pushing closer, demanding for Dean to see this his way.

But Dean turned his head to the side, “Dad can't find out about us. He wont shrug it off like Bobby does,” he kept shaking his head, “He would-...”

That Dean didn't speak on, that Dean was too scared to even speculate, took the wind out of Sam's sails and yet, he huffed, “I don't care if he understands or not, you can't threaten them like that. Don't you know-” Sam mirrored Dean's head-shake with more edge. “He can't do anything to you, he would have to go through me for that.”

Sam had made his actual point -that Dean and him stood together. Sam wasn't actually that angry, that Dean had threatened them, but only due to the reason why.

~

Jess watched with detached fascination how Dean didn't even dismiss Sam's readiness to protect him.

Dean just smiled and touched Sam's face, stroked the bangs from his forehead, all gentle indulgence.
“What, you think I can't take him?” Sam said and sounded every bit the little boy Dean saw in him.

“Sammy, Dad can't find out.”

“You won't have to be scared anyhow, I wouldn't admit to it-”

“I'm not scared of Dad,” Dean interrupted Sam's promise, “I always knew he wouldn't approve, but I did it anyhow. If he knows or not, doesn't change anything for me.”

Now she was actually interested where this was going. So Dean was cool about his father knowing? – hadn't looked like that to her this morning.

“You don't care if he knows?” Sam was as skeptic.

“I always knew it's not what he wants for us. He wants us to be normal. He never wanted this life for us, not even for me, no matter how well it suits me,” Dean shrugged, a little bit helpless, took a step back from Sam, from the emotion betrayed by his own voice. And Sam had taken the step forward, like in a studied dance, like he knew Dean needed it to keep talking, and really- “He wants for us to see things through to the end and come out of it alive. But what he wants and what he needs to do...

He needs me to stay alive, he won't let me to fight in this war, that's why he ordered me to stay behind, babysitting you and them. He needs me to live,” he said again, amazement dubbed over with dread.

“And you think,” Sam asked gentle, “-that would change if he knew-”

“No, Sam, you don't hear me. He told me to stay safe, not just to keep you safe, but to stay alive. So that no matter what happens, someone remains who can make sure you don't fall to the enemy; he didn't say it in so many words, but you know I read the man like a book. He made sure I know what he needs me to do if push comes shove – if you turn against us.”

Sam stepped back, “I would never-”

“I know.” -and Dean forward, made sure the bubble they created around them would not burst. By physical closeness alone Dean managed to hold Sam together – after he just point blank told him, that their father had ordered his death. It was beautiful, in a deterring way, Jess mused, like shiny black spiders, or a bared beating heart during surgery.

Sam's shoulders were shaking, Dean leaned closer.

“He thinks I'm-”

“No, you're not, Sammy. But Dad can't know that it doesn't matter to me. That it isn't even a question what you do or become. I will never be found at the opposite side from you. He can't know, or he would put someone else in charge of you and then I'd have to kill that person. And I would. No matter who it is. I don't care if that makes me a monster-”

“Dean-” Sam protested, but his brother suddenly pushed him away.

“I would go to hell for you,” Dean said and left.

Sam was left with this, these burdens of hate and love, his father who wanted him dead and his brother who wouldn't let him die. Jess saw it in the curve of Sam's back, the pressure of being caught in between and for the first time she understood why Sam considered suicide – because
death was better than this, than being caught in between with no end of this nightmare in sight.

“Sam?” her mom spoke up, “I want you to acknowledge what he just said-”

“Not now, Angela,” Sam ground out between his teeth-

“Yes, now,”

-Jess knew why her mother tried – so she didn't stop her, Mom was scared Jess would do something stupid again, if she didn't-

“You can't turn this one around,” her mother pushed Sam, “He said literally he would kill anyone who comes between the two of you and you still tell yourself that we, that Jessica will come out of this unharmed?!”

Sam shot her a look, opened his mouth and for another second he chewed on something hateful to say, before devastation took hold of him again and he shook his head, “You don't know what you're talking about. Dean isn't-...

Do you know what it means for someone like us to go to hell? Hell? Even demons are scared of being sent back there. Dean didn't just say he would just kill or die for me, he said he would damn himself for me!

So don't worry, I acknowledge just fine what is happening around me, I know I can't expect any of us come out of it unharmed. I know we already scarred you with this,” he pointed outside at the pyre. “I also know your life will never be the same,” his shoulders heaved, like Sam was trying to crawl inside himself and hide, “You wont be able to go home – my father hunted this thing almost as long as I'm alive and before him my mother's parents hunted it, so why should it end with me? Within my lifetime? I wish it would end with me. I wish I could do anything to make this stop.”

Her mom was shaking her head – she didn't understand and therefore said:

“You can. Stop to believe into it and it will stop to be real. Jessica will be able to go home. You will be able to help your brother, he wont have to hurt anyone again. Maybe in time he will even get better.”

“Mom.” Jess touched her with the purpose to stop her, before her mother could talk more about Dean and make it worse for Sam, “Leave him be.”

His love for Dean wasn't something that made Sam better, see reason, do the right thing. Love didn't make Sam stronger, thanks to Dean's teachings, love was a weakness to Sam.

A wound he would rather allow to kill him, than to sew it shut and see it vanishing as a scar.

She saw gratitude in Sam's eyes, when he checked their shackles, before he left. She met it with a smile, feigned pity, so he would not see compassion had little to do with why she had silenced her mother.

He wasn't to know that she would burn this wound out with the exact same dispassionate ruthlessness Dean had showed Maddy.

There was a lot to learn from Dean. She had realized that, as soon as the horror faded and she understood that Dean wouldn't hurt any of them in an outburst of rage. No matter how hard she pushed, Dean had never lost it, not once.
She had been so stupid, so blind, not to see it before, but when he had grabbed her by the throat and avoided to injure her, she had finally seen the light.

Not Sam was the one whose sanity had survived John's parenting. Sam was batshit crazy.

Dean on the other hand was more complicated. Or more simple, from a certain point of view:

Dean thought love was a cure all, an excuse to be loyal to a fault, to be a predator, a killer, a monster. The world was black and white and he knew he had colored it so. There was power in this knowledge, her mom was right about that. Dean was the only one of these crazy people who actually got it. Who knew how to make a life out of a horror show.

On him serial killing looked almost domestic:

Get up early, shower with your brother, molest him a little and then have pancakes for breakfast. Babysit the captives, threaten them when no one looks, but leave no bruises. Do some laundry, make fun of your brother, guilt-trip him into following you to the lake, where you can molest him some more. And before you know it's time for supper, don't forget to mock your starving victim by spilling some water on her and tell her it's her fault if she dies of thirst. Make sure your brother eats his vegetables, get him drunk to have sex with him in the backseat of your dirty car, but don't stay up too late, because you have to get up early...

The thing was, Jess could relate. Why make things more complicated than they were? Dean's priorities may ruled his life, but they also made it comfortable. He had this wonderful skill to pick whom he showed compassion, why not use it?

She knew she had potential there, knew it since she had entertained the idea of attacking Jo.

And this morning Dean had been so nice to put her priorities as straight as his were:

She had cared for Maddy and she loved Sam, but she let Maddy die and she would cripple Sam – would do anything, to protect her parents.

Dean was so very good at this life where killing came easy by pulling a trigger or telling Sam he loved him, again and again, until Sam took his life for him.

It was time for her to follow his lead, start to think like him and the first thing she had to ask herself was: If Dean was in her position, would he really kill Sam's brother when the chance came along?
Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

Hi. Sorry for the big break, life, you know- actually it was death and then a possible divorce, which is part of life too I guess. I'm not mourning, only everyone around me is, so no condolences please; but still, for the last weeks editing had not really been a priority and since Jo is writing text(and pretty useless as an editor) no one picked up my slack; But now I'm back; I will try to do another CH by the end of the week
Over and out
Bee

~

To sneak around under Dad's nose had been pretty much impossible. All Dean allowed him after the big You and me against the world speech was a kiss. One Sam initiated, and those were always more awkward, at best dirty and playful but never as...well, as magical as when Dean kissed him.

Maybe because they never did much kissing when they were really young, touch, bite, lick – yeah sure. But lips on lips? That was for girls. Sam would have never dared to make it happen.

He remembered as if it had been a minute ago how it was when Dean kissed him for the first time. With intent, not just a peck, not licking at his mouth, not an accident.

Sam had been in a fight. Thirteen years and desperate to blend in and avoid trouble. A bunch of stupid assholes had picked on him and thought just because he ignored it, they could follow him, get him alone and mess him up. They really had wanted to hurt him, not just scare him, but beat him into a pulp and piss on his remains.

He remembered that moment too, when he saw they had him cornered, it was as clear as the kiss – because it was what he told Dean, narrated it to him exactly as it happened, because Dean needed to understand:

Sam hadn't been scared. Four older guys towering over him, brimming with violent glee, enjoying it and taking their time because they did this every other week and had learned to make most of it. One had even brought a butterfly knife. They had each 8 inches and 50 pounds on him and they knew it.

Sam on the other hand had known Dean would chew him out, because he hadn't packed his knife, and he didn't even remember where his pepper-spray was. Sam had known they were drunk and untrained and telegraphed their moves. And he knew that butterfly knives or worse switchblades, were for amateurs who hadn't had the skill or the brains to draw and open a pocket knife the way you should: one-handed and unannounced.

So he hadn't been scared, he had been annoyed and after the four of them lay on the ground, bleeding something bad, he had been super-annoyed, because his knuckles were bruised, his knee
hurt badly and his lower lip was split open. So there was no way to hide this had happened.

He had to tell Dean. He also told him to save it, Sam knew it had been stupid to run around unarmed. He could kick himself - no wait he couldn't, because his fucking knee hurt so fucking bad he couldn't kick anything, which included a ball, so playing soccer was ruined for him. And he would have to walk into school looking like a freak – again!

Gawd, how could he have been so stupid! He had said and Dean had caught his wrist. Made him stop his pacing. Had trailed his fingers over the fist closed around the folded butterfly knife, over bloody skin and bloody metal.

_You took the knife_, Dean had asked.

And Sam had shrugged, _'course, has my fingerprints on it. I'm stupid, not brain dead_, he had added sullen and didn't understand why Dean wasn't pissed, at him, at them.

He had mistaken Dean's silence for pity, or maybe horror, perhaps Dean hadn't gotten it, what Sam kept thinking to himself: seriously, those guys hadn't been dangerous, not to him...

And that was when he realized what he was thinking there:

These guys had been really dangerous.

Just not to him.

Thanks to Dean, to Dad, his slow-developing body was a deadly weapon. These guys, or the kids at school, even he himself, everyone who looked at him saw a weak thing, chubby-yet-scrawny. Nothing at all like Dean had looked at his age, not lean, not beautiful, not hard-edged. Sam had always thought he could never be like that, that all this training was for naught and he would forever have to hide behind Dean. Would have to watch Dean get hurt, because he was just not good enough to fight with him side by side.

But that had been wrong, he was strong, he would get stronger, bigger-

This moment and all the moments that lead to it, were crystal clear pictures in Sam's mind – Dean had been sitting on the kitchen table, which had brought them at eye level. And Sam finally saw why Dean was looking at him like that, silent and caught. It wasn't fear, certainly not pity, not even pride - not the trademark smirk, that said, Well done Sammy, taught you good didn't I? - no Dean wasn't looking down at him like he was his little brother, he didn't hold his wrist like he held him safe:

He held him to keep him still, to watch him like something strange, like Dean watched happy families at the park or how he sometimes watched Dad from a distance when he was brooding over a book, relaxed, enjoying research... like something Dean couldn't possible understand, but wanted to, wanted to understand at least, even when he knew he couldn't have it.

Sam hadn't known if it was good thing to be seen like this by Dean, but he hadn't had the time to think about it, because Dean had tugged him closer by the wrist, not really guiding him, not showing at all where this headed and yet still, the thought had formed out of nowhere:

Dean would kiss him.

And Sam remembered, how he had expected something smooth and wicked, like he had seen Dean kiss girls.
He felt it still, written into his flesh, painted on his nerves, how clumsy Dean's full lips had felt with the task of nipping on his, of mapping out the edges of Sam's mouth and how tiny the wet tip of Dean's tongue felt, pushing against the cut, rasping over damaged, swollen flesh, how it felt to look into Dean's half-lidded eyes, so close.

Sam had shut his eyes and opened his mouth a little, not really knowing what he did, how he conveyed submission.

He would opened his eyes after Dean's lips were gone, no rush, because Dean held on his wrist like he tried to break it -he would sport a bruise there, but at this moment he hadn't known yet and hadn't thought about it, had just stared Dean down, who watched him, eyes hard, determined, plotting, helpless.

Dean would kiss him again, he had thought, -the kiss hadn't really stopped, this was all part of it, this was Dean trying to make something happen, willing it into existence so he would see what it was.

It wasn't the pain in his wrist that made him snap, made him rip from Dean's hold through the thumb. Made him drop the butterfly knife on the kitchen counter with a rattling clank and call it a, *Cheap piece*.

