Two-Headed Boy
by dollylux

Summary

Sam's life from sixteen to twenty-two years old. This is a story of the last days of innocence during a sweltering Southern summer when Sam is so in love with his brother, he can barely stand his touch. It's the pain between them through lies, through jealousy, through seeing each other with someone else. Theirs is a story of leaving and Stanford, of Dean feeling lost and Sam nearly losing himself without his brother. It's fire and reunion and a love never lost - ever-present and no longer deniable.

Notes

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ART POST: http://niightmoves.livejournal.com/6707.html
SOUNDTRACK POST: http://melungeoned.livejournal.com/64022.html
READ ON LJ: http://melungeoned.livejournal.com/57241.html

Note: *This story assumes you have seen/known season one of Supernatural. Fair warning!* 

DIRECT SEQUEL to The Ballad of the Invisible Boy. It isn’t necessary to read Invisible Boy to read this story (but it is advised to get a fuller picture). Start the series here: http://archiveofourown.org/works/1017905
PART ONE

1999

“Dad, I am not staying here.”

Sam doesn’t move when Dean kills the engine. They all sit in the car, staring out at the tiny shack set back from a nearly abandoned road. Evening is falling fast and the cicadas are out in full force, their sound as bright as stars. There are no lights on anywhere nearby, just the eternal headlights of the Impala.

Dad doesn’t even turn to look at Sam in the back seat, doesn’t even glance at him. He just opens the door to the car and steps out, grunting with every movement.

“It’s either here or Russellville, Kentucky. You take your pick, Sammy.”

*Here* is apparently a place called Sunshine, Tennessee. It’s snug right up against the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and it’s just a couple of tiny roads with expensive cabins and forgotten remnants of homes on them. Little rivers and creeks twist and tangle with the roads in a stubborn dance and Sam hasn’t seen a store for miles.

He forces his way out of the back seat, feeling a little panicky already. He looks to Dean for help but Dean is just staring straight ahead, right at the little house, probably trying to figure out how they’re going to survive in it. He never argues with Dad anymore, never defends Sam unless he absolutely has to. Just the thought of it has Sam slamming the door and stomping over to Dad. Dean seems to anticipate what’s coming and sidles around the side of the car away from them.

“Seriously, Dad, this is fucking creepy.”

“Watch your mouth, Sam.”

“Look around! There’s nothing here! We could be killed by a grizzly bear or--”

“There’s no grizzlies in this part of the country,” Dean supplies oh so helpfully from where he’s pissing on a tree beside the car. Sam turns to glance at him, glaring at his traitorous back before sighing.

“Or electricity! It’s going to be hot as hell out here, and there isn’t a store for miles! We’ll starve to death! You can’t just abandon us here!”

“What if I told you there would be power by morning, and Bobby’s leaving a car here?”

Sam and Dean both turn at that, four eager eyes landing on Dad. They don’t move, don’t breathe. No way. It’s too good to be true.

Dean’s the first to break the silence.

“...You serious?”

“He’s meeting me here sometime in the next few hours. Knows the guy who owns this place. We hole up here when we have a job around these parts. And there’s another guy, Billy Jenkins that
used to work with me at the shop in Lawrence. He owns his own motorcycle repair shop in Townsend.” Dad’s unloading the car as he’s talking, handing Sam bag after bag until he just can’t hold anymore. Dean’s still staring like he’s dreaming.

“He may have a part-time job for you,” Dad continues, his eyes right on Dean, eyebrows raised as he hands him two of the sleeping bags. Dean just gapes at him.

“At a bike repair shop? Are you kidding me?”

“Said you could start as soon as you get settled in. I figure you can make you some cash while you’re here and learn your way around a motorcycle. Go on in, there’s a key under that rock by the step.”

Sam stops on his way to the house, almost dropping everything as he turns to look at Dad.

“Dean’s gonna have a job?”

“Yes. Paid under the table, of course, but it’s real work. I told Billy not to go easy on you, so don’t you make me look bad.” Dad closes the trunk and hoists the last of their gear up onto his shoulder before he follows Dean up to the house.

Sam stares after them, his shoulders falling.

“What about me?”

The door to the tiny house bangs open and Dad and Dean are already inside, making noise and knocking things over in their attempts to unload their bags somewhere.

A warm wind rushes by, lifting Sam’s hair. The stars are brilliant overhead, fireflies out in full force. There’s water nearby, the sound of its trickling, along with bullfrogs and cicadas, is loud in Sam’s ears.

It’s his first time alone with Dean in months, and Dean’s not even gonna be there.

Dean is opening windows and Dad is lighting their three camping lanterns when Sam finally makes his way inside. It’s hotter than hell, and all the furniture is older than Sam and Dean combined. Sam dumps his bags on the couch and sits down on the arm of it. Dad and Dean move around him, talking to each other about plans and dates and Sam bites at his already chewed-down fingernails.

“...The Bell Witch? You mean, like. The Bell Witch?” Dean’s eyes are huge as he stares at their dad, bright with admiration.

“I don’t know, we’ll see. That’s the theory anyway. Bobby said he needs my help, so it’s not just a run-of-the-mill haunting.” Dad’s changing clothes right there, his belt clinking as he untucks his shirt. Sam watches them, a participant in his own life, forgotten by the both of them for the moment.

Dean tugs his shirt off, too, his body already dark from the summer sun. “Oh, man! I’m so jealous. I’ve read books about it before, at some of the libraries. There was this one that talked about--”

“You should go, Dean. Just go with them.” Sam’s voice is so quiet that he doesn’t think either of them will hear him. He tongues the skin that starts bleeding when he rips the top of his nail off his middle finger.

Dean looks over at Sam for the first time since they were all outside.
“What do you mean?”

“I mean,” Sam repeats more slowly, unable to keep the bitterness out of his voice. “Go with Dad and Bobby. You’re clearly only staying here ‘cause of me. You’d rather be with them anyway. Why don’t you just go with them. I can take care of myself.”

Sam can’t look at either of them after he stops talking. He just stares down at his nail, at the bright pink of it in the dimly lit room. He pushes on it so more blood will push to the surface. He sucks his finger into his mouth and tastes dirt and blood and the honey mustard from his chicken strips back in Georgia.

“What do you mean?”

“Sammy, I don’t mind stayin’ here with you. I didn’t mean it like that--”

“Whatever, Dean. It’s just. Whatever.”

Sam hauls himself up from the couch and grabs one of the lanterns to brave his way back through the house. He ventures into the one, tiny room that’s not a bathroom, holding the light out in front of him to check for anything fishy. It’s surprisingly clean, a bed made with old, dingy sheets and too damn small for two grown (well, almost grown, on his part) boys.

He strips off his shirt and his shoes and falls down onto the bed, listening to it squeak warningly but he’s claimed it as his own now. He reaches over to shove the window open, letting the small breeze in but at least it’s something.

He can hear Dad and Dean talking again, in low voices this time so he knows they’re talking about him. They’re always either talking around him or about him. He feels like an invisible pain in the ass most of the time, and it just feeds the anger that’s growing in him day by day.

Lashing out is the only way he can get it out sometimes, and he’s started yelling at Dean the same way he yells at Dad. He hates himself for it but he can’t help it, can’t seem to hold it in. He feels like Dean has abandoned him for Dad most of the time. Has picked a side and left Sam standing alone, has grown up and Sam is left out, young and in the way now more than ever.

He wraps his arms around the pillow on the bed and glares out the window at the moving trees. It’s going to rain soon. He can feel it in the air. He doesn’t bother wiping away the tears in his eyes because no one will see them anyway.

Sam falls asleep to the sound of his brother laughing, soft and low, like something’s really funny but he doesn’t want Sam to know about it.

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Bobby comes and goes with little fanfare. Sam watches them leave, half-asleep, watches Dean outside in just a pair of jeans, taking the keys to a huge old Ford pick-up from Bobby. Dean stays outside until Dad and Bobby have disappeared down the road. Sam stays right where he is, just watches Dean stare at the keys, the night folding up tight around him, only the moonlight showing him to Sam.

He disappears and Sam curls up again, folding himself into something he hopes looks convincingly-sleeplike by the time Dean comes back in the house. He listens to Dean out there alone in the main room, the silence of the night so loud that it brings tears to Sam’s eyes. There’s nothing more lonely, he realizes, than listening to someone you love be alone.

He wants to go out there, wants to make a joke to make Dean relax again, make Dean forgive him for being such an asshole. He wants it to be like it used to just a few years ago, back when he could
curl right up against Dean and just be near him, just listen to him talk, just smell him and hear him and see him and feel him for as long as Dean would let him. And he knows it’s his own fault, whatever it is that’s changed between them. He knows that Dean misses him, misses whatever it was they used to be.

But it hurts now, being too close to Dean. What he feels for Dean is just too much, too intense, ever-expanding and deepening in his desperately clutching heart. Sam’s never known how to explain to anybody how much it hurts to love Dean. It could never hurt to love anybody else as much. Just Dean.

He hears the thump-thump of those heavy boots of Dean’s hit the creaky hardwood floor and Dean’s tired sigh as he finally sinks into the couch. Sam lays in his bed, thin walls keeping him from Dean and just listens for him, listens with everything in him. He knows that Dean’s in the next room, awake and still just like him, and it makes him feel close to Dean, just a little bit.

He doesn’t know when loneliness became the one thing he shares with his brother.