And he had expected Dean to quote their dad, Best weapon is the one you have at hand when shit’s going down...But no, Dean had been too out of his element, he looked at the knife like he had never seen one before and asked,

*You used it on them?*

*How d'ya think got the blood on it-* he had tried to sound casual, but he felt anything but; he wasn't proud he had hurt someone -people, hurt them so badly they would need a good surgeon. *haven't asked for it, they followed me, they-*... They hurt people for fun, hurt kids, who knew how many before him. *But I'm not sorry,* he said, but Dean watched him like he spoke another language, didn't even look like he wanted to argue, Damn right you shouldn't be sorry, Sammy-

No, Dean hadn't listened to a word out of Sam's mouth, only looked at his mouth like he needed to read his lips and Sam hadn't backed away when Dean stood up.

Hadn't needed to, he knew he would get kissed, knew this was what Dean wanted, even though Dean himself had trouble to get it.

Dean had moved in with the same purpose in his step as when he fought, his grip was just as firm, his body as overpowering, grasping and pressing, he pulled at Sam's hair to tip his head back and kiss him like this, from above, pouring himself into Sam and making him feel really grown up and hot and tingling, for about ten seconds, then it became too-something and Sam started to struggle, not against, but for- more room, more touch, more air; but Dean was inescapable.

Sam was pretty sure, he bit Dean once, but if, it had gotten him no reaction.

Dean had been all over him, an arm around his body with his hand coming around -up to Sam's ribs, making him painfully aware how small he was compared to Dean and he had been close to crying, but Dean just wouldn't stop and in this brutality, was mercy, was what Dean couldn't say:

That he wanted Sam like this, wanted him to be strong and dangerous and grown-up.

He ceased his struggle and clung to his brother because it wasn't true, not yet, he wasn't what Dean wanted and then-
Then Dean had held him. Kissed his temple and nuzzled his cheek and Sam felt it, how Dean needed this to be true too.

Needed him to be little and safe and innocent.

It was both a lie, but when Dean asked, with words, *You okay, Sammy?* Sam had known Dean had figured something out, had known he would get kissed more often now, because for some reason Dean thought he was allowed to want it.

Kisses were Dean saying the truth. It didn't work when Sam started it, because Dean had to want it, be ready for it and especially now, after Dean had told him he would go to hell for him, had to use words, he wasn't ready.

But after Dad had left and Bobby called, said he wouldn't be back for another few days Dean gave him this looks through all the day, those that said he knew something, something that couldn't be said in words.

So Sam wasn't surprised to find himself pushed against a tree beside a devil's trap and Dean towering over him, using the slope to gain the necessary inches.

“We shouldn't leave them alone for so long”, -just finished rounds -who knew when Jess managed to pick her shackles again -it was shortly after sundown, an in between phase, good for dark magic, they should be careful-

“Uh-huh”, Dean 'agreed', mouth slack and eyes unfocused.

-really they shouldn't, “Dean”, he warned his brother.

Who didn't hear him. His gaze so heavy with lust, it dragged itself over Sam's mouth. Licking his lips, pressing them together Dean asked “Mhh?” as an afterthought, like he had heard his name, recognized the tone for warning, a plea -Sam didn't even know himself if he could've stopped what hadn't even started yet-

Damn-

The way Dean watched himself card fingers through Sam's hair took him away from the actual sensory experience. Dean looked almost scary like this:

The hushed color of his face in the near dark, the stillness of this facial expression, frozen in an deep eternal damaging haze.

He was so fucking beautiful Sam's eyes would start to bleed soon.

Any second the spell would break and Dean would make a quip about the fact that Sam's hair had grown out and-

Dean's look fluttered from his eyes to his lips, up to meet Sam's eyes again and finally his face twitched -from a grin, before he asked, “Wanna suck my dick, Sammy?”

Sam's knees buckled, like they wanted to hit the ground in record time.

But Dean wouldn't let him, leaned heavier into him, kept him between the tree trunk and a hard place. Held his head in both hands now with a good grip on his hair and Sam moaned at the first contact of their lips.
Dean told him many things that night, in secret swipes of tongue and nuzzling rubs of his face against Sam's. Told him, in the press of his body into his, that he got him. Betrayed age-old sweetness by how he rested his hands on Sam's ass or over his heart, while he breathed in Sam's exhale and fed him his air in return. Dean spelled out his whole soul. Coming in Sam's mouth later seemed like a natural part of it; a small detail, just another way for Dean to make him drunk on being loved and wanted and needed.

When they stumbled back, they didn't do anything but check the safety measures of the cabin, before they fell into bed. Sam had the first shift and with all those dreamlike details of Dean on his mind and on his tongue, he had assumed he would have a hard time to stay alert and awake.

But the salty taste vanished and left him bitter and he remembered the lie he told Jess about his first kiss.

Cute story, awkward and age-appropriate and of course short, so he would not confuse details if she ever asked him to repeat it to her.

Sam had held on to this butterfly knife. Other people kept the teddy their first love won them at the county fair. His keepsake came more handy in a fight, though. But that wasn't what it was to him; had been at first, sure. A lovely reminder of how perfect he could be for Dean.

Until Dean pushed him out of the nest; allowed the idea that he could be more.

He was supposed to be more. That was why he took that knife to every first date he had in Stanford. Remind himself to be more than Dean's.

Jess and him never had a first date. They had been introduced, hung with friends, kissed for the first time in a stolen moment at Rebecca's birthday party. Shared space in the library, had casual dinner dates and moved in together.

Only now he understood his mistake; he hadn't tried to be more for Jess, hadn't reminded himself constantly that he was a freak. He had been just himself, only a little safer, happier and more careless than he ever was with anyone but Dean.

He was supposed to be more. He was supposed grow up strong and be able to keep someone -if not Dean- save. He was supposed to be more and turned out to be only a burden.

Sam was supposed to be more.

-his brother huffed a deep-asleep sigh into his neck-

But he would always be more than enough for Dean.

...
He was supposed to be more. He was supposed grow up strong and be able to keep someone -if not Dean- safe. He was supposed to be more and turned out to be only a burden.

Sam was supposed to be more.

-his brother huffed a deep-asleep sigh into his neck-

But he would always be more than enough for Dean.

~ “No!”

She shot upright from sleep at that scream, so quick, almost throwing her back out-

“Dean! No-Dean-Dean-Dean-!!!!”

Angela's pulse had gone wild and her hands found her daughter in the darkness, who returned the embrace-

-there was a scramble of flailing limbs on the floor, in the shine of a dropped flashlight,

-her next glance confirmed, that Tom was close, right beside Jessica, he too stared wide-eyed at the floor,

where it was impossible to tell what Dean did to Sam that-

“No-”

-made him sound like he was dying, made him struggle like he was fighting for his life.

The absolute terror of disorientation took root, because this had been the only constant, Dean-

Angela's mind refused to cooperate, to analyze what could be the reason that Dean would be so brutal with his brother, that he would use every bit of strength to keep Sam down. Twist Sam's arms like that, press down, not give an inch-

“Sammy, wake up, you gotta wake up!”

Sam was fighting still and belated Angela understood, he wasn't fighting against Dean, he was-

“Dean?!”

Sam was shaking so hard it seemed like he still tried to shake his brother off.

“I'm here, Sammy,” Dean mumbled breathing hard, “I got you, it's okay, you were dreaming, it's okay.”

“Dean?” Sam asked again, pressed into the floor, like he wasn't sure who talked to him.

Dean let him up and was grasped the second Sam had turned around. Sam's hands had captured Dean's face and he was looked at, intense, long, like Sam needed to confirm it was really his brother and only time would tell his eyes didn't lie to him.
“It was just a nightmare, Sammy,” Dean offered.

Sam started to shake again, before he was able to coordinate a gesture of denial, “No, it was too real.” His voice was wet with tears when he said, “I saw you die.”

Angela could tell how cautious Dean became when faced with Sam's 'psychic ability'.

“How?” he asked.

“Like Mom did, cut open, bursting into flames.”

“Sammy,” Dean said with pity, “It was nightmare.”

“No, it was real. It was like I was there, because I will be there! I saw it. It's a warehouse and I climb up a broken elevator. There is this room, a loft or something with a long table - an altar, black candles, bones, sacrifices, cups, cards and a symbol drawn in blood on the mirror that lies in the middle of the altar and that's where I see it, your reflection”, Sam's eyes kept staring into nothing, like he really saw what he recounted, “I look up and you are on the ceiling above me, all torn up, slashed, bleeding and you try to talk to me, I look into your eyes one last time before you burst into flames and I can't-” he ground his teeth together and drew a hissing breath, hurting so much -

“Sammy,” Dean had kept shaking his head through the whole speech, drew Sam closer face to face now, nuzzling his shake of head into his little brother's skin, putting a small kiss on his lips to take away the pain.

“It's going to happen, we have to-”

“You have to calm down, Sam,” Dean said. “Let me up, let me get the light and then lets talk about it. Alright?”

He left Sam on the floor, who rubbed a hand over his face against the sudden loss, then against the warm glow of the kerosene lamp, or maybe against the brokenness of his own mind...

Angela felt her muscles fail, exhaustion and weariness ate away the adrenaline as fast as it had come. It was all too much, felt too heavy, physically so. She had to lie back down, put her shackled arm into a position to fall asleep again and listened to Sam's urgent tries to make his brother call their father, or Bobby, or anyone.

Absently she recognized Dean's careful reasoning for what it was: Disbelieve.

Though his arguments stayed within the boundaries of their mythology, that Sam's vision couldn't be of the immediate future because they were far from the next warehouse.

Before exhaustion won out and put her under again, she only heard, that Dean changed his tune, understood that reason wouldn't make Sam listen, only a greater fear could overcome his fear for his brother's life:

That to call someone would put them all at risk.

Morning was slow and uneventful, purposefully quiet to make up for the night. Sam did not even mention it when Dean wouldn't go to sleep during his shift.

Nor did he argue, when Dean told him to take a nap in the early afternoon. Over the course of the
day she noticed how they had given up all pretense. Touched and kissed right in front of them. In itself the displays of affection were tame, but the intimacy they carried...a few weeks ago Angela would have worried about how her daughter felt, but Jessica...

Her throat still healed, she barely spoke and when she did she gave nothing away. But she watched Dean as he soothed, caressed, enjoyed Sam, she watched this with a distant intensity that scared Angela.

There was something passive about it, and yet the opposite of submission, something that wouldn't be moved. Angela was careful to call it hate, because sometimes she recognized a fascination in her daughters eyes that scared her even more.

It was Tom who asked, “Jessy? What's on your mind?”

Jess' focus, on how Dean worked to keep the cabin as orderly and clean as possible, broke and she met Tom's eyes like she never had had a dark thought in her life, let alone had stewed in them for the last hours. She shrugged, denied, “Nothing really, I'm just tired.” And then she bit her lower lip, sighed and looked down, perfectly bored. And that was when Angela saw what her daughter did.

The cursory glances, a few minutes later, those which Jess swished over the whole room, like she searched for something to think and found nothing, only cemented Angela's theory. This form of obscured vigilance was too exemplary, to be an accident.

She didn't wait to be alone to address the issue -Sam and Dean were in their own world anyhow, “It's dangerous to stare into the abyss for too long, Jess.”

Her daughter only made it more obvious by reacting the exact same way Dean Winchester would have reacted towards nebulous disapproval:

With innocent ignorance, “What?”

Angela just held eye-contact.

She expected Jess to become flustered, or angry at her or simply drop the facade. She hadn't expected to be faced with another facet of it:

Jessica dropped the act of ignorance not like she would have, not angry, not short-tempered, but giving way to a wise expression of loving patience, “It's okay, Mom. I'm fine,” she sounded so convincing, it was eerie. “Someone needs to take on that abyss,” she shrugged, “And I'm good at it,” and then Jess smiled – the loopsided Devil'may'care Dean Winchester smile on her daughters face.

Angela wanted to puke.

“Really, it's going to be okay, Mom,” Jess repeated merciless. “Like you said, we can't expect to come out of this unharmed. It's past time to finally accept that and move on.”

It was a mother's age old cry of stubborn love that denied acceptance to this. Angela hadn't been able to protect her child from a lot of things since they had gotten into the van by free will. But she would be damned if she didn't break her out of a mindset that would-

“It's too late, Mom,” Jess said, like she had read her like an open book. Very hushed, too quiet to be heard by Sam, who read at the table or Dean, who tinkered with the stove, she went on, “I made up my mind, there is nothing I wouldn't do to get us out of here.”
No. Jessy didn't know what she was talking about. There lines one should not cross, not even to save their life. Her daughter was a healer even when-

“I guess he is a good role model,” Tom said, looking over towards Dean, “When you aim for dogged determination.”

“You're not helping,” she shot at her husband.

“She is right, Angela,” he argued gently.

~ The three of them were fighting about something. That and Dean's rummaging through their provisions got on Sam's nerves and made him loose the line every other paragraph.

“I'm sick of canned food,” Dean moaned, “I want a burger.”

“And I want world peace,” Sam let his mouth run off, kept his eyes on the page, to make sure Dean felt ignored.

That always drew his brother in.

Like a very large cat, Dean planted his ass on the table, taking up Sam's reading space. Stroked up Sam's arm, to his shoulder and soon fiddled with his hair, in a way that should have been annoying, but wasn't.

Dean could be annoying as hell but not when he touched, never when he touched. Never when he let himself worry, how he had tried to wake Sam up this afternoon with kisses carefully placed on his lips and rough hand on his thigh and his ass, a touch softened through the tender threadbare denim of the jeans Sam slept in – Dean's jeans, a little too short, but wider, comfortably low on Sam's hips, they felt like a second skin. Like a touch of Dean's that lingered.

His brother hadn't managed though to wake him up like that -too sweet, too dreamy those kisses. And while Dean had it in him to blast him awake with loud music, or that one time, drip ice cold vodka on his forehead -that ass! he didn't have it in him to dish out more than Sam could take. No. After that night, that too real, too relevant scare, Dean had kissed him a little deeper, uncaring that maybe they would be seen and he had done that trick where he caressed Sam's ear, not teasing, but rousing, rubbing and squeezing the earlobe, something that Dean himself would have driven up a tree(Dean's ears were off limits, even in a tickle fight – as if anything was off limits in a tickle fight) but Sam liked it. Having his ears touched was part of the massage Dean gave him against headaches.

“You need a haircut,” Dean stated, sweeping the bangs out of Sam's face in a way that surely made him look like an idiot – Dean could be annoying as hell when he wanted to.

“Now?” Sam agreed.

Dean jumped up, had learned long ago, not to hesitate when Sam readily went along for things like haircuts, or weapons training or going out shooting some pool. Things he usually put up a fight about.

Dean went to his second duffel bag, while Sam marked the page. His brother came back with the biggest hunting knife he owned -smile gleaming as glossy as the metal. Sam couldn't help but laugh:

This was an ancient joke between them, that had started when Sam had been four and Dean had tried to trim his hair with a knife, because they had left behind half their stuff on their last move,
including the clippers. Sam had gotten away and Dean had chased after him through the whole apartment building with a knife bigger than his forearm. A scene that had upset their usually very phlegmatic neighbors just a tiny wee bit. Especially since Sam remembered that he had squealed like the devil was after him -not because he was scared -because he thought it was a great game. Needless to say, Dad hadn't been as amused. But it was a long time before he packed them up leaving clippers behind. Over the years they had made do with a lot of things: kitchen scissors, disposable razors...once Dean's lighter, but never actually a hunting knife.

He got a hold of Dean's leg to drag him closer and sneak a hand to the back pocket where his brother had hid the clippers and the comb. Held them up, triumphant, proving he hadn't believed for a second Dean would use the knife.

“You're no fun,” Dean called him chicken.

“Yaw, yaw I'm stick in the mud,” he grinned and held eye-contact when he pinched Dean's butt, making his brother jump.

“Careful with the merchandise, Bitch,” Dean scolded and slapped his hand away.

“Jerk,” he said small, while Dean took the clippers away from him and moved in their space, moved their touching bodies, like there wasn't even the option to take a step back and let Sam move on his own. For a tiny moment, as he looked up to Dean, who draped a towel around his shoulders, it felt to Sam like they were the only two people in the world – not like there was Jess and her parents watching them. And by that thought the moment was over.

It still felt nice having Dean cut his hair, stroke fingers over his scalp, part locks, take his time to get it done perfect, take in his little frown of concentration Sam loved, but had never told Dean he did. Because that was not what you told your brother. You told him his face looked funny, all crunched up, which was a different kind of truth too.

All too soon, Dean was done.

“It's still in your eyes,” he said flattening the bangs in a way they never would on their own.

If Sam agreed Dean would cut more, “I like it that way,” and so did Dean.

“Freak.” But of course he couldn't say it.

Evening came around and then the sun had set Dean told him to stay, he would make the round, last check up for today before they turned in for the night.

“I don't like it when you're out there on your own.”

Dean rolled his eyes, but allowed him to come with.

“So?” his brother said the minute they were outside.

Must have been pretty obvious that Sam wanted to talk, since it was mostly him who had enforced the new routine of never leaving them alone for longer than a few minutes. Even when they left together, one of them usually stayed within ear-shot of the cabin.

They made their way down the slope.

“Come on, Sam, don't play hard to get,” Dean seemed to dread what Sam had to say like he had any reason to.
He couldn't even know what it was about. It wasn't about them, it was about Jess.

Sam saw it in her eyes since the witch was dead. She thought she was hiding it well, but he had been looking for it, had expected it for longer now actually- “You need to be careful...because of Jessica.”

“Dude-” Dean became defensive-

“That's not what I meant,” he stopped Dean. “I know you won't hurt her. But if she ever sees the chance she will hurt you.”

“Ya think I don’t know that?”

“No, I mean she will kill you. I've seen her explode plenty of times and do a lot of damage, but-”

“Yea'got it, she-hulk. You mentioned that when you were gushing about her on the phone – by the way, I still don't understand how this demonic amnesia spell worked, I thought those were time specific-”

“Will you shut up and listen? The only reason she never accidentally killed someone is because she knows exactly where and how hard to hit. So I want you to be aware you can never turn your back to her again, understood?”

“I shouldn't have threatened her dad, huh?”

“Yeah, that too.”

That and so many other things should have never happened.

They didn't go down to the lake anymore since Dad left. But from here where they stopped one could see it's surface through the trees.

It was just dark enough to make one extra aware of the sounds, even though the bluish light allowed a perfect sight still. The smells were more intense too.

He knew it was stupid to punish himself by not enjoying it as much as he usually would, this short moment outside the dusty cabin. It didn't help them, but it just felt wrong to enjoy anything while people he cared for were hurting.

“Jess would love this,” he told Dean.

The colors that was, or more the color: the longer one looked at the copper green reflections of the sky in the water, metallic, even colored like only blackness usually was in nature, the less it felt like a color, more like something devoid of color, alien and intangible.

“She paints, ya know”, not often, but pretty good for someone with little practice. Angela had taught her.

“Yeah, you mentioned it. Real renaissance-man your girl is.”

“She is just not very good at sitting still.”

Dean gave him that look of sympathy Sam had a hard time to categorize. The closest he came to making sense of it was that not too long ago Dean had actually thought that there would be a future for Sam with Jess.
They split up. Dean headed back to the cabin, left Sam to check the buried salt lines, there up at the road.

They checked out. Everything was perfectly in order.

Sam allowed himself to relax on the way back. Which of course invited his headache in, hitting harder than the dull ache he had ignored all day. At least the photosensitivity wasn't as brutal in the dark. He took another breath before he entered the cabin with it's warm light and that breath caught in his lungs when the door hit a blockage.

Dean was on the floor, bleeding heavy from the head.

Jess and her parents were gone.

Sam cursed and dropped to his knees beside Dean. Who was moving sluggishly, blinded by the blood in his eyes.

It looked bad, really really bad. Sam couldn't tell how bad because of all the blood.

“It's me, Dean,” he calmed his brother before touching him, trying to tell if his skull was fractured-

“Sammy-” Dean sputtered.

“Stay down, don't move.” -he looked around too, for whatever they had hit him with, to get an idea how bad it could be.

“Sam- it wasn't them.”

“What?”

“Something's out there.”

Dread and the feeling that his awareness expanded – two warring sides:

The demon had come for Jess. He needed to go, now-

-he couldn't leave Dean behind as helpless as he was. There could be more, they could attack now.

His training made it no hard choice, Sam stayed right where he was: between his brother and anything that would try to come at them.

He managed to assure himself Dean's split open head was superficial, he applied pressure to stop the bleeding and talked to Dean, until he started to make sense.

Dean didn't know what happened, he had blacked out. He just knew Jess, Tom and Angela had been secured to the bed when it happened.

“Go,” Dean told him.

Sam was still wiping blood off him, had to make sure Dean's hands were steady and dry; that his eyes were clear, his pupils both the same size.

He would be too late. He knew that. If it wanted to kill them, he would be too late.

But it wanted him, Sam told himself, it took them to get him.
Holy water and salt and his gun collected, he took one last look at Dean who held on to his shotgun like it was his consciousness.

The outsides seemed too far, too wide and Sam always felt too tall when he moved crouched fast through open space, following the tracks – they had been running, no attempt at stealth, five people, two tracks of shoes, two in socks, one barefoot, like they fled in panic.

Sam followed fast, but not too fast – this reeked of an ambush.

The woods were silent.

He felt tense, ready for an attack, from all sides-

-unprepared for the instant sight of them huddled together, propped up against a broad tree trunk, all three of them.

Arranged.

To be found.

Slit throats, bled out.

Sam felt like the ground dropped out from beneath his feet.

Jess sat there dead, flanked by her parents like they were trying to keep her warm, safe from the cold death nothing could warm up, not even the ethereal ray of sunlight that grazed them-

The wooden floor beneath his boots shook now and his stomach jumped and the sunlight screeched like it tried to force the picture in front of him to stay when it wanted to flicker out of existence.

He saw his own hands clutching the sink, tan skin against white ceramic in the dusty light of the cabin's bathroom.

He saw them dead one last time, before the vision escaped.

Shutting his eyes, he tried to stay on his feet -flooded with sensations of denial and grief and piercing physical pain, his skin reached out like it had developed a visual/haptic sense to express-to press physically against every surface of the small room, the tiles, the door, the mirror-it cracked and he screamed.

…
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~ Tom couldn't suppress the flinch when after an unspecific grinding sound traveling through the walls, something shattered. Like Sam was suddenly wreaking havoc in the bathroom.

“Sa-” the call to his brother died on Dean's lips, when Sam started to scream like a scared animal. “-dammit!”

Sam had locked himself in – Dean was fighting to get the door open.

Tom had no idea what just happened, all he could do was hold his wife closer and wait and try not to let the complete helplessness scare him into submission.

Dean sounded panicked, even now after Sam's screams sounded less feral -but still as scared, after he had actually yelled out his brother name -which usually calmed Dean down, to know Sam was turning to him for help.

Not this time.

Dean had not seen this coming.

When Sam had returned from outside, he had been silent. Had not acknowledged his brother, made a beeline for the bathroom. His eyes had been dull, something had been clearly wrong, but Tom had paid it no heed. So much was always wrong with the boy.

Dean now talked to Sam, tried to guide him out of the bathroom, away from the splintered glass, he explained like talking to someone unaware he was about to cut himself.

When they finally came into view, Tom felt a chill run down his spine:

Sam looked drowsy, physically sick and his words were incoherent. His nose was bleeding and his eyes squeezed shut -the only part tense about him, like the rest of his body had given in to the pain he obviously was in.

He remained sitting on the floor, slumped in his brother's arms, labored exhausted breaths – the only sound for the next few minutes.

Dean stroked a hand up and down Sam's back. Until Sam spoke his name weakly, then he helped Sam up, told him to get some fresh air.

Fresh air. Sam must have had a seizure -another one, now Tom was sure that 'nightmare' last night had been the first- and Dean would not even consider taking him to a hospital. He only helped Sam outside, asking him if it had been a vision, what he had seen?

Odd. The horrors of the last weeks had on one hand desensitized Tom to some experiences, like for an example the recurrent spike of fear for Sam's life in relation to fear for their own life. It was
there, but he didn't feel it, it had lost it's edge while in reality it had become more and more serious:

Because Sam was the one thing between them and certain death.

John would not be coming back, they had not heard from him in days; or from Bobby for that matter. If Sam slipped into a coma or died, Dean had to decide over them all by himself. No Sam, but more importantly no father, whose self-made ethics allowed killing only under specific circumstances – Dean would only have to justify their deaths to himself. They were ballast, witnesses; he could not leave them behind alive. And he probably didn't want to.

That was the strange thing, how he knew that his daughter, his wife, he himself, could die any day now. Any minute due to the recent deterioration of Sam's health.

But, and that was the strange thing, it didn't get under his skin, not the way some sounds did. Intellectually he understood this sensitivity as a normal reaction to trauma. But to live it was different.

Worst were the sounds on wood. But also rustling clothes, or when Dean would scrape the bottom of his bowl with a spoon. The unbelievably loud sound of paper touched, when Sam would turn the page of a book he read. The hiss of long whispered conversations in the early mornings.

The conversation Sam and Dean held outside, didn't have the same effect, even though Tom did not understand more than the sound of their voices. They spoke on a normal level, only muffled through the door – obviously not the same to his frayed nerves as whispering was.

They came back inside soon enough; probably because of the mosquitos. After Madelyn had died, a new heatwave had hit and of course they thought they drove out the cold by killing a witch. Strangely enough they had not included insects in their biblically laced superstition. Even though Dean hated anything with passion, that crawled and bit or stung; therefore he spent as little time outside after sundown as possible.

Tom tried to prepare for the sound of Dean putting a bottle down on the table -glass on wood- right in front of Sam.

“Man, I don't like this psychic crap,” he spoke to the back of his brother's head.

“Oh, you don't like it, why not? I'm enjoying it immensely,” Sam griped, ignoring the alcohol and shielding his eyes from the light.

“No, not on principle, because yeah, it sucks, but...” Dean sighed, sat down next to Sam, moved the chair with a charring sound closer to Sam and said, “-the timing.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Why now?” Dean spoke close to a whisper, like they weren't supposed to hear, “Why you get visions being awake, now?”

“Because the people I love are in danger?” Sam answered at a normal volume, “It's not an unusual trigger for the development of psychic abilities.”

“Yeah, but we're always in danger,” Dean dismissed his reasoning.

“I did have nightmares of Jess on the ceiling, almost every night before Dad intervened. Maybe they're getting closer to finding us.”
“Or they’re trying to flush us out.”

Sam seemed to think about that for a second, then he shook his head. Reached out for the bottle in a nervous gesture, only to rotate it so that the ridges at the bottom grazed over the table top. “No, it doesn't feel that way.”

“How could you be sure?”

If Dean was aiming to upset his brother, his questioning technique was dead on. Because Sam became jittery again and finally told him:

“I hate not having a plan.”