Dean’s gone when Sam wakes up, a note left in his wake:

_Gone to find a store and talk to Billy about the job. Back later._

-D

Sam runs his finger over the edge of the paper until it cuts him, slicing cleanly through the pad of his finger. He shoves the note down into his jeans pocket and looks around the house, letting out a sigh after a minute. He should clean a little, should straighten shit up, maybe tuck some of the bags away. But it’s too fucking hot already, the heat so damp Sam feels like he’s swimming in it.

He strips right there in the living room, pushing his underwear down last before he sets off to find the shower.

He shoves the homemade curtain aside on the window in the bathroom, letting in a tiny square of sunlight so he can see. There’s already a bar of soap, shampoo, and a towel in the bathroom, all evidence that Dad took a shower before he left. If it’s clean enough for Dad, it’s clean enough for him.

He barely turns any hot water on, just letting the cold water blast down on him when he steps in. Goosebumps fly all over him, his muscles tensing immediately but he just sucks in a deep breath and tips his head back, letting his hair get all wet.

He wonders how he looks here, right now. If anybody would think he’s sexy. A young boy, not really all that tall yet at sixteen but he’s filling out, chest muscles a little defined, stomach tight. He knows he’s got a pretty good-sized dick, and that he’s not that ugly, not really. Girls giggle after he walks by, like they always have for Dean. They give him that look sometimes, that deep, staring look that makes him feel like he should say or do something back. But unlike Dean, he’s never really learned what to do once he gets to that point. His big move is just sort of clamming up until girls take pity on him and come talk to him.

Which is just real fucking smooth, of course.
He runs the soap over his chest and around to his back, using the gnawed edges of his nails to scrub at his dirty skin. He wonders if anybody would think he’s beautiful like this, if just the sight of him would turn anybody on. If Dean would walk in and see him, his little Sammy all grown up, and get hard. He wonders if anybody would want to fuck him in the ass, or want to spread their legs for him. God, either one. He’d take either one.

Especially if it’s Dean.

Most days only if it’s Dean, if he’s being real fucking honest here.

The icy cold water keeps his dick way down, so he doesn’t get a chance to really explore the thought. He scrubs shampoo into his hair and rinses it before he climbs out of the shower, toweling off and walking to what he’s deemed his room, naked for the world (or nobody, really) to see. He digs around in his bag until he finds the pair of jeans he’d cut off into shorts in Louisiana last week, when it was absolutely too goddamn hot to pretend that jeans were totally okay to wear.

He drags them up, going commando because who gives a shit. He shakes the water out of his hair and drags his hands through it to tame it down before it gets any wild ideas. The sound of a truck engine outside is absolutely deafening and his heart leaps because it can only mean one thing.

Dean’s back.

He scampers back out into the living room, pretending to root around in the bag on the tiny kitchen table when Dean shoves into the front door, the screen door smacking back onto the frame, cushioned by Dean’s ass right up against it. The loud rustle of plastic bags overtakes any other sound as Dean makes his way across the room and next to Sam.

He smells like summer, like sweat and sunshine and dirt-grass-oil and Sam feels a thick pulse of hunger shoot down all the way deep down in his gut. He closes a hand around the shirt he’s holding in the duffel, taking a second to pull himself together before he looks over at Dean.

“Gotta few more things in the truck. Come help me.” Dean barely glances at Sam, doesn’t linger on his naked chest or back or anything. Sam almost sighs but he catches it at the last minute.

He follows Dean outside, the cicadas louder now than they were even last night. The grass is almost up to Sam’s knees as he makes his way out across the yard. He watches Dean climb into the bed of Bobby’s truck, watches his jeans get real tight before they loosen up again and Sam reaches down to adjust himself as fast as he can.

“Fella that owns this place is comin’ out here in a few minutes. Somethin’ about a switch to get the power on. C’mon, Sam, take these.” Dean thrusts a few grocery bags at Sam who takes them by standing on his tiptoes. Sam steps back when Dean grabs two 24-packs of generic root beer and hops down from the truck. Sam just nods, trying to look like he’s following all of this, like he’s as worldly and cool with being left in the damn boonies as Dean is. They shoulder their way back inside, dropping the rest of the bags on the couch.

“After this, you maybe wanna--”

“Must be him,” Dean interrupts just as another truck pulls up outside. The guy only gets out one honk of his horn before Dean is back outside. Sam follows him, not wanting to be left out but mostly not wanting Dean to feel alone with a strange man.

“Wha’ya say there, boy? Goddamn, do you look like yer daddy or what? How you doin’?” A wide, sweaty man with a mustache, a dirty shirt, and a big, friendly smile comes waddling over to them.
from the idling red Tahoe next to Bobby’s truck. Sam relaxes a little in the face of the man’s genuine friendliness, and he watches Dean do the same as he shakes the man’s hand.

“Hey, man. I’m Dean. This is my brother, Sam.”

It shouldn’t hurt that Dean doesn’t call him Sammy much anymore, but it does. Sam shoves his hands in his pockets and makes do with nodding at the guy, giving him a tight smile.

“I’m Doug. Friends call me Red. So, you boys stayin’ in my little rat trap for awhile, huh?”

Sam and Dean follow after Red as he wades through the grass toward the side of the house.

“Yeah, uh. Thanks, man. For lettin’ us stay here and all,” Dean jogs a little to catch up to Red but Sam doesn’t, just follows along a few steps behind. He watches Red pull out a little set of keys and squint at them while he digs around for the right one.

“I don’t mind, I swear. Yer Daddy helped me out a few years back, and I owe ‘em one. Or a dozen, I guess. Anyway, him’n Bobby always stay here when they’re out this way. This is my bachelor pad, mostly. When me’n Linda are on the outs. Love is half fightin’, you know?” Red finally finds the apparent right key and shoves it into the little lock on the electricity meter.

Sam smiles for his words, his cheeks warming a little for the thought. He glances at Dean to see if he reacted at all but Dean, of course, is ultra-focused on the whole process going on.

“Well, anyway. Friend’a mine works down at the power company. I just use my little magic key here and turn the power back on when I need it. Helluva lot cheaper’n payin’ those sonsa bitches to power an empty damn house, you know?”

“Yeah, I hear ya,” Dean mumbles distractedly. Sam sighs and glances around, squinting in the high morning sun. He sees what looks like a swing buried under some weeds, so he ventures over to investigate.

He pulls some kudzu up and slips into the brush and smiles when he sees it’s definitely a swing, rusty and dry-rotted but still there, still connected by some heavy chain to the top beam. He’s just about to reach up and test the beam’s strength when he hears Red clear and close behind him.

“I wouldn’t go too deep into them vines back there, boy,” Red calls out to him. Sam turns to look at him, unable to glare because he’s squinting too hard but he makes sure that he looks annoyed, at least.

“Why?”

“Snakes, acourse. Damn copperheads hide until yer right up on ‘em and then it’s too late. You mark my words. This ain’t Dollywood.” Red has a hand lifted to shield his face from the sun and Dean is standing right beside him, shifting from one foot to the other like he’s trying to decide if he’s going to go in and pull Sam out himself.

“C’mon, Sam, get back over here,” Dean orders, his eyes focused and alert on the ground all around Sam’s feet.

“Jesus christ, I’m not a fucking toddler,” Sam growls under his breath. He crawls back out and stalks toward the front door again, done with socializing for the day.

“Hey, you lookin’ for somethin’ to do this summer, kid?”
Sam stops mid-step and turns to look at Red again, his curiosity getting the better of him.

“What do you mean?” Sam closes his hand around the railing, half-turned to look at him. Dean is standing between them, looking as uncomfortable as he always does when anyone is talking to Sam besides him.

“I gotta few lawns you can mow around here. I rent out a few houses on Lovers Lane, and they’re always lookin’ fer somebody to mow the yards. Hell, I’ll even pay ya to mow this damn yard. Fifteen bucks a yard. Wha’ya say?”

Sam chews on the inside of his lip, digging his bare toes into the grass as he considers it.

“What’s Lovers Lane?”

Red looks between him and Dean, grinning big and letting out a wet snort.

“You’re standin’ on it, kid.”

Sam looks out at the tiny one lane road before focusing on Red again, disbelieving.

“This road is called Lovers Lane?”

“You betcha. Best place to have a bachelor pad, ain’t it? Lotsa love to be made on this road, I’ll tell ya that.” Red elbows Dean who is grinning in spite of himself. Sam’s cheeks heat up but he refuses to react otherwise.

“So, um. Yeah, I. I guess I can do that. I don’t have a mower though.”

“Oh, I got one in the shed there. I’m usually the one that does the mowin’ around here.” Red nods over at the shed that’s closer to the road than the house is. Sam looks it over and realizes that it’s actually almost the same damn size as the house.

“Sure, that’s. That’s fine. Uh. Thanks, Doug.” Sam takes a step up toward the house, wanting to get back inside and see if there’s a fan to turn on.

“Call me Red, I told ya. And it’s no problem. Bein’ John Winchester’s boys is all the reference I need. Listen, the lights should be back on. There’s a AC in the window in there in the livin’ room, and there’s a few fans in that closet in the hallway. You might need to clean that AC but yer good to go, otherwise. You got my number, Dean, if y’all need anything else. I’ll be by in the mornin’ to get you started, Sam, how’s that?”

“Works for us,” Dean answers for him, giving a wave as Red walks away. “Thanks again, man.”

They go back in the house without another word to each other, each of them grabbing a few bags and hauling them into the kitchen. Dean opens up the freezer and lets out a loud sound of disgust.

“Jesus fuck, man. Clean out your shit before you leave. Fuck. Sammy, go empty one of those plastic bags and hand it to me. We gotta get this cleaned out before we can put anything in here.”