“We have a plan-”

“No, we have orders, Dean, to stay here. We have no idea what Dad's plan is, or if he even has one.”

“He has one.”

“How-”

“Because we know! When has he ever gone into anything having not at least three plans in case the first two blow up in his face? He knows what he's doing. He told us to stay put and that's what we will do, because we're safe here.”

“If you really believe that, why do my visions scare you, hu?!”

“Cause this bastard really has a hold on you! If it's on purpose, it means he can get into your fucking head, Sam!”

Dean stood up fast, chair pushed back from the force of it. Arming himself, he told Sam, “I will check the road again.”

“I did-”

“Yeah, you also dream-walked back without noticing you were having a vision.”

“Dean-”

“I wont be able to sleep now anyhow. Jeez!”

Dean had not rested since Sam's first seizure. Tom exchanged looks with his daughter, but Jess shook her head.

He had not meant now. But eventually, when exhaustion would catch up with Dean.

Sam and Dean were not secretive when they decide to change their system of keeping guard completely, instead of just switching shifts, how Tom had expected them to, they found a new, safer arrangement:

They would both stay awake during the third -the night shift, the one when Sam usually had slept, from nine pm to five am; then Dean would sleep, or rest, his eight hours, before Sam got a turn.
The following night made Tom jittery, since the small light on the table lulled him into a false safety, but what should be innocuous sounds, kept him awake. Sam reading noisily, Dean not able to sit still after he had finished the second pot of coffee and then there was of course his daughter sitting vigil – seemingly motionless, unless someone was as oversensitive as Tom to the noise of her picking at the cut off threads of her jeans shorts.

He tried to focus on Angela's deep sleep, on her soft sniffling breath, on her trust in him and Jessica.

After a while their daughter noticed how he watched her mother sleep and she stopped picking at her clothes. She held Angela's hand for a long while without Angela ever waking from it.

He had to be patient for five hours for them to have a minute alone, to discuss eventual steps to be taken when Dean would-

“No,” Jess only said.

“Sam is too weak to-

“No, he is not,” Jess interrupted him, eyes on the window, on them – even when they weren't in view, “Unless Sam's in worse shape than Mom, we wont outrun them. We wait.”

Jess had decided they would not fight and Tom trusted her insights on the situation much more than his own.

He was not much of a fighter, never had been. If anything he usually was the one who broke up fights; and that had been when he had been young and been in situations that called for an action of sorts. He didn't know where his daughter got this hard edge from; she got her courage from Angela, and from him a tendency to involve herself in protecting others, but that was motivation. This brutal power of hers was something else.

Would have been dangerous (to her mostly) if it had not been paired with a sharp instinct. Tom didn't know where she had that from either.

Maybe because she was a girl; Jessy's own words: A girl had to know how to pick her fights.

He knew how many times he had not gotten into fights or easily out of them, because he was older, taller or later in a position of authority and respect -and, how he realized later: male. Male authority de-escalated, female authority on the other hand...

Girls were expected by society to be nice and Jessica never really had been. She was kind to those she loved, but nice? His daughter? Not even when she was very little – she had bitten her kindergarten teacher then. Twice, actually, because the first time didn't make the point she had intended to make.

That was why he had insisted on her taking up as many sports as possible. To channel her aggression, he had told Angela, but also because he had wanted his daughter to have the strength to back up her iron will, be able to stand up for herself. He never had wanted her to change and he had told her so instead of scolding her, like Angela sometimes did.

He had trusted Sam because he had seemed to see Jessica the same way. Because he had not been scared of her strength.

Today Tom was pretty sure Sam just saw Jess as someone who would not be scared of him. Whose kindness could be exploited into turning a blind eye to his obvious faults.
But -and given what they had been through, it seemed a grim thought- his daughter had prevailed:

She still was not scared of Sam.

Her decision to wait and simulate resignation had nothing to do with fear, it was pure calculation. Jess had walked them through her thought process step by step – what exactly would be necessary give her a valid chance in a fight against Dean alone. And the close ranges of the cabin's insides made her the weaker part always, even if she grabbed a gun...every scenario ended the same way: they could not take the risk of a direct confrontation. Neither with Dean, nor Sam; certainly not against both.

All this, even these -what Angela thought were obsessive thoughts, it had never changed their daughter. Not really, not deep down.

“"I was always proud of you and I always will be,” he said, because he hadn't said it in a while-

-maybe a too long time, because Jessy looked at him kind of surprised, her brows creased, like she wanted to argue.

“It's hubris,” he had to smile about her silence, “Because I'm sure I have no right to be more proud of you than someone who found a diamond. I didn't make you, not those qualities of you I'm so proud of. All I ever could do was tell you how perfect you are.”

She laughed and shook her head about him, like he was a fool. But he was not, not in this. There never had been a more perfect being than his daughter, he was sure.

After a little bit more silence, Jess took a breath and said, “That's something to be proud of: To be a father who loves his child always, not just when they're good. It's more than many fathers do.”

She was looking at Dean again.

Jessy turned out to be right about them – during the rest of the night Tom observed how much more relaxed the brothers became with every hour, like a rhythm existed for situations like this:

Sam hurt, Dean exhausted. And of course it did. How many times had they spent their nights abandoned by their father, vigilance their only comfort?

There simply was no opening, no moment of weakness, on the contrary:

In the following three days Tom observed how dark hours spent together calmed things for them; how old stories about hunts came to Dean's mind, how they would slip outside of the cabin into the night like cats and come back as silent and as unannounced too. Sam and Dean felt safe again. Maybe too safe.

Jess and Tom had adopted the same rhythm, having learned how important it was not to be caught off guard – it simply cost too much energy. Angela found sleep whenever she could, knowing they would watch out for her.

While the daytime had shrunk to glimpses of light, fragments of time broken up by dozing and unnaturally long periods of silence, the nights -with their wet, alive acoustics- stretched out eternal and promising.
This night was no different and Tom sympathized in an abstract way with the betrayal Dean seemed to feel when a few hours before dawn, Sam suddenly whimpered in pain.

It was the first time they were able to observe Sam's seizure. Angela too, since Tom had woken her at the first signs of something out of the ordinary.

It could be an epileptic seizure, though the convulsions were subtle; but there were many types. Most of them not directly harmful, if treated, if not going on for minutes on end...like it did for Sam.

This episode was already lasting longer than the ones before. Tom saw Jess was counting seconds sub-vocally and minutes with the fingers against her leg.

Dean knelt beside his brother. Unable to stop Sam's loss of control from happening. Unwilling to panic like he should.

A few minutes ago, they had sat close together on the couch, comfortable and safe. Dean had buried his nose in Sam's neck and audibly smelled him, whispered something, that in turn had made Sam laugh softly.

Now Sam could be dying. Who knew what damage the waterboarding truly had left on Sam's body, his brain.

After the tension followed a deathlike slack stillness, Sam just lay there on his side, unresponsive, his eyes open staring ahead and seeing nothing.

Dean's whispered, 

*Sammy,*

would have been heartbreaking, if this was not exactly what they had been waiting for.

But only if Dean left the cabin. They needed 45 seconds to get out of the handcuffs. They were as ready as they could be-

If Sam didn't wake-

But he did wake – he gasped and he was confused and blinded by the pale lights, but he was aware of his surroundings again.

Dean cradled him against his chest and listened with the attention of a parent to Sam's tale on the dangers Caleb was in. On how a demon girl would interrogate him, torture him, slit his throat in the end. Where it would happen, what time of day it had been, what it had smelled like in the dusty workshop.

Dean listened and then forbid Sam to call Caleb, or their father, or anyone.

Sam grew livid – as much as that showed in his weakened state.

Dean easily held him in place, gently so and begged him, “Please, Sammy, you need to calm down.”

His brother did, but only because he was too exhausted.

“Jess,” Angela spoke softly, barely audible, “You need to tell them.”
The look their daughter shot her could have cut glass. She held it long enough to make absolutely clear:

Angela would not like the desperate things Jess was ready to do if she went against their planning now – tell them that they actually had in their medical kit what would help Sam, at least initially:

Ativan.

“Jess-”

“He has been unresponsive for less than four minutes, the seizure lasted maybe three.”

Tom couldn't tell if Jess was lying, he had not watched her finger count towards the end. It had felt longer, but it was not Jess to lie to her mother. Which was why she had not concluded, that four minutes meant Sam should be fine. Or that she would have offered help if it had lasted longer.

Angela probably accepted it solely for Jess' tone:

Soft despair.

Jess didn't want Sam to die.

But they could not help him. It was just guesswork, there was no guarantee that it would be the right medication. He needed a hospital, preferably one with good neurologists and an attached psychiatric ward.

The only one who could help Sam fed his fears and terrors to be able to keep him:

Dean stroked through Sam's hair. The boy had fallen asleep in his brother's lap, breaths labored like Sam had to take them deliberately. Maybe he wasn't really asleep.

Maybe it was better if he held on to consciousness, Tom thought and wondered at the same time, how after everything, he still couldn't hate the boy enough to wish him dead.

Dean was humming, timed with the circles his fingertips drew over Sam's scalp.

The humming had a rhythm, a melody, words of scars and the sun...

“...is going down the drain,

**behind every beautiful thing, is some kind of pain.**

**She wrote me a letter and she wrote it so kind...**”

Dean's singing was lost to whispers again. Sam had fallen asleep, now really.

Maybe Dean had never expected Sam to survive their father's treatment; maybe he didn't hold on to life as hard as his sunny attitude spelled.

He looked more tired than a man as young as he ever should be.

They truly were like night and day, because Sam wasn't tired of life.
Morning broke with bitter arguments fueled by Sam's new found strength.

The moment his brother left him alone, Sam activated one of their cell phones.

~ You could watch something until it was stripped to it's bare existence, watch shotguns handled until they were just metal and wood and a series of simple movements. Jess had stripped Dean Winchester's being in the long dark hours of night until she looked at nothing but a skull covered in flesh and skin, stripped him of color and emotion, reduced to material and function.

She had stayed up the nights and slept the days, because a gut-feeling told her whatever would happen, would happen at night. And it would happen because Dean would make a mistake for Sam.

He only ever made mistakes for Sam.

She knew him now well enough to see this, to know which sounds outside would make Dean reach for the shotgun, which sounds he ignored, which sounds put him into move to go outside to investigate, unless- Unless Sam threw a wrench in it. When Dean was worried, he was off.

Like right now:

Sam was outside all alone. Taking another look at their safety measures, he had announced. Even though they had just done their nine pm check up -actually they had done the nine pm check up three hours early, because Sam hadn't been able to sleep anyhow.

He had been climbing walls the whole day.

Deep down he had to know he wasn't healthy and after this last seizure... He had even tried to reach out for help, calling Bobby, leaving a message.

Bobby hadn't called back.

Sam had chewed his nails bloody. Hadn't eaten. Hadn't let Dean touch him. Hence the permission to spend a little bit time apart from his older brother.

Dean's concern for Sam existed in layers:

A thin coat of worry for Sam's mind – she remembered that from the early days; it did not exist anymore.

A soft squishy layer of sympathy for Sam's emotional pain – easily pierced and peeled away, not very sturdy, but growing back at better times.

A weaved tissue holding together parts of those squishy concern for Sam's happiness -that tissue was Dean's concern for Sam's health, because without health, no happiness.

Those were all scraped off at the moment, leaving only the core of concern:

A concern for Sam's ability to love him.

If this love was threatened, then, even a threat to Sam's life ordered less urgent.

Sam could be biting off his tongue right now, or split his head open falling. But Dean stayed inside, to give him space. Because if Sam came back, he would let Dean close again and if he didn't, if he died face down in the dirt-
She had to stop. Take a breath. Today had been a hot day and it would be a long night. After days like today the crickets became unbearably loud. chirping her sanity away. Not that much was left when she made up anatomical structures of a psychopath's sympathy before her inner eye.

Rubbing her earlobes usually helped with the tension of sitting too long too still in the heat. Her hands came away greasy. She would take a shower tomorrow morning. Trying to remember, Jess wasn't sure when she had her last one.

There was a sound outside. Probably Sam coming back, since Dean didn't even blink.

Footsteps on the porch. Sam stopped in front of the door, but then didn't open it. Hesitant. Unwilling to go back to his handsy brother.

Now that got an reaction from Dean. After a moment of staring at the door, like he could see Sam behind it, he exhaled his grief and got up from the couch.

Reaching for the door to pull it open, he was hit with it's edge right in the face.

It had happened so fast, Jess hadn't really seen the door pushed open, just Dean getting knocked out.

And then there was Brady.

And a girl with a baseball bat. She giggled and said, “Was-”

“Will you shut up,” Brady hissed at her, pulled her inside and shut the door behind them. “Window,” he said and pointed at it, “Tell me if he's coming.”

The girl gave him a mock salute, giggling some more, like this was all very funny.

“Hey Jessy, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Moore.”

Brady was really here. She-

“Sam,” her mother said, “He is-”

“He's down by the lake, don't worry,” Brady told her, “Jessy are you okay?”

“I can't believe you are here,” she told him, while she worked the broken-off ballpen clip out of it's hiding place in her hair.

“Is there a key for those-” he noticed what she was doing, “Okay,” he gave her a shake of head, “You have to make me look slow, even when I'm saving your ass.”

“How did you even find us?” Her own shackles finally budged, her dad's would be next.

“Is he dead?” the girl asked, nudging Dean with the baseball bat.

“Probably not,” Jess told her, “Be careful!” -she was way too close to him, if he woke up-

“Sasha, keep watch!” Brady repeated and then said, “Don't mind her, she is...” he grinned apologetic, “the kind of girl who wants to spend the weekend investigating a family of serial killers.”

“Did you call the police?” Dad asked, and Jess noted that he was pulling his two pairs of socks on. Good.
Brady was talking a lot again, something about him looking for them, after the FBI had stopped; that he wanted to be sure before he called anyone and then he had seen Sam and just decided to act...typically Brady.

Mom's shackles came off, finally.

Jess didn't loose time with anything else, but grabbed the gun from the table and switched the safety off. It was loaded, safety wouldn't be on, if it wasn't. She aimed-

“Jess! No.”

Her mother's voice was far away. Didn't matter in this moment.

Jess kept aim at Dean's chest. She studied him for a five full seconds: his breaths, the tension in his face, the redness of his skin where the door had hit him. Her gut told her he was not faking, he was still out cold.

She came close, just close enough. She pulled his switchblade from where it was clipped into his waistband and felt the gun weighing down her outstretched arm – she felt this moment like it took too long, like he would come to any second and grab her. She was ready to shoot, but she didn't want to. She needed him alive.

Now time had slowed down completely, nothing but Dean registered anymore.

Flipping the knife open one handed like Jo had showed her what felt like a million years ago, she drew breath and exhaled while she slashed up the side of Dean's skull.

Blood sprayed, she dropped the knife, wiped her hand and changed the gun to it, gripping it two-handed. Time flowed back into the flurry pace it had taken to when Brady entered their nightmare. They had to get a move on – which was no problem, her parents had just waited for her. Mom held out Jess' pair of socks, but there was no time for that. Didn't matter, Brady had a car.

From the cabin to the treeline, she threw her head around, if Sam-

But he didn't show. And she was terribly relieved for that.

Brady lead the way. Dad helped Mom along. Jess behind them and this Sasha girl, fell back-

What the hell!?

She was kicking with her tennis shoes at the dirt – then Brady was there and grabbed her arm-

“But you said, we have to smudge them,” she argued when he tried to pull her along.

She wouldn't budge.

Distantly Jess heard the cabin door bang open. She couldn't believe it! They would get caught, because this stupid, crazy-

First it looked like Brady was about to drag the girl by her hair, but a sickening, impossible crunch was to be heard and then she fell dead to the ground.

“Whenever I kill one of these sluts,” Brady said, “Your friend screams like a little girl on the inside.”

Jess heard words and saw Brady speaking, but all her brain truly registered was the turned up earth
behind him, a messed up circle of grooves, branches and stones. And mint blossoms.

She aimed at Brady's face.

“Now, Jess, you're not going to shoot your best buddy.”

She stood between him and her parents. Strange, how she was suddenly aware of that.

Brady took a step towards her, “Give me the gun. You're not-”

Yes, she was. She pulled the trigger.

Her hand was hit with a force that made her think the gun had exploded, but then she was pulled forward by her arm, quick, brutal, making her shoulder jump -almost dislocate, and she collided with Brady, pressed against him, the gunshot still ringing in her head, she barely heard what he shouted into her ear:

-shoot me! ---ucking Bitch! ---m going to rip your mom's guts out! Gonna string you up--them

He pushed her to the side -sent her flying through the air. Taking a roll, she tried to get up, stumbled – where was the gun?

She heard a shot. Another-

No, no, no. Mom, Dad. Brady was shooting them. Jess got to her feet and dropped again the second she set sight on him.

He was shooting into the other direction.

Crawling closer and into the cover of the next thick tree trunk, she dared to take another look around. From her position, she saw neither Brady nor who he was shooting at, but there to her far left: a bit of purple that moved, before it vanished. Mom, maybe Dad too.

“Come out Sam! or I'm going to blow your mother in law's head off!”

Brady was not even close to her parents, they had gotten away from him.

But Sam probably didn't know that. He was shouting something, something Jess didn't get. She took another glance at Brady to learn if Sam was in danger, but Brady actually lowered the gun and then waved his other hand. His lips moved, she didn't hear -anything short of a shout was swallowed by the dead sound in her ears.

It was the look on Brady's face:

Pure mirth. Like he was about to tell a really good joke.

Jess knew she had to do something, but strangely enough now, that she knew that, her body wouldn't do anything.

Move!

She didn't really feel her limbs, but up until now that hadn't been a problem.

Hadn't been a problem when she cut Dean, or pulled the trigger, or dropped to the ground. It all just had happened and now:
Nothing.

Stupid! So fucking stupid. Move!

She looked to the side and thought of Move where suddenly, like she didn't really have a direction.

Okay, maybe not so stupid. If she had stood up just now, Brady would have probably seen her and shot her.

She glanced again.

He was gone.

Dammit.

Another look and she found him:

Down the slope, he was moving closer to where Sam had to be.

When her gaze dropped she saw her next direction. And now she also had cover to get there.

Well, she had shrubs that covered her. If Brady looked close enough she was as good as dead, her brain helpfully provided, while she crawled faster and felt twigs breaking against her arms, making noises she didn't really hear, but feel.

There it was. The baseball bat. Her hands were sweaty and slick from the dirt, time slowed down again, details became overly graphic and melted into the background:

Like the dead girl looking her exactly into the eye.

Like Brady taking aim again.

Like Dean a target as he pulled Sam's limp body out of harms way.

It all was recorded for later, but it was not important.

Not like the swing she took, the impact, the pain shooting up her arms and the determination to take another swing at Brady's head and another and another and never to stop.

She almost puked from the pain when she finally opened her clawed fists to let go.

Where were the much lauded pain-killing effects of adrenaline now?

She had to have lost some time, because soon there was Sam and he spoke to her. And Dean stood over Brady's ruined skull, pressing a piece of cloth into his own head wound.

“She said” -Ellen she meant, “it's easier to brain a demon blunt force than to shoot them in head – I didn't believe her,” for more than one reason. “Seemed illogical.” Was one of those things only understood first hand.

It's not dead, Sam probably said and then louder because he must have realized she didn't hear right: “Help me move the body!”

Dean made an aborted try to follow that order, but he swayed and decided to take it easy.

Sam grabbed Brady under the arms, so she went for the legs. By now some feeling other than pain
had returned to her hands.

They placed the dead body into an undisturbed circle right beside the road. Sam moved around to bend Brady's legs so that his long form fit inside the circle completely. Then he picked up a leaf that broke the outermost circle – precise like Sam was in all things.

It was real. The demon -not Brady- had killed this girl, would have killed them and now Brady was dead.

She had killed him. His skull looked like the bones had been sloppily mushed together into an attempt of a round form. His nose was destroyed and his eyes-

“Holy! Shit!”

The sudden blink went through her like an electric shock. Her heart was racing: out of that completely dead, still body now liquid black pools for eyes focused at her. And the body started to move.

Sam held her, “Jess, it's okay,” his hand around her arm kept her where she was. She felt literally beside herself, like she could watch herself shuffle, struggle between deciding to attack or flee.

The wrongness of what happened before her eyes touched that animalistic part that only knew fear. In this moment she didn't even care that it was Brady, or that the thing that moved his corpse wrapped his broken jaw into something like a grin, like it knew what it's existence did to her.

Sam's reassurances that they were safe had little effect, her heart kept racing.

Did so too still, when her mother and father had returned and saw what she saw.

“Just you wait, Jessy,” slurred words escaped Brady's throat, “T'was told to take time with Sammy's girl.”

Sam let go of her arm.

It effected him, these threats and somehow that calmed Jess down and made her snap out of it. This was not over. But she was no help gawking at the demon.

Her dad was looking good, aside from the normal shock.

“Mom, you okay?”

“Yes,” her mother sounded hoarse. She was sweating a little, but that had to be from the running. She hadn't had elevated temperature in days. She should be fine.

Sam seemed okay too, but Dean definitely was not.

“Do we have a few minutes to fix you up?” she asked him.

The question changed the way Dean held himself. After a moment, he told Sam to stay with the demon and Mom to stay too, he ordered Dad with them to help pack up and gave Jess a cue hinting at the cabin.

He almost managed to sit still, while her dad packed guns and salt by his instruction.

“...and the ax,” he pointed towards the stove and then eyed her stern, “Come on, speed it up. It doesn't have to be pretty.”
“Don't worry, you will sport one butt ugly scar,” she answered not really minding the conversation, and still had the needle slip her fingers due to the blood again, great, “I'm not slow on purpose, this is my first time.” -Dammit! His skin hadn't seemed so thick when she had cut it.

“Ya know,” Dean said, “You should be able to size up the gravity of our situation by my restrain to say something about you having your first time with me.”

Yeah, right. That was what made it real. And, “Technically you did say something, just now.”

She finished him. It would scar. A lot.

“Anything else?” Dad asked.

“No, just the weapons,” Dean touched the stitches up to the bump of flesh where she had knotted the suture too tight; he gave her a favorable nod anyhow and turned back to her dad, “Leave your stuff. There is not time. What we need, we buy on the road.”
At first there was a thought caught in Tom's brain, *This is insane, it's insane* -as a loop in his head while he held the flashlight to Sam and Dean digging a grave in a pioneer cemetery. A tourist attraction, abandoned at night.

But that thought died down in the hours it took to make a person sized four feet deep hole in the ground.

The place was a compromise:

The ground too hard to dig deep, but they would not be disturbed, which was essential when the body one wanted to bury was still moving. Insane.

Maybe they could tell by his face, that he couldn't shake the thought and that was why Jess was tasked with watching the demon. And also watching the area. Whenever she heard a sound Jess would flicker her light over the slim lopsided tree trunks, making them seem to hang over their heads in a precarious manner.

Tom felt alert in a tiresome way, he couldn't believe that it was still the same day -night technically. The crisp wetness of after midnight could only act stimulating so long and he started to ask himself, if they really planned to dig six feet deep. The ground was getting stonier. Shuffling around a bit to stay awake, he made the dry grass under his shoes crackle and prompted Jess to shine her light at his chest.

Like that, he couldn't see her -only a bright spot- but she saw him clearly, studied him a while.

He gave his daughter one half of a smile. More would have been faking it.

The picax and the shovel kept hitting the ground, a tangible sensation, Tom got more tired just from watching, but maybe also because the brothers worked in such an even steady rhythm, his breaths had synchronized to it.

Their effectiveness was to marvel at. Dean had driven them here with a concussion *Don't act like it's the first time*,-said to his brother, and now drilled into the stubborn ground with a pickax like he did this all day every day of his life.

Tom was still scared of them. Maybe more than before. He had listened to them decide in a matter of seconds not to exorcise the demon. He had heard Sam explain to Jess -after she asked- that yes, that meant, that Tyson... Tyson, who had insisted to be called by his last name since he was fifteen, that year when it became synonymous with the boxer and some especially immature kids had made fun of him because of it, that boy Tom had watched grow up, he was still in there and he would be buried alive alongside a demon.

Tom had seen Sam carve symbols into a living bone, after stripping away the flesh. He had seen
what it did to Sam to do this to his friend, to Jessica's friend, to a boy who had done nothing to
deserve this. Sam carved into him anyhow, having tears in his eyes doing it.

There was nothing he wouldn't do to keep them safe. And somehow knowing now that Sam was
not insane, made this only a more loaded promise.

The boy Tom had once trusted his daughter with, had never been real.

The real Sam was someone Tom didn't have to trust. He believed him. He knew what Sam would
do for Jessica. How far he would go.

That didn't exactly give him a good feeling; but they were past the point of being able to care about
feelings.

Facts, certainties -the few of them- ruled this new life of theirs.

Dean declared that the grave was deep enough.

Sam put the shovel away, checked his brother, and even though Dean showed no outward sign of
weakness, it had to be there, because Dean nodded, gave in to an unspoken question.

Whereupon Sam asked Jess and him to help carry Tyson's body over to the grave. The demon was
tied up and wrapped like package, gagged underneath the sheet, so thoroughly it would have
suffocated a living human being.

Sam got the kicking legs and Tom grabbed one bent arm, Jess the other. He met his daughter's eyes
briefly over the body of her friend. He couldn't tell how she felt about that. But he could see her
creased brows, her gritted teeth, her centered stance.

He counted the facts of her and came up with a new certainty. It didn't give him a good feeling
either, but knowing it now, would at least give him time.

~

Unbroken vigilance, she thought every time she opened her eyes and looked at him.

Watching Dean ride shotgun, reminded Angela of the very literal origin of the term.

Sam drove all day to take them as far away as possible from where the demon had found them.
Twice he had asked his brother where to, and Dean had only shrugged, replied, North. To stay
away from larger cities seemed to go without saying between them.

Whenever they had to stop to leave the car, Dean surveyed the place first.

It wouldn't have surprised her if he had insisted on staying on the move. He looked like he could
take over for Sam, drive the night through. His youth a deceptive mask. But it seemed like he took
what was after them so serious, that he did not dare to ignore that even his energy was limited.

And it was. He sounded weak as he cracked that joke, when he tossed Sam the motel room keys,
send his brother off with Jess to a room of their own.

Or so Angela had thought, but it never ended. She started to suspect the boy was vigilant in his
sleep. Because in the room Tom and her would share with him, Dean went through his routines:

Told Tom, that they had the bed further away from the door, then he checked the locks on the windows, laid down thick lines of salt before the door and the windows and made a count of the weapons he brought from the car. Had them all loaded and two of them at the ready.