Sam doesn’t ask, doesn’t wanna know what’s rotting in the freezer. He takes the bread out of the bag and hands the bag over to Dean, busying himself with unpacking everything and putting away the stuff that just needs to go in the cabinets. The cabinets, thank god, are mostly bare except for a couple of cans of Raid, a pack of mouse traps, and a bottle of Windex.

He pulls out a big yellow box of a variety pack of popsicles and he grins at Dean’s back.
“You, um. Thanks for these.” He smiles shyly down at the box, not able to meet Dean’s eyes when he turns to see what Sam’s talking about. He hears Dean smile though, hears it in the breath he lets out. Sam glances up then to meet his eyes, giving him a quick, bashful smile.

“You’re totally easy. Knew you’d want some, ‘specially if it’s this hot. Hey, rinse out that washcloth over there for me?”

Just like that, it’s easier between them. The air loosens up and Sam finds himself smiling the whole time they clean the kitchen and get everything put away.

Dean can make the entire world better just by giving him five unfiltered seconds of a smile. Sam doesn’t think that will ever go away.

A loud knock on the front door early the next morning wakes Sam up in a panic. He sits up rod-straight in bed, his heart in his throat. He’s halfway to his door when he hears the front door open and Dean sleep-roughened hey to whoever is outside.

Sam shuffles out and tucks in against the doorframe in the hallway, peeking out the tiniest bit to be able to see the front door. There’s Red in a faded NASCAR shirt and jeans, a huge smile on his face as he talks to Dean who is practically dozing against the door.

“Yeah, lemme just go wake him up,” Dean is saying to Red before he interrupts himself with a huge yawn.

“Y’all are some late sleepers, huh?” Red steps inside after Dean backs up into the house and Sam runs back to bed, burrowing under blankets and trying his best to still hear them.

“Nah, not really. With Dad, we’re usually up at 5:30 in the morning most days. This is kind of a vacation, I guess. Hold on, lemme go wake him up.”

Sam’s heart races when he hears Dean getting closer and closer and then finally appear in the doorway to his room. It’s the first time Dean’s even stepped inside here. Sam hears him clear his throat but he doesn’t move, doesn’t react.

“Sam, rise’n shine. Get up, Red’s here to give you the addresses and show you how to use the mower.” Dean hovers near the foot of the bed and reaches up to swat at Sam’s feet like he always does. Sam just groans and mumbles and tugs the covers up tighter around him, hiding the beginnings of a smile.

“C’mon, you lazy ass. Get up and make me some money.” Dean grabs the covers and yanks them, surprising Sam with how quick he is and exposing Sam curled up in his bed in just a tight pair of blue briefs. Dean is staring right at him, at his almost-naked body, and he’s not awake enough to do anything but get embarrassed.

Sam’s face turns beet red and he sits up to grab at the covers again, not meeting Dean’s eyes for a second. “Why do you have to be such a jerk!? Give it back!”

Dean steps back from the bed, holding the sheet up like it’s a cape and Sam’s the bull. Sam slides to the edge of the bed, his feet hitting the ground but he refuses to stand up and show off any part of his
body, no matter how much he fantasizes about Dean seeing him.

“You do kinda look like a bull right now. All red, nostrils flarin’. Olé!” Dean swishes the cape away and Sam reaches up again, trying in vain to take it back.

“Quit fucking around, Dean. Why do you always have to be such an asshole?” Sam curls his long arms up in his lap, hiding his cotton-covered dick and his thin legs. Dean stops his theatrics and smirks down at Sam before he throws the sheet back hard in his face.

“Because you secretly love it, scrawny ass. Now get up. Red’s here and he’s your boss now, in case you didn’t realize.”

“I’m not scrawny,” Sam mutters under his breath, humiliation coloring his face and all the way down his neck. He feels his chest tighten with how much that hurts to hear from Dean, no matter how joking or silly it is. He grabs the sheet and pulls it around his body like a cape, hiding himself as he stands up and hurries toward his duffel.

“Are, too. But that’s okay. I’m sure there’s some girl out there who thinks skinny geeks are hot.” Dean laughs a little to himself before he leaves the room, leaves Sam crouching with his back to the door, mortified tears burning in his eyes.

It’s one thing to think you’re ugly, to think you’re weird-looking and no one likes you. It’s quite another when the person you’re in love with says it to your face.

Sam throws on a t-shirt and his oldest pair of jeans and steps out into the livingroom, fastidiously not looking at Dean.

“There’s sleepin’ beauty! How’s it goin’, Sammy?” Red claps Sam on the arm so hard that Sam winces. He gives Red a tight smile and shoves his hands in his pockets.

“You’re gonna show me how to use to the mower?” Sam nudges his feet down into his beat-up black Converse and somehow doesn’t look at Dean even though he can feel his eyes burning on him.

“There’s sleepin’ beauty! How’s it goin’, Sammy?” Red claps Sam on the arm so hard that Sam winces. He gives Red a tight smile and shoves his hands in his pockets.

“Yeah, come on outside here and I’ll show ya. Already got her out and gassed up.” Red stands up again and Sam lifts up a little, bracing himself as he grabs the handle and yanks up on
the starter, nearly falling when it doesn’t do anything. Dean and Red snort and hold in laughs and Sam grits his teeth, ready to fucking scream at them both. He grabs on tighter and yanks as hard as he can, letting out a growl with the motion and, by some miracle, the mower starts.

Dean and Red clap approvingly and Sam stands up, proud of himself but he’ll be damned if he’s going to show it in front of these two.

“That’s it, kid! That’s all there is to it. Grass height’s already set, and you just hit the kill switch to turn her off. Mow in lines, one right after another, and that’s it. Here’s the list.” Red hands him a small piece of notebook paper with names and addresses scribbled on it. Sweat is already dripping down from Sam’s hair and he dares a glance over at Dean who he swears is dozing standing up next to Red.

“Just hit all those houses by the end of the week, and I’ll get you your money. Any questions?”

“Uh,” Sam says intelligently. He’s staring at one of Dean’s pretty dark nipples and he has to rip his eyes away to get any sort of words together.

“Yeah. Do I start this morning?”

Red laughs, pulling his car keys out of his pocket. “Kid, you can start at midnight, for all I care. Just don’t piss people off. And some advice for you: do it as early as you can stand. Summers get real hot around here. Passing out from heat stroke won’t get you any girlfriends.”

“Thanks,” Sam mutters, watching as Dean reaches down to flip the switch to turn the mower off.

Red leaves with a few words to Dean, the sound of his big truck blasting through the otherwise quiet morning. Sam looks over at Dean who’s watching Red pull away.

Dean gives him a small smile and motions with his head for Sam to come back in the house.

“You can sleep for one more hour, and then you start. We’ll start at the farthest houses so I can drive you in the truck. My job doesn’t start until tomorrow. You can get to the closer ones by yourself later.” Dean collapses down on the couch and Sam stands beside him, staring down at him, wondering what it would feel like to just straddle Dean right there, to curl up on his chest like he used to, to feel Dean’s arms so big and tight around him while he goes back to sleep. Sam scrubs a hand through the hair on the back of his head and sighs.

“Yeah, okay.” He kicks his shoes off, sparing one last glance over at Dean. He’s already asleep, chest rising and falling as he starts to snore. Sam could do it right now, could just climb right on him. He feels his dick stir and his hole clench up tight in want. He’s heard girls talk about it, about how their bodies react when they get turned on and they really want to have sex. He doesn’t know what it says about him that he relates completely.

He shucks his shirt on his way back to his room, sighing as he falls back into bed. He grinds down against it, feeling his dick harden even more. It would feel so good right now to jerk off, to just shove his hand down into his underwear and yank and pull and twist until he floods his briefs. It’s been four and a half weeks since he’s jerked off, and he’s fifteen days away from a personal record. He doesn’t know if he’s going to be able to beat it though, not with the smell of Dean’s body in the hot sun all over everything here.

Sam gives one last hard thrust of his hips into the mattress before he relaxes again, letting out a sigh into his pillow and falling right back to sleep.
Sam is mowing five yards today. Dean dropped him off a couple of hours ago a couple of miles down the road, at the farthest house. Five yards and he’s gonna call and Dean can go get him.

Dean feels like a housewife with the house clean and the kids gone. Except that he’s not really a housewife, and the house is pretty fucking far from clean.

He doesn’t know what the fuck to do.

He finds himself standing in the middle of the tiny living room, wearing just a pair of low-hung jeans, holding a bottle of cold water. He very rarely finds himself alone, and more and more lately he’s realizing something really fucked-up about himself.

He doesn’t know who he is when Sam and Dad aren’t around.

He flicks the TV on, leaving it on whatever channel it was left on because he just needs the noise. It’s some stupid soap opera, two people discussing something of huge fucking import, apparently.

Sammy’ll call soon. He’ll probably call soon.

Dean pulls the phone from his pocket for the millionth time, checking to make sure the volume’s up, that he hasn’t missed any calls. Yes and nope.

He glances around with a heavy sigh for no one. His eyes travel over the entire scope of the tiny shack, pausing for a beat on the miniature hallway leading to Sam’s room.

No. He can’t.

He’s halfway to sitting on the couch when he hears a woman’s melodramatic scream from the television screen.

“Okay, fuck it,” he announces, spinning around and heading right for Sam’s room.