She tried to coax him into relaxing. A little. She figured he would do them no good if he crashed and she simply was not sure how much of his demeanor was substantiated. She had listened those last weeks, she had not believed, but she had heard it all and she knew, demons were not Dean Winchester's usual prey. They were one of the things that preyed on hunters, not the other way around.

He was evasive when she hinted Tom would surely leave him some warm water to shower. *That bad?*, he joked, referring to his own smell.

“Dean,” she sat down on his bed right beside him. She did not touch his arm, like she wanted to, to convey what she had to say, because what she had done already made him look like he would jump out of his skin any second.

Dean did not meet her eyes.

This was the first time the two of them were alone with each other and Angela remembered clearly how he was not comfortable with women; charming, competent, but not comfortable the way Sam was.

“Look-” he started just-

as she put her hand on his arm.

He did not jump out of his skin. He actually relaxed a little, like against his will and then gave her this wary glance and she understood, how unsure he was to trust them, because from his side not much had changed, they were still those strange normal people and he was too tired to charm his way through the conversation, no shield left, he could only trust her, or push her away and it was a close call, but he didn't sound too annoyed when he said, “I know what you're going to say-”

“I don't think so,” she interrupted him as gentle as possible. She had a good enough read now to know exactly what she needed to say: “I want to ask you if you will go to sleep, because if you are, I'd like to stay right here. Beside you. I wont be able to sleep, not with my daughter in another room where I can't see her.” She had been barely able to sleep in the car, holding Jessica's hand the whole time. “I can't help it, though it's not very rational -rationally I know she is safe with Sam, that I myself cannot protect her.”

Dean ducked his head, like he knew-

“But you can,” she moved on to the point she actually wanted to make, “And if you go to sleep, I'd like to stay right here. And you can count on me waking you if I see flickering lights, or any other demonic omen or if there is only so much as a chill down my spine.”

He smiled a little about the conviction in her voice, a genuine smile for once. And he told her, “They are not always announcing themselves like that.”

She knew. Not just theoretically. There had been nothing out of the ordinary about Tyson before the demon killed that poor girl.

Dean put his hand over hers, “We should be safe here,” he sounded so much older than he was
when he talked like that, “I don't think they followed us. But you're welcome to stay in my bed, any
time.” His eyes twinkled a little.

“Oh thank god, you made an allusive comment; it's been ten minutes, I was wondering if it's really
you.” She mock glared at him.

He snickered and bumped shoulders with her -a little too rough, but unknowingly so.

He understood, because he could relate. How much she needed to be needed right now. Her whole
world had crumbled. Nothing would be as it was ever again.

Patting her hand one last time, he let go of her and pulled away. He went to sleep right then, in his
clothes, rolled to the side, so that his back connected slightly with her if she kept sitting like this.

He faced the door. But he had turned his back to her.

It was not a bad habit for someone living in this dark world: To find comfort in keeping others
safe.

In the face of an evil that was only ever a saltline away, Angela had softened to everything John
Winchester had done for and to his sons. They were healthy, as sane possible and able to protect
themselves without him around. More than that, they protected others. He had not done so bad. A
parent's first function was to keep their children alive and only second, to help them find happiness.

Next morning, John was scheduled to call Dean. -they call us, we don't call them-that's
the orders Sammy, and the orders don't change if demons attack, or you have another vision-

Dean had not taken lightly to learning Sam had called Bobby only hours before the demon had
come. They didn't know if it was a coincidence, or not. And not being able to tell if Bobby could
offer a safe place, it complicated things.

Maybe Dean punished Sam for his call, by talking with his father alone. He did bring it up again,
when the phone rang and he got up to leave the diner and Sam wanted to come with.

But Angela actually suspected Dean had another reason, something to say to or ask of his father, he
didn't want Sam to hear.

Jess noisily stabbed the last piece of her pancakes and declared, “I'm still starving,” -she had
wolfed down her breakfast in what even for her was unusually fast. “Do you think Dean’s going to
finish that,” her daughter pointed at Dean's half eaten cheeseburger.

“Yeah,” Sam answered halfheartedly, like he knew how little it would to to stop Jess.

“Then order him another one.”

“Jess!”

“What, Mom? It's going to be cold before he's back.”

And it would have been. Also a fresh burger arrived at the same time with Dean, who took it in
stride without a word.

But that wasn't the point. One could think Jessica had been raised by-

“-killed himself before they got to him.”
Caleb.

Warned by Bobby about Sam's vision, Caleb had killed himself.

“Well it looks like he did it himself when they were closing in on him, but we can't be sure. Dad will dig around a little before he moves on.”

“So he will be held up,” Sam said.

“No, Sammy. He is not meeting with us.”

“What- Why?”

“Too dangerous.” Dean bit down on his burger, explained chewing, “They could follow him and they could have heard every word we just said. That's why he said he would meet us, but that's not the plan for this occasion.”

“What plan?” At this point Sam was more than upset to have been left in the dark again.

“We will drive further north and then take the scenic route to South Dakota. Dad is in Nebraska at Caleb's so he heads west, pretends to meet us to throw them of our trail.”

“And then he will meet us at Bobby's?”

“No,” Dean shook his head. “It's not safe, there is no way to tell if he can shake them. He wont meet us until this is over.”

“What'ya'mean until it's over, until what is over!?"

Dean put his burger down to look at Sam when he said, “What I mean is, that he said goodbye last time he left.”

Sam forgot to breath for second, “You knew-? How could you-”

“You would have wanted to come with and that's not happening.”

“So what? We're going to sit ducks at Bobby's?”

Dean bit his lip.

“What?!" his brother demanded to know.

“We're just dropping off the Moore's, we don't stay. Dad says it's safest to keep moving and I agree. Safer for everyone. We disperse, we're many targets, instead of one.”

“I wont leave them behind,” Sam stated with a glance on Tom and Angela, and fixed at Jess, who held his gaze.

“Don't be stupid,” Dean's voice lowered, “You stay there? you're calling this fight to Bobby's doorstep. They don't want them, they want you.”

“And they're going to try to get me through them, they're never going to stop searching for them!”

“And what good does it do if they find them at Bobby's and you're there? We don't know what they want from you, but we know for sure, they would love to kill Jess. They find her and you're not there? They may use her as bait, which buys us some time.”
Dean had a point, but of course-

“You don't know that,” there were two sides, and Sam happened to see the other one, “You don't
know what they want or if they will just kill Jess and her parents and Bobby and leave to let us find
the corpses like in my vision – because maybe they just want to push me where Mom was: backed
into a corner, alone, nothing left to-”

“You're right,” Dean held out his hand halting Sam's words, “I don't know what they will do, but I
know what we wont do:

We wont be reckless, just because we're scared for each other. That's an amateur move. That gets
you killed faster than you say Too-Dumb-To-Live.”

The argument did not end there. It would flare up in the following days and once even got so
ugly, Sam did accuse his brother of not caring for them, of wanting the responsibility off his chest-

Dean swallowed heavy and while Angela had seen him hold himself well against low blows -
thanks to her daughter, Dean had trouble to shoot back when Sam was the one who dealt them:

He only almost finished his comeback, You don't get to say that to me, I'm not the one-...

-who left. Who quit hunting.

Bitter were the wars between brothers. And bitter even their peace -because while Sam did not
apologize, he did take the accusation and twisted it into what Dean had not said:

That it was Sam's fault, the danger he had put them in.

So many things unspoken. No wonder they needed to lie down next to each other, say with an arm
around the other what they couldn't put into words.

All Dean had meant was that he did care about people, he had not just stayed in hunting because of
their father, but because he was actually good at it.

He couldn't say it, so he proved himself, kept them together and safe for the moment, even though
the stitches of what Jess had done to him had not come out yet and he was hurting in a different
way from his heavily masked hope crushed, to meet with his father. Because he could tell them
much, but it was a safe bet that he had asked John -just between them- if there was any
possibility...

But there was none. They made their way to South Dakota, a town called Sioux Falls, where Bobby
Singer and his dog lived. No surprises waited there for Dean, neither good, nor bad. Angela wished
she could say the same thing.

And then it was time to say goodbye.

There was nothing polite about the hug Dean gave her. Awkward, heartfelt, too firm and
completely unexpected in this situation, since she had other things on her mind. But Angela hugged
him back just as hard. It hurt a little, and that was what she had needed.
For the next days, after they buried Brady, her life became a series of stops. In between, Jess started to view the long stretches of the road and everything that came with driving as the only constant, a sense of stability to come back to.

A great deal of it always stayed the same:

The suffocating heat from the sunlight burning down on the black car the whole day – a given. Or the traffic-light-punctured bleakness of the night when they kept driving; which they did more often than not, as they crisscrossed through the American Northwest...

That musty car smell, mixed with the smell from leftover food. The sense of comfort from being tucked away under Sam's arm or sitting between her parents in the back.

Aside from the stops, time lost it's meaning. After months of captivity where keeping account of it had been a form of control; now slipping up felt welcomed, falling into something, into a step, no? more a roll, a way to breathe, a way to hear...

The rustle of Sam reading the map, the rumble of the car, the music Dean played that reminded one of that quote her mom had in her study as a calligraphy:

_The function of music is to release us from the tyranny of conscious thought._

-She managed to make her mom laugh with the comparison and had her argue, that one couldn't hear one's thoughts over this music, which wouldn't be the same thing.

Dean, overhearing them, quipped, how he hadn't got that, since the music was too loud.

-the constant bickering, between Sam and his brother. Sam and Dad - when Dad didn't make himself sick from reading the books in the backseat. Between Dean and Mom – though that was probably more flirting than bickering.

He was very entertaining. The antics of a man born to be behind the wheel; the kind of driver that made one feel safe, _Like a good ole boy type busdriver_

Dean chocked on his water, before he dumped the last drops of the bottle over Jess’ head, curing what he diagnosed as first symptoms of a heatstroke.

The overall feeling of moving, of invulnerability, of being home.

This was Sam's home, a lived-in one. That fact showed every time he turned around to look at them and had that face on like he shook himself from a dream – but what was the dream? The road, or them – being back home - beside Dean and then remembering that there was more to it, that it wasn't so simple, or was it that they were still there, that he hadn't lost them? Jess wasn't sure, because all Sam's guilt weighed on one side, but on the other sat that split second it took him to shake himself from happiness, that second he focused on her and she saw that his favorite fantasy of today had been that she belonged, belonged to this life of his.
For how safe it felt, it still felt like flatlining, like something your brain came up with until you realized you're dying. Because every time they stopped she became so much more alive, like jolted by fear, or experiencing a burst of hunger, or that first night they stopped, when she learned tiredness could crawl like a robotic parasite under one's skin -keeping you alert uncaring of your body wasting away...

...that first night they stopped

…she just barely caught it when Dean said he booked them two rooms.

Then he tossed Sam the key, not minding the confused looks, and Jess thought too, Weren't they supposed to stay together?

But instead of minding his brother's non-verbal cues, Dean told her parents, “We let the kids have some privacy, what'ya'say?” Got a lot to talk about, he mumbled and shrugged and lead the way.

Mom hesitated a second, but they shared a look and parted knowing it would be alright.

Jess saw Sam roll his eyes about Dean's choice of a king size bed – but she actually thought it pretty considerate of him.

Weird. In the ugliest possible way things had started to make sense again since Brady 'died'.

Sam wasn't crazy, his brother was an okay guy, demons were real and life sucked ass.

Dean didn't want to come between Sam and her, he wanted what was best for Sam. He would literally tear his heart out for his brother, or figuratively by pushing Sam towards her. Give Sam at least this night – who knew what would wait for him tomorrow.

She liked that logic. Take what you can get, when you can get it. Simple, easy to remember. Maybe too simple to build a whole life on it, but to survive a life like this one?

She doubted she was what was best for Sam. In a parallel universe maybe, but here? Sam needed a lot more than she alone was able to offer. At the moment she felt like a shell, something so hollow that it echoed-

“Jess?”

-it kept flashing before her eyes, even when she made sure they were wide open: The change from solid to soft when she kept hitting Brady's head, The unblinking black eyes on a dead moving body, The mummy-wrapped demon wiggling in the grave trying to get the dry earth off while they were shoveling it on him-

“Jess?” Sam asked again, and when established eye-contact indicated she had heard him, he muttered awkwardly about getting them a different room -probably because she had been staring at the bed- if she wanted that-

she didn't want that. She pushed him against the door and shut him up; he melted against her for a moment before he returned the kisses, all that quiet fire that was Sam.

And then he stopped, pushed, pleaded, -We have to put saltlines on the door and the windows-
Dean will kill me if we don't-

“Okay,” she said and let go of him. Normally she would have hated to feel so needy, but in the hollow echoed no hate.

At least that bit of physical discomfort coating her outsides made up for all the emptiness she felt inside.

But what would happen if she showered, if she stretched out on the bed, if the lights were off and then she woke up to a new day? What then?

Naw. As raw as it made her, it was better to be greasy, tired, wired and pissed at Sam for flipping the lights on. One of these light bulbs that just wouldn't die, that were so dim and yellow they hurt the eyes.

She sat on the bed, returned her stiff and tired body to the position that had gotten it so stiff, and buried her face in her hands. It gave her flashbacks statics when she scraped her fingernails through the oily skin of her hairline.

Hearing Sam come closer, kneeling down in front of her, she was expecting something, but not his hand on her bare calf.

He took her shoes off for her. Wearing them again after so long going barefoot had been weird.