It’s dim with just the light from the one window facing out to the yard. A tattered, transparent curtain is covering it. The bed is pretty small, a stolen hotel pillow and blanket draped over Sam’s unzipped sleeping bag. The room is bare except for the piles of clothes left by a teenage boy and Sam’s top-secret, don’t-touch-my-shit-or-I’ll-rip-you-apart-with-my-pain duffel.

Sam being a real teenager is so far beyond Dean’s understanding. Dean never really got to be a teenager, not like that. He never got to rage or brood or angst or pine or wist more than a handful of hours all together. Either he wasn’t built that way, or his life between Sam and Dad didn’t allow him much time for thinking about himself. Not that he ever has, really. He’d rather not, if he’s telling the truth.

He sits down on Sam’s bed and looks around. Wonders if Sam’s gotten up to any brooding in here yet. Probably. He swears the kid doesn’t jerk off. He takes five minute showers and sleeps with the door open. It doesn’t make any fucking sense. It’s hard for Dean to think of a time when he wasn’t jerking off when he was Sam’s age. Only when he was having sex.

Dean grins to himself.
He checks his phone again. He chews on his lip, staring hard at the duffel bag.

He shouldn’t.

He scoots down to the foot of the bed and drags the bag over by shoving his foot through the strap and pulling. He picks it up and pulls it onto the bed, his eyes intent outside the window. What if Sam just decides to walk home? He’d kill Dean if he found him digging through his shit. He’d cut his head off.

He unzips the bag and pulls it open, staring inside expectantly, like some big fat magic secret is going to glow on the inside, revealing once and for all why Sam seems like he hates Dean now half the time. Just a few shirts and jeans and underwear. Dean pulls them out and tosses them on the bed, annoyed. He looks back into the bag and. Oohh.

Okay, it’s just a book. He pulls it out and squints at the weird cover with squiggly faces drawn on it. Wonder Boys by Michael Chabon.

“Cha-bon. Scha-bon,” he tries out under his breath, turning the book over to read the summary. He nods a little, approving. Doesn’t sound girly or boring. He wants to kidnap it for a couple of days, but there’s a receipt-bookmark sticking out of it right in the middle, and Dean knows Sam would notice the book’s disappearance.

He sets it on the bed and digs back into the bag. Sam’s Discman. There are two CDs in the bag, a huge one with angel art on the front: Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness by The Smashing Pumpkins and another one with a scruffy-looking guy on the front in a black hat. Elliott Smith. He opens the case to find the name of the album, but the CD is missing. He grabs up the Discman and opens it and sure enough, there’s the Elliott Smith CD: Either/Or.

He shuts it back and pulls the headphones on, hitting the ‘random’ button. He lays back on Sam’s pillow and stares up at the water stains on the ceiling, listening to the subdued but clear guitar sound. When the guy starts singing, Dean closes his eyes. His voice is fragile, bitter, and just. Full of sadness. A sadness that immediately and unmistakably reminds him of Sam.

It hurts, listening to this song. It hurts because he knows without a single doubt that Sam hears his own pain in it. Dean chews on the inside of his cheek until he tastes red. Why. Why is Sam feeling pain? Who is making him feel it? Did he fall for some girl awhile back and they just had to leave and he never told Dean about it? That has to be it.

He thinks back over the last few jobs, the last few long stays. Tries to picture one of the girls that watched Sam when Dean went to go pick him up from school, when they went down to the gas stations, when Sam dragged Dean to the bookstore for two damn hours. Sure, there were girls, but which one did this to him?

The song is short and it fades away in Dean’s ears. He opens his eyes and pushes stop, unable to listen to anymore. He sits up again and rubs absently at his chest, trying to ease some of the ache built up there. He starts to shove everything back in the bag when he sees it.

Sam’s notebook.

He guards that thing like a pitbull. Writes in it in the safety of the back seat away from him and Dad, at night in motel rooms when he thinks Dean’s asleep. He writes and scribbles and runs his hands over ink-covered pages and sighs. Dean has watched him for hours, sometimes. Watched Sam be sad, be himself by himself. And it’s all right here, now, in front of him. And Sam’s not.
He pulls it out very carefully, like Sam will be able to track his fingerprints or any crinkle in it that Sam didn’t put there himself.

It’s just a notebook, one of the dollar ones from a grocery store with a red cover. Spiral-bound and deceptively blank on the outside. Dean presses his palm flat to the center of it, stupidly trying to see if he feels anything from it. He’s just a dumb guy, not sensitive at all, even for Sammy, it seems, because he feels nothing. Just cool, flimsy paper and the stifling heat of early June in the south and a dull ache in his chest and his wrists.

He shouldn’t. He won’t.

He stares at it like he can fucking read what’s inside by concentration alone. He wants to open it so bad suddenly, wants to know what his brother can tell these pages that he can’t tell Dean. Wants to know why Sam is so shut off from him, why he leaves the room when they’re alone for more than half an hour. What he did to make Sam not like him anymore.

“Stop being such a fucking girl, Winchester,” he grumbles to himself. He picks up the notebook, halfway to tossing it back in the bag when a folded-up piece of paper slips out of it.

Okay, there’s no way that just happened by accident. There’s.

He stares at the paper, the notebook dropped back on the bed.

There’s a pen sketch on the side of the paper facing him, in the bottom left corner. It’s a mouth and nothing else, very carefully sketched out with hundreds of quick, purposeful lines. It’s a hot mouth. Dean smiles. A real hot mouth, full lips, plush and they almost look wet, even there on the paper, in blue ink. Nice choice, Sammy.

Dean tries to connect the mouth to any one of the girls he’s seen in the last few months, but honestly, they all blur together. Even his own girls. He refocuses on the mouth and shrugs, tonguing that ripped-open place on the inside of his cheek.

He uses the edges of the Elliott Smith CD to get underneath the paper enough to flip it over. He didn’t touch it, see?

The other side is a scribble of words in Sammy’s handwriting, a long train of thought that goes from line to line to line. A poem, Dean realizes with raised eyebrows. Sammy writes poems?

I hate myself even more
everytime you touch me
because I know it shouldn't do
what it does to me
you shouldn't have power over me
but I give it to you
I’d give everything to you
I'd break myself open for you right now
let you in as deep and full as you want
to be
in me

I'm all for you anyway
space in between my ribs
the same size as your fingers
hipbones the same
size as the suck of your mouth
and I know we could make you fit
where it doesn't seem like you would
because I'm made just for you
and you're supposed to be there
please be there
please

Dean’s cheeks are burning hot when he’s done reading, and his heart is beating frantically in his chest. He blinks down at the paper that he’s now holding, clutched in his shaking hands. He feels breathless, feels so fucking strange. Because this isn’t. This isn’t a poem that a guy would write. Is it? Maybe somebody wrote this for him. Maybe this is from a girl.

He studies the handwriting, knowing all the way deep down that he’s wrong. It’s Sam’s, definitely Sam’s. Maybe it’s a song that he likes. Maybe it’s from a book he couldn’t take from the library.

Maybe.

“No way,” he breathes, licking his dry lips.

Sam doesn’t like guys. He’s. That’s just.

He doesn’t flirt with guys, doesn’t stare at guys, doesn’t get all shy and stupid around guys like he does around pretty girls. Dean’s definitely never seen him with a guy, holding hands or anything. And, god, wouldn’t Sam have told him? Wouldn’t Dean have known? Surely to fuck he would have figured that out by now.

Maybe it’s about a girl. But. But it’s all wrong. The whole. Dean blushes even more.

The whole part about somebody being inside him. Inside Sam.

Oh, Jesus Christ.

The phone rings and Dean nearly falls off the bed like he’s in some fucking sitcom. He throws the paper down and digs the phone out of his pocket, forcing calm into his voice.

“’llo?”

“Hey, it’s me.” Sam sounds tired. He’s panting right into the phone and Dean shifts on the bed, a hand subconsciously going down to push between his legs, heel of his hand against his dick.

“Hey, me. You done?”

“Yeah, finally. I ran out of water about two houses ago. Can you, um. Can you come get me?”

“Course. I’m leaving right now. You down at 772, like we talked about?”

“Yeah. Hurry, okay? It’s burning up out here.”

“Be there in two minutes.”

He hangs up because they don’t really do goodbyes. He looks down and suddenly he’s back in that place where he doesn’t feel like he really knows his brother at all. He hurries to shove all the stuff back in the bag as close to the way he found it as possible. He stares at the piece of paper that’s still out, Those Words still staring up at him, challenging him almost.
He picks it up and folds the paper up, shoving it down in his pocket. He’s gotta go get Sam.

Five minutes later, he’s ambling down Lovers Lane in Bobby’s big ol’ clunker. The windows are down, radio off, and he can see Sam right there next to the mailbox. He’s sitting in the grass next to the mower, his shirt off, his shoulders already so red that Dean can see them from the truck.

He pulls up a little bit past where Sam’s sitting and hops out. Sam stands up and Dean can’t help that he lets his eyes linger on his bare chest that’s getting really dark, his narrow waist and flat stomach. He looks back up to Sam’s face and is relieved that he’s rubbing it in his shirt, wiping sweat off.

“Oh. Here.” Dean jogs back to the truck and grabs the two bottles of water he brought from the fridge, tossing them to Sam one at a time. Sam groans his thanks and cracks one of the bottles open, drinking it like he’s dying. Dean opens the bed of the truck and uses every bit of his strength to lift the mower up into it, shoving it toward the back and slamming the bed closed.

Sam’s already done with one bottle and he’s starting in on the second one. Dean takes the empty bottle and tosses it in the back of the truck, squinting at his little brother while he finishes the bottle off.