Sam checked her scarred foot. He was working through a mental list, she realized, and was flooded with a tenderness for Sam. For how he held on, when this was all he ran from and so much worse. Suddenly she could cry when she thought how he had told her he felt safe with her, when they did nothing but lie under their tree and be together. She hadn't understood, in her life safety just was. In his you fought dangers off like chores – demons, infections, heartbreak...the list never ended, you were never done, he was never safe, only safer, which was not the same.

He looked up at her. The shadows in his eyes had settled there like sadness was Sam's soul. They had been back with his memories and until now Jess had never allowed herself to think that she had missed them. That Sam without his memories was happier, but he was also not Sam, not the one she loved so much that she would let it cut her open. “Lie down with me.”

His hands resting above her ankles grasped her before letting go, such an instinctual, conflicted thing to do. “I'm dirty,” he argued, “I should take a shower.”

They both needed one, but yeah, Sam was probably worse off. Other than Dean, he had not changed out of his sweated through grave-digging clothes, only washed his hands with water from a bottle – but when she looked close enough there was still Brady's blood dried underneath his fingernails, from when he-

“I don't want to shower,” she said, “I don't want you to shower,” that meant too, but what it really meant was how scared she was that when they were clean, when what had happened had no place in reality anymore, it would shriek all the louder, become a memory with sound, instead of flashes of feelings absorbed into a world of smell and taste.

She had always been better with smells and tastes, she realized, as she had drawn Sam in for a kiss again.

~ Her legs were wrapped around his waist and he wanted her closer still.

Kissing Jess felt like salvation, something impossible to describe to those who had never needed it.
The holiness of it didn't come from forgetting your sins, but from owning them. Deep down he had always felt like she had seen through him. Like she washed away his sins with her silence about them and loved him anyhow.

A lot had changed, but not that. To anyone else he would have felt like a liar when he promised they would come back for Brady, that they would put an end to his suffering... Promise me...she whispered against his skin.

And would. How could he not? He had brought it up again, he had asked if she was okay. After they had stripped and he counted all her dark bruises in the fawnish light with his fingertips. It had slipped out, the question, like a testimonial of his guilt – too sudden the realization that he had not asked her, not once, how she felt, if she was okay...considering.

“I promise you,” he swore without doubt, without denying what risk they would have to take one day, without fear of disappointing her.

“Then I will be okay,” she traded the promise back, along with more kisses, skin-deep-soft. So much more tender than he deserved.

He didn't know why he was less gentle with her than he was with other people. What it was about her that made him careless. He did love her more than anyone, safe maybe Dean.

But then she laughed suddenly and he knew.

“Not a puzzle box, babe,” she commented on the intensity of his stare, “And even if I was, you should have figured out by now where to press.”

Nothing would ever tame her.

They left the light on and went to sleep there on top of the sheets naked, vulnerable to everything but each other.

~

Her life had become a series of stops.

Like the one after Dean went shopping for toiletries and they had that discussion beforehand:

“A scarf?”

“Yeah, one of those Hippie-Surfer-...”

Dean shut up then and there, but he wasn't wrong. They had to change their appearance. She had not thought about it initially, had believed Brady's words – which was a thing she still had to get
used to, that it hadn't been Brady and that demons lied – well that demons were a thing. That needed getting used to.

It wasn't true that the police and the FBI or anyone had stopped looking for them.

Her mom went for the scarf. Jess opted for something a little bit more permanent, which lead to the rest stop bathroom where Mom helped her dye her hair.

The brown suds stained the sink further -if that was possible. Her mom winced, but really that t-shirt hadn't been white for some time time now, not since Sam had wrestled her to the ground the first time they had escaped.

It felt foreign, but also soothing once her hair was dark; once she wouldn't be recognized a mile away by her friends...who she never would be able to see again without some serious explaining, because they all thought Sam had kidnapped her, them...

And then there was Sophie. She tried not to think of her, tried not to bring her up in front of her parents, only once asked Sam if he thought she would be safe?

They were her family, what did she go through? Did she believe them dead? -it felt forced to have these thoughts, here -on the run -lightyears from the life where it came naturally to worry about someone feelings, even someone who she wanted to be her sister once.

They stopped to shop for clothes soon enough. And out went the feeling of soothing anonymity – it only existed as long as there was the car window between her and the world.

After months... it had been months, -of captivity, doing something as mundane as checking jeans for sizes felt terribly free and panic attack inducing for how out in the open it was. A small crammed second hand shop felt like complete exposure; not like being watched, but like any of the people in here could look up and see her at any moment. Their eyes could be turning black or they simply just recognize her for being weird. “How do you do it?” she asked Dean who had become her shadow while Sam had a hard time to find pants that wouldn't be high waters on him.

“What?”

“Crowds.”

Dean looked around, raising an eyebrow at her definition of crowds. “I drink, but I also prefer to do people in a relaxed, dark, loud setting.”

“Like a bar?”

“Like a bar.”

She could use a drink right now, because if this not-really-being-noticed went on for another minute her spine would start to cramp from how uncomfortable she felt.

“You want something with a bit of a higher waist,” Dean nodded at the low cut blue jeans in her hands.

Okay? “Why?”
Dean gave the room that cursory glance that took everything and everyone in at once and when he was sure no one's attention was at them, he turned around, lifted his jacket, showed his backside-

Of course.

“You also want to find a shirt wide and long enough. If it's only a little too tight, anyone with an eye for it can tell you're carrying.”

She wasn't carrying a gun, but she didn't point that out because this was where this was going. And she didn't want to question the idea to arm her, when technically she was always with Sam, or Dean, mostly both of them at all hours of the day. She didn't need to be armed, technically.

But there was this idea in the back of her head, something she didn't want to think about until it would be absolutely unavoidable, and because she didn't think about it she also didn't contemplate the fact that her acceptance of things like carrying a gun already pointed at a direction that was beyond the immediate practical everyday thing to learn when you were on the run from demons.

She was glad Dean practically pushed that development at her -followed her to the cabin with a sturdy but worn-in leather belt he found. To complete her gear.

Dinner later in the afternoon came from a deli and was eaten miles into the wilderness of Washington. Nice spot. Very green. She had forgot about the guns, when Dean told Sam,

“I think it's time to give Jess the drill.”

Just to confuse his brother. He was such a jerk-

“Get your mind out of the gutter, Sammy,”

-but a goofy one.

Dean waved with the gun and when Sam finally understood, it earned Dean a tortured sigh.

Sam showed her the basics of gun safety and while she knew what to do, the most important thing wasn't something she could've learned from watching. Well not really-...

“Do it again.”

...

“And again.”

...

“Again.”

...-she had seen them at ease while being armed, but she had never really thought about how that came; she had just assumed that after years- but that was stupid of course, a learning curve wasn't really a good thing when it came to deadly weapons, that went off by the pull of a trigger, or if you dropped them, or just because.

So you practiced gun safety, every time, all the time, again and again. You never picked a gun up assuming, you never let yourself be handed a gun trusting, you never made an exception and you always followed the same procedure.

Again, and again, and again.
That way you're safe to handle any weapon even drunk, half-asleep and bleeding out from the gut, Dean offered his wisdom.

Sam was satisfied after about twenty minutes and then took the gun from her.

“I know you fired at the demon, but we should stop to shoot a few cans before you get your own.”

“You asked for a gun?” her mom questioned her immediately.

And she was able to answer truthfully with, “No.”

They hadn't been able to shoot a few cans yet when she decided to stay back in the car parked in front of a restaurant in Idaho, while Dean took her parents out for dinner. Because Sam had finally fallen asleep and Dean had been reluctant to leave him alone. But also hungry. Hard choice.

So Jess had volunteered.

She thought it would be a peaceful way to spend an hour almost alone.

It wasn't -peaceful.

Almost alone, fit it.

It was too hot in the car.

People walked by peeping in.

She thought she smelled sulfur, but the source turned out to be Sam.

After ten minutes she got so bored she looked through her mother's things, but didn't want to move too much, since Sam really needed that sleep.

Mom had grabbed her drawings when they left the cabin. Her drawings and the books Sam had shoved into their hands. Priorities were a funny thing.

She hadn't thought to take a single item from there. Not even something functional.

Sure there had been Brady and the demon inside of him distracting her a bit, but most of all:

She just had gotten Sam back.

Sam who sniffled in his sleep.

Sam who was so warm, he had to have core of lava in his belly.

Sam who cuddled closer to her anyhow and woke a little because:

“Can you shut the window...i's loud,” he mumbled.

Yeah, but you're gassy, she didn't say, “Sure, babe.” She kissed his unnaturally soft hair and held him closer and decided that that counted as a peaceful moment for an antsy person like herself.
She wasn't sure if she should call it one of those stops when they stopped in the middle of night at the side of the road under a starry sky.

Dean had heard his *Baby* make a noise he hadn't liked.

It had been a beautiful day. An orange sunrise. A lone stag with heavy antlers watching them drive by, not bothered, just observing their passing.

Dean had let Sam choose the music. For full five minutes. Mom had been drawing and they had discussed colors and light, since Jess never had liked drawing as much as painting and there had been a long sunset, casting colors without names on ripening corn fields.

Art was only ever an attempt to capture, to translate. And beside the technical aspect completely futile if all the people you wanted to share what would be in it, were there with you, when you pointed out the splatter of stars there, that looked like someone lost diamonds on black velvet.

They sat on the dry gravel, leaning against the car. Jess shared a beer with her dad, as they both were only in the mood for the taste. Sometimes bitter was the best taste, when one felt so happy to be alive.

“She is not giving me any love tonight,” Dean took a break and sat with them.

“She is an object, Dean.”

Oh Sam.

“Don't listen to him, sweetheart,” Dean was patting the black paint like one would pat a horse.

Jess had grown somehow fond of Sam's brother. And that was not only the beer making her feel that.

Then eventually the had stopped to shoot a few cans.

Now she was walking around with a gun tucked into the back of her jeans for the first time.

Had breakfast sitting abnormally straight, because she was sure her shirt would ride up or fall wrong and show she was hiding something there.

Carrying did not help to calm her nerves, like Dean had promised.

But what did he know? He had grown up with a gun under his pillow.

Concealing an illegal weapon felt a lot like wearing light colored shorts on her period on a hot summer day, sweating, and constantly stifling the impulse to check herself.

“You're doing great,” Dean said, as they walked back to the car, but? she felt it the but coming,
“No, really. You almost don't look like you shit yourself-Ow!”

Sam had stamped his foot.

Ouch.

Dean was a grumpy Grumple for first few miles, until Jess decided that there was no position that didn't dig the metal into her back painfully and finally put the gun in her bag where she found,

“Cookie dough?” she offered Dean.

Who graciously accepted.

Sam bitched about not letting her go grocery shopping alone anymore. Obviously she was worse than Dean.

Her mom agreed. Dad just sighed. Dean disputed Sam's claim, but had to concede, that yes, cookie dough was even more unhealthy road food than peanut M&M's.

Her life had become a series of stops. But in between lay that dream that was the road.

Where when Sam would have trouble sleeping Dean would change the station to classic rock, and Sam would snooze against her shoulder.

Where her mom would point out random things she remembered from the roadtrip she took as a young woman; stories she had never told Jess before.

Or where her dad read from the books Sam had made them go back for, those last minutes before their hasty retreat, the one-of-kind kinda books of lore so old and crazy even Dean didn't believe half of what was in them. But Sam sometimes knew additional facts, and they listened to both of them and it felt like when she was little and Dad would read non-fiction out loud, trying to make her fall asleep, but never really succeeding for how enthusiastic he sounded.

Dean was driving, Sam was reading the map. She had spent the last hours in the back between her parents and now leaned on the bench looking over Sam's shoulder.

“In three hours we could be in Great Falls, have an early dinner—”

“Uh'uh,” Dean shook his head, “we drive through – we should make it to Miles City before midnight.”

“I thought we're taking the scenic route.”

“There's nothing scenic about that area of Montana.”

Okay?

She traded looks with Sam, but he seemed just as clueless what had gotten-

-realization dawned and immediately mixed with annoyance:
“Oh come on, this is not about-”

“Yes it is. You know the rules, Sammy: We don't go anywhere near Black Horse Lake – Not in this car.”

Sam rolled his eyes and heaved an epic sigh.

“Why?” it was always very educational to question things that made Sam heave epic sighs. Not to forget, amusing.

“Because the roads of the area are haunted,” he explained.

Okay. For normal people not going somewhere haunted was reasonable but, “I'm sorry if that's a stupid question, but if you know that, why did you never-”

“Because it's not killing anyone. It's-”

“-Yet” Dean corrected.

“-Yeah, okay, it has not killed anyone yet. It's just a phantom hitchhiker who likes to scare people. Sometimes he runs along with the cars and makes them go at top speed-” Sam grinned, but then, “– so technically yeah, it's endangering people, but practically we and every other hunter who knows of the hitchhiker always had better things to do.”

She just had an idea. Whispering, like it was only meant for Sam she asked, “And why is Dean afraid of it?”

“I ain't afraid of-... any ghosts.”

“Dammit, so close!” She almost had him say it.

Dean shook his head about her, and went on to argue his case, “I just don't like those who go after cars. And” he pointed his finger at the sky, lecturing, “There is ghosts, and then there is Native American ghosts, like this hitchhiker. You do not mess with those, you just stay out of their way.”

“Sure, and that has nothing to do with-”

“You shut your mouth.”