“You better slow it down. You’ll get a stomach ache.” He shades his eyes and looks at the yard behind Sam. The grass is all mowed, meticulous and careful as he would expect Sam to be. He looks back and finds Sam watching him, almost nervous and expecting criticism. Dean smiles at him, a real, warm smile, giving him a nod before he heads back to the truck.

“Looks real good, Sam. Damn good.”

He climbs in the driver’s seat, listening to Sam toss the second bottle into the back of the truck and jog around to the passenger’s seat. Sam melts back into the seat the second he settles in, head tipped back, eyes closing with a tired sigh. Dean just watches him, stuck on Sam’s adam’s apple and the slow heave of his chest.

“Wanna just go home?”

“Yeah.” Sam licks his lips before he tips his head to the side, eyes opening just a crack to look at Dean. “Did you go into town at all?”

“Yeah, went to see what was around. It’s all pretty far out, but there’s a few stores. A lot of places to rent tubes to go tubin’ in the river. And the park is real close by. The Smoky Mountains National Park or whatever?” Dean starts the truck, letting the engine roar to life and he throws it in reverse to turn around in the driveway.

“And I got some aloe and some sunscreen. Because I realized it’s fuckin’ a hundred degrees out and that you will pro’ly need some.” He starts back toward the house and glances over at Sam, feeling ridiculously pleased with himself when he sees the smile that crosses Sam’s face.

“Thanks, Dean.”

The rest of the ride home is quiet, the sun still bright in the sky, the heat closing in around them like it’s alive.

They eat hotdogs wrapped in white bread with ketchup for early dinner, three each and their messy hands reaching into the same bag of chips.

“Oh, hey, uh,” Dean mumbles with his mouth full. Sam waits patiently for him to chew and swallow and continue. “I saw a flier in one of the stores this morning. Said there were these synchronized
fireflies up in the mountains. Only happens once a year and it only happens here and somewhere in like. Taiwan or something. It’s happening tomorrow night and it, uh. I don’t know. Sounded pretty cool.”

Sam smiles, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. He raises his eyebrows and Dean knows Sam can see right through him.

“So, you’re saying you wanna go?”

“I don’t really care. You know.” Dean shrugs, watching as Sam opens the freezer and digs around for a popsicle. He almost groans when Sam comes back with a cherry one. “If you wanna go.”

“Mm.” Sam wraps his lips around the popsicle and Dean just watches him, eyes unknowingly intent on Sam’s mouth. He licks his lips when Sam pulls off with a wet smack and he meets his eyes again, casual as anything. “Yeah. That sounds fun. Tomorrow night, then?”

“Yeah.” Dean pops the last bite of hotdog in his mouth and takes in the sight of Sam: cut-off shorts, ever-darkening skin, sun-pinked nose and cherry popsicle-red mouth. Goddamnit.

“Awesome.” Sam’s smile is big and real and Dean can’t help but smile back. He eats a few more chips while Sam finishes his popsicle and Dean makes sure he spends most of his time looking out the window while he does.

Sam tosses the napkins in the grocery bag they’re using for a trash can and Dean finds his way to the couch, lazy and sleepy and watching Sam. Sam who wrote that poem. Sam who feels that burning hot for somebody. There’s somebody out there he wants to do that to him.

“Sleepy?” Sam is smiling almost shyly when he walks over to Dean, dropping down on his knees next to him to dig through the Wal-green’s bag next to Dean’s feet.

Dean grunts a reply, a hand on his bare stomach. He watches Sam pulling out the aloe and read the back of the bottle. Sam’s hair is getting so long, so shaggy and thick, covering his ears and the nape of his neck. Dean follows the long, graceful line of Sam’s spine until Sam turns to look at him. He blinks at Sam, eyebrows raised in question.

“Will you, um. Can you help me put this on my back? I can’t really reach.” Sam hands Dean the aloe and sits right there on the floor between Dean’s spread legs, leaning forward to expose his back for Dean’s hands.

Dean swallows, looking down at the bottle and then up at his brother bared for him like this and he feels so dirty for the hungry shiver that drags up his spine. He sits up a little, uncapping the bottle and squeezing the good-smelling green goop into his palm.

“You sure? You’re gettin’ those long octopus arms. I think they could reach.”

“Shut up,” Sam replies dutifully, reaching back to swat at Dean’s shin. Dean grins, some of the tension eased until he rubs his hands together, the wet slopping slurp of the gel spreading in his palms really completely filthy to his ears. He clears his throat softly and places his hands on Sam’s back, right over his shoulderblades. Sam jumps for the cold and then relaxes almost immediately, holding very still to let Dean work.

Dean spreads downwards first, coating Sam’s back from his shoulderblades down with a thick slather of aloe. He stops just above the waist of Sam’s cut-offs, not at all staring at the tiny, secret pale hairs at the smallest part of Sam’s back, the ones that disappear down into the waist of his shorts. Dean closes his eyes for a minute, taking a deep breath as he slides his hands back up.
He squishes some more aloe in his hand, palms rubbing together again so he can start on Sam’s shoulders. The second he squeezes them, Sam moans, his whole body going rigid in front of Dean. Dean feels a tingle between his legs, right behind his dick. He licks at the bitten inside of his cheek and stills his hands.

“Your, um. Muscles tight?” Oh, Jesus. What a stupid fucking thing to say. He feels like a virgin in a surfer movie.

Sam just nods, tipping his head down, exposing the hard notch at the very top of his spine and giving Dean total access to his shoulders. Dean grits his teeth and spreads his hands out, making sure to rub aloe into the pinkest parts of his skin before he starts to rub at Sam’s shoulders and his neck.

The slick sounds of his hands on Sam’s skin is enough to make him half-hard and he hates himself for it. Sam is loosening up slowly under his strong fingers, goosebumps all over the skin that Dean’s touching. Sam’s breathing deep and erratic, head bowed down so that his chin is touching his chest.

The aloe is making the whole thing sticky but Dean braves on, letting his hands run down to Sam’s collarbone and the front of his chest, just a little. Sam finally leans back a bit, letting Dean do whatever he wants. Dean lets out a tiny breath of laughter and Sam makes a sound in return that goes up like a question mark at the end.

“Nothin’. This is just. Like the beginning of a bad porn,” Dean mumbles.

He can feel Sam smile and it makes him brave, like this is flirting and he’s succeeding. He pushes his fingers in deeper against Sam’s chest, rubbing at the tight muscles there.

“What makes it a bad one?” Sam’s voice is deep, scratchy. And he definitely, definitely sounds flirty. Dean feels drunk.

“You’re not a chick and I’m not gonna get laid.” Dean grins, about to run his hands back up to Sam’s neck but Sam is moving suddenly, pulling away from Dean’s hands and standing up.

“I, um. I’m tired. Gonna go take a nap. Thanks for.” He motions down at the aloe but doesn’t meet Dean’s eyes. Dean just nods, doesn’t really know what to say, doesn’t know what just happened. Sam’s gone before he can think of a single word, the door closing definitively between them.

Dean stares after him for a long time, no sounds at all except for the birdsong outside and the far-off sound of a lawn mower. He knows he fucked up but he doesn’t know how.

He pulls the paper out of his back pocket once he’s sure Sam isn’t coming back in. He reads the poem again, mouths along with it and feels his dick hardening without hesitation in his pants. He flips the paper over and stares down at the mouth again and wonders for the first time if it’s a guy’s mouth.

He pulls his dick out right there, spreading some more aloe on his palm and staring at the mouth, the words of the poem running through his mind. He tosses the paper aside and concentrates on his dick, spreading precome and aloe all over it to slick up the desperate movement of his hand. A sudden, unbidden image comes to his mind, of Sam on his knees for some guy, some faceless, bigger guy, his pretty boy mouth spread around a veiny, fat dick, his mouth way too small to take even half of it.

“Oh, fuck,” Dean huffs as quiet as he can, a lazy hand on his chest to pluck at one of his nipples. He sees one of the guy’s big hands spread out on the back of Sam’s hair, all that thick hair caught up in meaty fingers. Dean is jealous suddenly, protective. Even in his own jerk-off fantasy, he can’t let anyone have Sam.
He pictures this from the other direction then, him standing behind Sam, his own hands in Sam’s hair, guiding Sam on how to suck the guy’s dick. In his mind, he rubs his dick into the back of Sam’s hair, along his neck, the smell of aloe all around him. He hears Sam choke and gag on the dick like a girl, hears the wet sound of a cock fucking a throat and God, yes, that’s it.

He forces Sam to suck that dick, forces him tighter and closer, doesn’t let him up for a second. He sees the guy’s strong hips fucking forward, shoving deeper into Sam’s mouth. And suddenly, like he’s not in control of his fantasy anymore, Sam’s hand comes up and rubs over the head of Dean’s dick, just slides over it and grips it like he owns it, like he knows what to do with it.

Dean slides almost all the way down on the couch, his legs spread so he can reach into his underwear and pull at his balls, his pace frantic now, so fucking close. If he could just. Fuck, if he could only--

Sam is lifting his mouth off that guy’s dick now, breaking free, his mouth so fucking fat and pink and dripping and he’s turning toward Dean, yes, yes, yes fuck yes ohmygod, he’s wrapping those lips around Dean’s dick and it’s burning hot, it’s the sweetest hole he’s ever felt, the most velvety tongue and the plumpest little mouth and he fucks his hips up hard, savage, so fucking needy and he almost bites clean through his bottom lip when he comes, so careful not to make a single sound.

He strokes his dick until it hurts, until he can’t stand it anymore. He rubs the come into his skin distractedly, his hips and stomach still twitching, balls still tingling like they can’t believe how fucking good that was. He barely has it in him to tuck himself back in his pants and shove the paper into his pocket before he’s out, utterly boneless and fucked-out.

The smell of aloe will bring him right back here, to a hot June afternoon in a shack in the Smoky Mountains, his brother’s name on his panting lips, for years to come.

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Sam closes the door to his room and stares at the knob, wishing that it wasn’t older than everyone he knows and had a damn lock on it. He sits down on the edge of his bed and sinks his fingers into his hair, dragging them through hard as he lowers his head with a sigh. Idiot. He’s a fucking idiot.

He knows he has to stop. He has to stop this. Sam is normally a very rational person. He thrives on logic, on information, on facts. On knowing the absolute truth and doing what he can with that information. It doesn’t reach the parts of him that love Dean. That absorb Dean’s every move like its scripture. That take Dean’s every throw-away word and smile and touch as something divine. All those parts are just hope. Are pregnant with love and devotion and a stunning amount of blindness.

He can’t stop hoping that one day, one magic, random day, Dean will see Sam. Really see him. See all the parts of Sam that are carved up just for Dean’s pleasure and unyielding love. Sam cannot stop the stupid, emotionally suicidal romantic part of him that maintains that Dean can someday fall in love with him right back.

He stands up and strips his shorts off, leaving him in just his underwear. He drags his bag up onto the bed and roots around in it until he can reach the lining at the bottom. He lifts it up and pulls out the turquoise, stolen pack of Natural American Spirits cigarettes hiding there. He digs his Discman out, too, shoving the headphones on his ears and pushing play blindly, letting the CD start up loud in his ears. He pulls a cigarette from the half-empty pack, fishing out the star-spangled lighter and lighting it up with startling efficiency.

He cracks his window and sprawls out on the bed on his stomach, making sure the smoke heads right toward the open window. He inhales deeply, his eyes slipping closed as he exhales in a pretty,
practiced tendril. Elliott Smith is aching in his ears and Dean decidedly doesn’t feel the same way about him.

But how could he? And why would he. Sam feels all the food he’d just eaten right at the top of his throat. He swallows hard, his mouth dry. Takes another drag. And another. He loves the initial buzz of cigarettes but makes sure he doesn’t smoke them often enough to crave them. What he craves. What he craves is.

He sits up and looks down at his bare thighs, the tender parts at the very tops of his legs. He counts six perfectly round marks all across the top in a careful line, all in different states of healing and healed. The one on the farthest right is completely healed: a pale, pale pink in the center with a brighter pink rim. They continue across the tops of his thighs, rawer as they go. The latest one is from last week, ugly at this point, scabbing and disgusting and hurting like a bitch. There’s space for one more, at the outermost part of his left thigh before he has to start a new row beneath.

He takes one more drag as a new song starts up, exhaling out toward the idyllic summer day. He turns his attention back to his thigh, his heart rate picking up as he lowers the cigarette, careful, careful. When he presses the burning tip to his skin, the pain spreads through his entire body so fast that tears burn in his eyes.

Sam inhales, quick and deep, biting down on his bottom lip so hard that he draws blood. He keeps it there for five seconds, four, three, two. When he pulls the cigarette up again, it’s out, black-brown at the tip. His chest heaves as quietly as he can manage as he stares at the new burn on his leg, the pain focused now, laser-sharp and stinging so bad he doesn’t think he’ll ever feel anything else again.

He tosses the cigarette out the window and lays back in bed, the guitar droning on in his ears, giving him something else to focus on, letting his attention spread outwards. Tears spill down the sides of his eyes and his teeth haven’t yet let go of his lip.

It’d be great, really. Not feeling anything else ever again.

Dean wakes Sam up at six in the morning, grunts at him to be ready in twenty minutes. They load the mower in the truck and Dean drives Sam to the other end of Lovers Lane, dropping him off at the farthest house with a small container of gas for the mower, three bottles of water and two Little Debbie oatmeal cream pie cookies. Sam stands in the driveway next to the mower and watches Dean drive off to his new job, not looking away until he doesn’t hear the rumble of that old Ford engine anymore.

He makes it back to the house before noon, dragging the mower behind him, every muscle in his body trembling with exhaustion. He leaves the mower outside, drags himself into a freezing cold shower and then falls back into bed naked, sleep overtaking him immediately.

All the houses are done for the week.

He wakes up around two, muscles aching but it’s nothing he hasn’t dealt with before. He throws on
sweatpants and fishes through the hunter’s first-aid kit with the little bottles of pills with other people’s prescriptions on them. He sighs with relief when he finds a single hydrocodone. He washes it down with another entire bottle of water and then sets out to make himself a couple of cheap microwave pizzas.

He eats them standing at the counter, the pill slowly working its way into his system, leaving him feeling a little stoned and boneless and. Huh. Happy, he guesses. In that “Black Hole Sun,” artificial, fifties housewife kind of way.

Better than nothing.

There’s a crappy radio on the table near the window, one covered in dust but still plugged in, still equipped with an old Conway Twitty tape. Sam flips the radio on instead, searching through all the stations to try and find one that isn’t talk radio or country. He settles on one playing The Beach Boys and turns it up a little, the bright layers and harmonies matching the lemon-yellow sun high up in the sky outside.

The whole inside of this place looks like a Polaroid from the seventies: all dingy yellows and browns and sickly oranges and greens, all mismatched fabrics and furniture and truly horrible patterns on the carpet. It’s comforting, somehow, in its unapologetic ugliness. Any significant time Sam has spent in nice houses, or even just plain old normal, cookie cutter houses in suburbs, he feels itchy. Criminal, insignificant. And it only gets worse the older he gets. He’s comfortable in the backseat of the Impala, among the smells of dirty boots and oil and stale fast food bags and a little bit of dried blood and gunpowder. He’s comfortable in shitty motel rooms with tired bedding and dollar store prints in plastic frames on the wall, with barely functioning electronics and plumbing and nonexistent water pressure. He’s comfortable in trailers that creak with every step, with tiny windows and dust covering every possible surface, that stink of cigarettes and arguments and the stale air of sadness. He’s comfortable at Bobby’s house.

He’s comfortable here.

Just maybe a little bored.

He pokes around in the livingroom, not finding anything but some old Tennessee Volunteers games on tape from the 80s, a couple of Ray Stevens comedy songs on cassette tape, and a lost can of Skoal tobacco.

He wanders into the tiny hallway and flips the light on, opening up the tiny hall closet. There’s a couple of curtains thrown in there, an old wool Army blanket, and a clothes basket. Sam moves everything else and pulls out the clothes basket, falling back on his butt on the scratchy carpet to root around in his new find.

Ritchie Valens is singing out there now, his voice tinny from the crappy radio speakers. Sam hums along and pulls out a few empty wire coat hangers from the basket, tossing them aside. A few mismatched pairs of socks without their mates, several dryer sheets and a humongous pair of Fruit-of-the-Loom underwear. He wrinkles his nose and pulls them out with the edge of one of the hangers, tossing the underwear aside. A towel from the Family Inn and. Oh.

Sam glances around at the empty house, just double checking before he reaches in for the last thing in the basket.

It’s a pale, apple-y green with thin straps and he pulls it out by those straps, holding it up in front of him.
It’s lingerie, there’s no doubt about it. It’s kind of silky and definitely see-through, with lace along the top and at the bottom. A slip, his mind supplies oh so helpfully, and he blushes. He pulls it down closer, letting the dress part of it pool in his lap while he runs a hand over the body, just feeling the soft material. It’s so different than any material Sam is used to feeling, and just the silkiness of it makes him feel weird. Nervous. A little turned-on. It’s kind of not fair that girls get to just wear this stuff and not get made fun of. That it’s sexy when they wear it. He grits his teeth and drops it back down in the basket, hurriedly piling all the other stuff on top of it.

Whatever.

He throws the basket back in the closet and shuts the door, flicking the hall light off again. He shuffles back out into the living room, grabbing up the car magazine Dean had gotten at the grocery store. He looks at it for approximately four pages before he’s tossing it aside and practically marching back to the hallway, opening the door without overthinking what he’s doing.

He digs the slip out of the basket and closes the door.

He lets the material drag over his naked belly and he wonders.

Sam shoves his pants to his feet and stepping out of them happens without thinking. He races to the front door, making sure it’s shut and locked. He puts the chain on at the last minute, his heart already racing, his cheeks flushed. He can hear his own fast breathing as he gathers up the material, finding the opening at the bottom.

It goes over his head easily, falls soft around his lanky boy body. It’s completely sheer, showing off every single bit of him he hates and doesn’t hate. It barely comes to the bottom of his ass, and the lace dances and tickles at it there and scratches and irritates his latest cigarette burn. He dashes to the bathroom and turns on the light, pushing the door open all the way so he can stare at himself in the long mirror nailed to the back of it.

He looks like an idiot. It’s so girly, the color and the fabric and the shape, and he’s such a boy, despite what Dean says half the time. His hips are mostly straight, his waist still pretty small, his legs gangly things that match his arms. He feels like the jointed paper scarecrows that elementary school teachers put on their walls at Halloween.

He stares at his body from underneath his long bangs, forcing himself to look, to really look. The burns look so real like this, almost too real. The newest one is black-red with healing, scabbed and angry-looking. He touches the oldest one, the one that almost looks like an eclipsed pink moon. The scar tissue makes it feel foreign, like somebody else is touching him there. Or like he’s touching somebody else there, he can’t decide which. He can see the tip of his dick dangling just below the lace, peering from beneath it demurely.