She looked at Sam, who grinned and mouthed, Long story.

“Nope,” Dean caught him without even glancing sideways, “No story, nothing to tell, nothing to see here, move along.”

Sam started to pack the map away. Miles City was only a day away from Sioux Falls. It felt terribly sudden, the realization that they could be there tomorrow.

“But I tell you what,” Dean added suddenly, “We could take a trip to Larson's in Larimore.”

“Yeah, sure,” Sam did not hide he lacked spirit, “Because there is nothing more scenic than that part of North Dakota.”

“Three words, Sammy: Monster Burger Basket.”

“Only you would take a day's detour in stride for-Oh, I'm sorry,” Sam turned his head to her looking down his nose verrry disapprovingly, “There is only two people in this car who would take
a day's detour for burgers.”

She kissed his scrunched-up disapproving nose and sat back, between her parents. Dad looked up from his book and smiled a little.

Mom had been looking out of the window, deep in thought and now looked at her, and made her feel caught.

Like her mom knew. Which was stupid of course, paranoid. Jess didn't even know herself yet; had decided not even to think about making any decisions, plans. And maybe if she told herself that a few more times, she would be able to fool herself well enough to trick her mom's mindreading abilities for a little while longer.

“Do you think someone is watering my plants?”

What? That was what her mom was thinking about?

“Not that I want them to, it would be waste of time, we're not coming back. But you know how Evelyn is...”

Yep, definitely Paranoia.

Chapter End Notes

The epilogue will be posted tomorrow.
Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

For reasons of nostalgia the epilogue was not heavily edited, since it was written early in the process and became a fixed star in our long journey ending today...

Epilogue

The charcoal gray hoodie smelled of her mom. It was cooler at Bobby's, first signs of fall.

Dean found her in between the gutted cars. Not exactly hiding- No, yes, she was hiding. She had made up her mind and now didn't know how to tell her parents. They thought-, well Mom thought, that Jess could do this -stay here with them, learn everything Bobby could teach them...Sure it was safer here than right next to Sam. But was it? Or was it like conservative management versus surgery?

Stay in one place, built up resources, wait to be hit versus staying on the move, learning on the job, going out with a bang.

She didn't have the nerves for the former. That would be like playing dead until spotted and killed. Waste away what one had left. A dry life, bereft a calling.

No, the thought alone took her breath away. No way she would let this happen to her.

Dean kicked at the dirt. Nervous. Bored?

Ah. Babysitting her. So it should be a bit of both.

She looked at him, really looked like she was to see him for the first time and knew nothing about him but how good, how right he seemed here placed among scrap metal, destroyed paint and growing rust. Even if she knew nothing about him, she would think he was someone who saw work where others saw trash. Someone capable, someone who fixed things no one else wanted to fix. If she had met him like this, she would have seen him right away.

So demons are real. What else?
a shrug

*Everything dark and fugly. No unicorns.*

*For me unicorns are out of the picture since ’97.*

*???

*Only virgins can see unicorns.*

*Oh. counting with his fingers. Ohh.*

*Yeah. Ohh.*

*You dog.*

*I am a girl, Dean, I can't be a dog. I mean I could be, but the word you are searching for is bitch, or slut.*

*Nope, the bitch is Sam. You're the dog.*

*You do realize that dog-girls are the ugly ones.*

*But you know what I mean. It will be our thing.*

*That you call me a dog?*

*No the dog.*

*No, you're The Dog.*
You're The Dog.

You're right, I am The Dog. Now be a doll and show me how to shoot a shotgun.

Dollface smiled at her, shaking his head in a most approving way. Right there she got the feeling that maybe she would get along just fine with Dean. They were not so different.

It took Sam respectively longer to figure that out. But that was after she had said good-bye to her parents, left them where they were "safe", while she wasn't so safe and still had a long way to go to be a full hunter. At least Dean and her had figured out how to share Sam. Dean got him when they were really drunk and Jess when they were really sober. It worked. Mostly because they did not tell Sam he was shared and pretended the big incestuous polyamorous elephant wasn't in the room.

Sam always needed more time to figure things out...

They had an argument about Star Trek, Dean and her, he said she was the Mccoy to their team and claimed to be Kirk. After a while she agreed with him, saying Kirk had something of a Ken doll.

Dog. Dean grinned like a loon every time they did their thing. Sure Sam and him had their bitch and jerk thing, but theirs was better. Mostly because Dean really was a doll, she told him so.

Their conversation irritated the hell out of Sam, who tried to do some research. That was just a plus, he had promised to stop at six and cuddle with her. Now it was seven and her head rested in Deans lap.

Since he had told her she reminded him of his mom and that killed any sexual interest for him, she had become a lot more physical with Dean. She was sure he had lied, but it didn't matter; for a reason she understood, but could not properly explain, Dean thought of her as off limits. She was his brother's. The brother he had drunken, sweaty, heavy make out sessions with. It did not make sense, not in a direct, straight way. Like everything with Dean. He was so simple it was complicated. He loved Sam. That was why she was off limits. And why Sam wasn't.

Thinking big thoughts?

No, thinking about you, dollface.

Keep it up, dog-girl. ... So med-student...?

Yes I know things about the human body that lead to magical orgasms.

Sam clapped the lap-top shut. Maybe he did not want to test how long it took his girlfriend, soon to be fiance(she had found the ring a week ago), to get bored enough to get friendly with his brother. Not that she would. Dean was off limits. He was Sam's.

Not what I wanted to ask, but now that the subject has come up. What do you know about ears?

More than you think. But feet do more for me.
Prompted, Sam made up for his one hour delay and sat with them on the bed, taking her left foot, massaging it.

_Direct connection to the speech center. Over and out, Captain._

_So now is a bad time to ask you if a Med student knows her Latin._

_Very bad. What are we talkin about?_  
_If Sam already taught you some exorcisms._

_Wha-? the spot under the ball of her foot, Yes!_  
_You don't know what your missing, Latin is the new french_  

That had her laughing hard enough, she had to sit up, because she wouldn't wiggle around in Dean's lap to put her mommy-image to a test.

_Why you're laughing, that doesn't make any sense? Sam wanted to know and she only had to laugh harder._

_It's funny Mister Spock, it's not supposed to make sense._

_Dean, -Sam protested even humor has rules-_  

She fell off the bed because she laughed hard enough to loose all control of her limbs.

And then and there, when Sam watched them laugh themselves silly, because Latin was the new French, which wasn't funny, _since French was actually the new Latin_, like Sam rationalized later, but just because it was vaguely dirty and stupid and a conversation fail for anyone but the two of them; there, even though he did not get the joke, _because_ he did not get the joke, Sam finally understood how alike the rest of his crazy pack was.

And a pack they were. It was easier to explain their triangle when they just called themselves a pack. Dean claimed to be the alpha. The alpha-doll maybe, she shot back. And it was pretty easy to determine who was the alpha in their pack. It wasn't Dean. And it wasn't her.

Though she was an integral part of the pack, she still was second to Sam in Deans eyes. Same thing for her, Sam was first, Dean second.

_Which was why it came to Sam as a big shock, when Dean sold his soul to bring her back from the dead:_

_After two years, that yellow eyed bastard finally had succeeded and got her killed. Before Sam could do something stupid, Dean beat him to it. Always had to imitate his daddy, _that idjit_, Bobby would say. Bobby had kept an eye on the wrong brother while she lay dead on that bare mattress._

_They had no time to think, threw themselves into the fight, shutting the devil's gate, killing Yellow Eyes._

_Only after, when Sam had broken down, unable to look at her, to touch her, to talk to his brother, she was left alone with Dean._

Who had the nerve to smile at her, like all would come to be okay. She beat the crap outta him.
She did not listen to any reasoning, she knew it all. How he thought Sam and her would settle down, white picket fence and all the shit. That stupid ass. As if Sam could ever settle down with a part of his soul damned to hell. As if she could be with Sam, when it should have been her. When she had been too stupid, too slow, too trusting. When she had always been second in Sam's life, in his heart.

She stopped shouting and hitting Dean, when he started to sob into her skin.

They had sex. Or something with the same motions as sex, with a climax both of them wouldn't feel. The lightness in their hearts afterwards was nothing sweet, but resembled to the open wound a night spent crying left.

When Dean started to talk, began to explain, how he did it not because he wanted Sam to have a life with her, he wanted that, just- ...it wasn't everything. He murmured into her heart, of how he wished she would have that silly white dress on her wedding day and little girls throwing flowers in her path, and her being pregnant and showing Sam how to built a cradle, because he would just hurt himself with a screwdriver and she would kick ass giving birth, because no one took pain like she did and she would be the best mother and sing Enter Sandman to her baby and she knew how to stop scraped knees from hurting and make nightmares into silly laughable things.

He saw her as one of the grandma's who snuck sweets to their grandchildren right before dinner and fed stray dogs, just to annoy her deaf and blind husband, who she still loved even though he had stupid hair.

He saw her whole life – a thing of beauty.

She saw herself dying, because there was no way she would survive seeing him dragged to hell. She did not tell him so. She told Sam. Not in that words.

She told him that she loved his brother.

The year before they died was the best and worst time of her life. The three of them were so close, it felt like they never really let go. They lost all pretense, slept in one bed, too scared to miss a minute of togetherness.

Ruby tried to talk her into helping her help Sam.

She had none of it. Demons were snakes. Poisonous. There were no exceptions. The idea of Dean's soul burnt down to that made her actually puke once. Sure she had been drunk, but the reaction had been so violent, the sickness of the idea had to become somatic expression.

Then suddenly time was up, they had lost, but it seemed alright, because they brought the fight to Lilith and none of them would survive that.

Only Sam did.

Without a scratch on him.

Her soul was standing beside her's and Dean's shredded bodies and wondered if the hellhounds had only come after her because she had been the one with Rubies knife.

She had anticipated, whatever Sam would do now, it would be terrible.
Still nothing could have prepared her for the gagging feeling of black smoke and the agony of being forced back into her dead body.

He had begged her for it. Begged Ruby to bring her back. Like the bitch would bring her back, like she would let her speak, like she would step back and let a human be with whom she considered hers: The devils vessel. Jess knew. Ruby told her the first night they lay on Sam's chest, listening to his thumping heartbeat. Lilith would rise Lucifer and offer Sam as a puppet to him.

Four months. Four months Sam was blind with grief, unable too see that Ruby only pretended to let her speak, used her, used him, fed him their blood. Poison, now so literal.

And then Dean was back, uncharred by hell, still human, still beautiful.

She was so sure, he would see the difference, but Ruby...Ruby fed him lies, spoke in poisoned tongues using Jess' voice, painting a picture of a changed Jess, a whore, who liked sharing her body with a demon, gave it up for power and wanted Sam for herself.

Dean wasn't demonic, but he was deeply hurt, broken, the angel had put him back together, but all wrong.

Over a year she watched helplessly how all forces worked her brothers apart. Till nothing bound them together anymore, but Jess herself- Deans hate for her and Sam's dependence.

All this time she was sure the angel would seduce Dean to take the final step, become his brother's death. Become Michael to Lucifer.

She had lost all hope when the tables turned and Castiel fell for Dean. Disobeyed, told him the truth about the plan, about Ruby, about Lilith, about Sam. Gave him the means to save his brother, to stop it all.

It was too late.

Lilith died and Ruby revealed herself to Sam. So sure of her victory, not counting on Dean coming up behind her with a knife.

It was easy, dying, with Sam's gentle arms holding her upright and Dean looking at her and seeing her again for the first time since he came back from hell. Death was easy.

Life then, wasn't.

And awkward.

On a plane.

*It's me* quickly became her new favorite phrase. Because Dean had reached for the knife on reflex and Sam stared at her, as at a ghost(like normal people stared at ghosts).

She had been healed. They were not sure if it had been Lucifer, or some side effect of his rising, till they met Castiel, who was sure, it had been God who rose them from the dead.

Bets were still accepted about that particular riddle.

But sometimes she suspected there had been a plan behind the plan and that plan had included her.

Because a year after her resurrection, a lot of battles lost and few won, they faced Lucifer.
And his decision to jump Sam's bones turned out to be his worst idea since rebelling.

Because it took Sam one look at the two of them to take control back from Lucifer.

Sam had been far from stable. It had been a hard year for him. To forgive himself was not his strongest trait. But they were together, and like Dean once had said, together they could take on heaven and hell, Mothra and Godzilla. Sam would be gone after they won, with only a little part of him left behind.

As they watched Sam fall into the darkness, Dean caught hold of her hand.

Dean had had to promise Sam to take care of her.

Stupid macho idiots, like she would let him make her barefoot to her pregnant. She would move in with Bobby and her mom, because she had promised Sam. But she would not marry Dean. He did not even want to, he just thought it was what Sam would have wanted.

She explained it in easy words to him. Dean could be the old guy who was skittish around the strays she fed when she would be a grandma. She would always love him. But Sam was the man she would marry.

Not him, Dean was like her brother, she explained, that would be like incest.

Bobby pretended not to have heard them. Her mom didn't pretend, but didn't find it funny.

Her dad up there did, because the ones up there knew everything and he always had had a skewed sense of humor.

When she was alone and busy -cleaned the guns, rubbed her baby belly or when she watered down Dean's whiskey- it sometimes was so quiet, it felt like someone was watching her.

She was not crazy. In a universe like theirs, it was just matter of time till the quiet was over. God was not done with the Winchesters yet. They still had work to do.