He goes hot all over, his cheeks on fire. It’s scandalous, seeing a dick so close to lace. Seeing his dick like that. Watching every move in the mirror, he reaches up and runs his fingers over the head of his dick, feeling it like somebody else did it. He gasps, shudders all over, his eyelashes fluttering as his dick stirs in reaction. He watches it twitch and it’s so hot. It’s so hot.

He’s still panting, lips a little swollen with biting and his cheeks are so pink. He looks up and meets his own eyes and. Pretty. God, he looks so pretty. So young and lush, almost. Like. If somebody liked boys, liked boys like him, they would think he was so hot like this. He watches himself lick his lips, watches the flower-pink dart of his tongue over his darker-pink mouth. He feels his dick thickening, feels it lifting against the lace and whatever the slinky material of the slip is made from. He moans for it, all that soft against his dick. He lowers his eyes and watches himself rub over his nipples through the material, watches how they stiffen. He bites into his bottom lip as he pinches
them, pulls and twists and god, he’s almost completely hard now.

He wants pictures of this, pictures of himself looking like this. Wants to leave one in Dean’s bag, in the seat of that dirty truck when he goes to work in the morning. Wants him to see it and get so immediately and forcefully turned on that he’d have to come back inside, lock the door behind him. Come right into Sam’s room and just take him, take him right then and there.

“Take me,” Sam pants to his reflection, to his own fluttering, dark eyes.

He wonders. God, he wonders. He hesitates, dick almost throbbing now, he’s so hard. He watches a long, honeyed drip of slick ooze from his slit, watches it dampen the material and splat on the floor in a tiny sound. He turns his back on the mirror then, staring at the door frame for a second before he cranes his neck, looking back over his shoulder at what he’s about to do.

He reaches back, reaches up under the slip and grips his own ass, one cheek in each hand, and spreads it apart. God, it feels so good, even if he’s all too aware that it’s just his own hands. His lashes flutter, mouth open but he keeps looking. Looks harder. There. God, there.

He can see his own hole, the shadow of it beneath the sheer, pale green. It’s dark pink, wrinkled up all tight and stubborn. He stares at it and stares at it until his neck hurts too much. He switches sides, looking from over his other shoulder.

He lifts one hand up to lick at his finger, getting it good and wet and then he’s spreading his ass again, watching in fascination as his forefinger rubs over his hole. He feels it and watches it twitch, react to the touch. Want. It wants. He wants.

He pushes the finger in to the first knuckle, practically chewing on his bottom lip now. He pulls as hard as he can, tries to hook his finger inside of himself and just pulls. He wants to see the inside, wants to see if it’s that same dark pink, wants to see if it’s just as pretty as the girl’s asses in porn when they gape open. It’s his favorite porn, the most risque he’ll allow himself to watch. He loves watching them get fucked in the ass, loves how different the sounds they make are compared to the ones they make when the guy is fucking them regular, in their cunt. He loves when it’s all sloppy with lube and the girls sound like it hurts a little bit it feels so good, he knows it does. Because he wants it. He wants it, too.

He thinks of Holly all those years ago, of how Dean just plowed her ass raw, of how sore and tender it looked after. How it tasted. He rubs at his own hole, little, hurt sounds of pleading leaving his throat. Yes. She felt like this, just like him. And god, when she touched him. When she fucked him with her fingers like she was a guy, like he. Like.

Like he was made to be fucked. She told him he was. She.

No.

“No,” he whispers to himself. He swallows hard, removes his hand, straightens up again.

He tries so hard not to think of Holly, not to think of what she’d said, what she’d done to him. It was too good, too good to be true. All of it. She’d been more messed up than him, even. Don’t listen to her. She wasn’t right. She still isn’t right.

But still.

He turns back around, leaning against the doorframe and stares at himself. He arches away from the frame, his tummy pushing out, the slip riding up high, revealing his balls that are pretty even and covered in light brown hairs. Thirty-seven days since he’s jerked off. He can’t wait another day.
He’s earned this.

He watches himself as he wraps his fingers around his dick through the sheer material, watches the obscenely pink head push up tight into it. He pushes up, gathering skin around the head of his dick, another fat, clear drop gathering and smearing in the fabric. God, it feels so fucking good like this. In all that pretty material all over his dick.

He moans and closes his eyes and starts to jerk off in earnest, the pill fully in his system now and he feels like he’s swimming. Flying.

The Everly Brothers are singing from the living room now, sweet and dreamy and he hums along. Dream, dream, dream.

“Whenever I want you, all I have to do is dream,” he whispers along in between heavy breaths, in between the dirty sounds of dick and the pretty little sounds he traps in his throat. He slides his free hand all over his body under the slip, feeling it whisper over his skin as he rubs at his stomach, at his lean hips, over his scars and between his thin thighs. He slips his hand behind his balls and forces two fingers to slide into his hole, pushes and pushes until they slip in dry. It hurts but he’s high and it feels so real, feels almost maybe just like. Just like.

He opens his eyes and watches himself, watches his busy hand on his dick and the gorgeously filthy secret of what he’s doing between his spread thighs, the veins in his hand as he fucks himself with dry fingers. Dean. Dean, Dean, god, please, Dean.

“Dean,” he whimpers, just to fucking say it out loud. His mouth falls open when he brushes his prostate, just the barest hint of touching it and he’s coming, the weird fullness in his ass like a revelation as he tightens and twitches and he’s coming so fucking hard, ruining this stranger’s slip while he thinks of his brother fucking him in it.

His legs give out and he sinks down to the floor, his fingers staying stubbornly hooked inside of his ass, his dick twitching hard in his tireless hand. He sucks and licks at his swollen mouth, his eyes closed and it’s all Dean, all over him, all fucking over him. He’s drowning in him.

--

Sam wakes up to a fist pounding on a door and he flies to his feet, so startled he feels sick. The sun is lower in the sky and fuck knows what time it is.

“Sammy! Open the door! What the hell is your problem!?” Sam hears the chain rattling on the door and he remembers. Fuck. Before he--

Oh, god.

He looks down at himself, at the dried comestains on the fucking slip he’s wearing and Dean is right there and--

“Hold on! Dean, hold!” He rips the slip off and runs to his room, almost skidding and falling on his ass in his hurry. He shoves the slip under the mattress and finds a pair of boxer shorts and the shirt he’d worn to bed last night, pulling them on as he runs to the front door. He can see Dean where the door’s open just enough, stopped by the chain. He looks murderous and dirty and tired and so fucking beautiful.

Sam appears in Dean’s line of vision and Dean relaxes so immediately that Sam almost double takes. Sam touches the door and the frame with both hands, leaning in close so that Dean can see him. Dean sighs, resting his head on the frame from outside.
“Sam, I swear to god. You do that again and--”

“I’m sorry. Just. Just hold on, lemme.” Sam forces the door closed gently, undoing the chain as fast as he can. He opens the door and Dean practically barges in, staring at Sam critically, looking him over to make sure he’s okay.

“Why the fuck did--”

“Sorry, it just got kind of freaky, being out here in the boonies by myself. I just locked the door and fell asleep and I forgot. I’m.” Sam ducks his head and Dean is so close, all that angry energy focused on him and Sam’s still a little stoned and he’s practically swooning under all the attention. He sees a movement out of the corner of his eyes, out on the front porch.

He jerks his head to the side, on alert but he sees immediately that it’s a girl. A girl.

Sam looks back up at Dean, in hurt and disbelief.

“I thought you were at work all day?”

“Oh, I was. This is, uh. This is Amy. She’s the receptionist down at the shop. It was a good day. Long day. Learned a lot and, uh.” Dean grins at Sam, a completely guilty, cat-caught-the-mouse grin. Sam really thinks he’s going to puke.

“And Amy just wanted to hang out.”

“Hi.” She sounds unsure and her voice is mountain twangy, soft and sweet and Sam closes his eyes, trying to calm down. He looks over at her, opening his eyes and giving her a tight-lipped smile.

She’s cute as hell, about as tall as Sam is with short, messy hair and the tiniest, itty-bittiest pigtails possible sticking out from behind her ears. She’s got her lip pierced and is wearing an old Van Halen t-shirt and cut-offs so short they’re barely even shorts anymore. Her beat-up Doc Marten boots complete the ensemble and Sam feels a wave of self-loathing so heavy that he has to walk away.

He stalks into the kitchen and rips open the freezer, letting a blast of cold air rush over him and he closes his eyes, focuses on breathing.

He hears Dean’s whisper to her and here’s her voice reply, questioning, unsure. He hears the door close and knows she’s inside, she’s in there with them. He hears Dean’s boots thump across the room and Sam can smell him, the thick scent of hard-work sweat, motor oil, rubber from tires and it’s all so fucking overwhelming, so deliciously Dean. Sam grips the freezer door handle so hard it whines in warning.

The Beatles are singing “I Want to Hold Your Hand” ecstatically from the radio.

“Hey, Sam, listen, um.” Dean’s voice is low and right next to his ear. Dean’s body is still hot from being outside and from a full day’s work and Sam can feel the heat from him in waves. “Amy’s gonna stay the night, okay? And I was thinking maybe if you’d loan me the bedroom and you can. I mean, the couch is plenty comfy, and.”

Sam jerks his head out of the freezer and slams it shut so hard it opens again on its own. Dean closes it with slightly less force and follows Sam as he slams through the house.

“Dude, what’s your problem? I’ve been cooped up in here for days, just like you! Don’t get pissed at me because girls can’t resist me!” Dean’s trying for humorous, for being irresistible and charming to make Sam calm down but Sam knows it’s only because Dean doesn’t really know him at all. Not
anymore.

Sam shoulders his way into his room and grabs up the sleeping bag and pillow without a word, grabbing his duffel bag only as an afterthought. He drags it up onto his shoulder and turns around, not able to meet Dean’s eyes where he hovers nervously in the doorway. Sam knows he’s worried about Sam scaring off his latest fuck more than he’s worried about any pain or emotion Sam might be feeling.

“Don’t worry about it, Dean. I’ll sleep in the truck. Be as loud as you want.” He shoves Dean out of the way so hard that it hurts his shoulder and Dean lets out a grunt of surprised pain. Just that contact, no matter how rough, has Sam’s touch-starved body singing.

Sam stops in the livingroom where Amy is sitting on the arm of the couch, her body angled towards Sam’s room, her eyebrows drawn in worry. Sam just stares at her, really stares at her. Thinks cruelly that she’s not any hotter than he is. That she’s the same height as him, that her tits are just a little bigger than his, even. Her hair is as short as a boy’s even, maybe. Just a little longer than his. He sneers at her, his hand in a deathgrip on his bag.

“Nice to meet you,” he bites out in his meanest, most sarcastic tone and he’s gone, out the front door, pulling it shut so hard behind him that the whole frame of the house rattles.

The house is deathly silent behind him as he stomps toward the truck. He throws his bag in the back and hoists himself up on the bumper, climbing in after it. Tears are hovering in his eyes and so he focuses on not letting them fall as he spreads the sleeping bag out, throwing the pillow near the top of the bed. He shoves beer bottles and empty water bottles and wrappers out of the way and sits right in the middle of his makeshift bed, his chest heaving raggedly.

Dean doesn’t come out.

Sam pulls out his cigarettes, lighting one up in clear view of the window to his bedroom. The sun is still pretty bright out, hovering just above the horizon, not that Sam can even see that. He’s surrounded by trees and trees and trees, by the sound of the wind through them, the light filtering through almost prettily.

He smokes his cigarette with a shaky hand, smoking it almost all the way down to the filter. He thinks about pulling up his shorts, starting the second row on his thighs but he glances up at the house at the last second, sees Dean and Amy, clear as possible through the dirty glass of the window. He presses the cigarette blindly to the wrist of his left hand, throat closing around the scream he wants to let out.

Five, four, three, two.

He pulls the cigarette away and tosses it toward the bottom of the truck bed, turning his gaze down at his wrist, all the veins standing up in stress as he clenches his hand in a fist. The burn is startlingly bright, more painful than any of the others. He brushes away the extinguished cherry and the ashes from his skin, pressing his tongue right against the burn which just makes the pain bristle, flare up again almost more than he can stand. He licks at it, eyes closed, soothing the burn as much as he can, licking and licking until the repetition of it calms him, makes his chest stop heaving.

He can hear them now, can hear the dull, rhythmic thump-thump-thump of bed frame against the wall, can hear the muffled sounds of a girl getting fucked by his brother. He lays back in the bed of the truck, still sucking at his wrist and he pictures her pussy, pictures it wet and tight around Dean’s porn-perfect dick, pictures it giving Dean exactly what he wants, exactly what he needs. Pictures her in that green slip, her small tits bouncing in it, nipples bitten at by Dean’s perfect mouth, her cunt
bare and soaked for him. Perfect, perfect. They’re both perfect and Dean is never happier than when he’s having sex, when he’s sunk ballsdeep into a sweet, pink girl.

Sam knows because Dean’s told him.

The worst part is that Sam doesn’t want to be that girl inside, the one coming on Dean’s dick loud and now, right now. It’s so much fucking worse because he doesn’t just want to fuck Dean, to be fucked by Dean. It’s worse because he’s fucking in love with him. He wants all the stupid shit that he’s supposed to want with girls: he wants to hold Dean’s hand, he wants to stare into his eyes for hours and let all those sticky-sweet, pretty emotions swirl and glimmer around them. He wants to fall asleep with Dean inside of him. He wants to lay in bed and talk for hours and hours, really talk. About each other, about their love, about how different the world is because their love exists, is alive right there between them. He wants to leave these silly poems for Dean like tributes every morning before he heads off for work. He wants to take care of Dean. Wants Dean to take care of him. To be proud that Sam is his. To sit in a restaurant and have everyone know that Dean’s eyes are on Sam and only on Sam. Wants people to see them in the park on a bench and be jealous of their love. Wants Dean to hear songs on the radio and looks over and his eyes tell Sam ‘this song’s for you, Sammy.’

He wants his brother to be his fucking boyfriend.

He rolls onto his side and pulls out his notebook, flipping to the next blank page and he uncaps his pen, listening to them in there, to the sound of the wind through the trees and the oblivious, sweet sounds of birdsong.

He writes. Dirty poems, angry poems. Begging poems. The cicadas start up, the crickets, the frogs loud from the creek that runs along next to the house. He writes until the sun gets low, the colors exploding in the sky. He writes obsessively about Dean, writes his stupid, teenage poems that nobody will ever read. Writes his love songs and they are marathon-fucking in there, getting louder and louder as the hours go by.

Dusk. Everything purple and silhouetted and the stars are brightening by the minute, moon too low to see yet.

Fifteen pages, all covered in ink, back to back. Full of terrible poetry. Sam mocks himself even as he writes them, even as the tears fall from his eyes. He falls asleep with his wrist in his mouth, his arms around his duffel, notebook closed beside him, the night alive and wild and ever lonely all around him.

--

Dean wakes up around dawn from dozing. His eyes adjust and he sees Amy asleep beside him, mouth open, snoring almost silently. He lets his eyes sweep her body, her nipples tight from cold, the bruises forming on her hips, on her tits, on her tiny stomach. He knows her cunt is raw from fucking, that it’s well-used and satisfied and that her clit is probably fucking bruised from the middle finger of his right hand, from his insatiable mouth.

He licks his lips as he lifts up, spreading her legs and shoving his face right back up against her, clit sucked right up into his mouth. She whines in her sleep, her hand coming down to grip his hair.

“Dean,” she whimpers even as she rocks down, starts to ride his mouth. “God, I can’t. I’m done. Please.” She soaks his mouth when she climaxes, she tightens and twitches around nothing while he makes her come with just his mouth. She collapses back against the bed, shaking with exhaustion and orgasm and panting, falling immediately back to sleep. He climbs out of bed, licking his lips and
smiling to himself.

He pisses in the dark bathroom, too lazy to turn the light on. He steps out into the livingroom, fully expecting to see Sam curled up on the couch and drooling on his pillow and he’s. He’s just not.

Dean blinks, waking up a little bit more and squinting out the window to try and see the truck in the mostly-dark outside. He opens the door, not caring if he wakes Amy up as stumbles out into the respectably trimmed yard.

Sam’s curled up in the bed of the truck, trembling with cold, his wrist tucked right up against his mouth. Dean frowns for that, not hesitating as he climbs up into the bed of the truck, landing none too gracefully at Sam’s feet. He looks around, not really sure how to get Sam out of the truck or how to cover him up since he’s laying on his sleeping bag.

“Sammy,” he mumbles, his voice hoarse from sleep and sex. Sam doesn’t stir, doesn’t change the volume of his snoring. Dean crouches down and his eyes are a little better adjusted now and he can see Sam clearly in the growing pale of the dawn: his fingers curled toward his face, his lips parted around his wrist, spit all over his mouth. He’s hugging his green duffel bag like it’s a person, like it’s the only thing keeping him from sinking.

Dean feels guilt spread out through his body, through every single inch. He feels like shit, like the worst big brother on the planet, the same way he used to feel when he’d pick Sam up at Plucky’s and Sam would be sitting at one of the tables in the middle of color and chaos and laughter, alone and withdrawn, eyes dull. It’s just like that now only worse, somehow, So much worse. Dean scrubs a hand over his face, over the scruff there and up into his messy, greasy hair.

Amy had come onto him strong, and he’d been too fucked up over, just. Just everything to say no. She’s cute and spunky and a little on the tomboyish side, just what Dean would have picked right now if he’d been able to go to a good bar and find a girl. He’d fucked her hard from behind, fucked her so hard he thought the bed would break, and she’d loved it. Her hips had been so small in his hands and he’d pulled her messy brown hair until she screamed and.

He refocuses on Sam, so soft and unaware with sleep. So small in his big t-shirt, his feet bare and freezing. He looks younger than sixteen. He looks like the boy who used to actually smile at Dean, who used to love Dean almost too much. Who wasn’t angry all the time.

Dean feels how tight his chest is, how tight his throat. He can’t quite seem to take a full breath.

“Fuck,” he sighs, his eyes burning, body aching with nostalgia too powerful for a fucking twenty year old boy.

He sinks down behind Sam, cradles right up behind him. He knows he’s gonna catch hell for this when Sam wakes up, that he’s going to be somehow even more angry at Dean for this than for bringing Amy back and practically kicking Sam out of the house, but.

He slides his arm around Sam’s waist, presses right up against his back. He tucks his head onto the edge of Sam’s pillow and stares at the back of his head, All those thick waves, right up against his nose. He closes his eyes and nestles his face into them, just like he used to. Sam smells just the same. Somehow. It’s like years have melted away and there’s nothing between them, here in the vulnerable of dawn. Whatever happens, it’s worth it. Pretending they’re okay for a minute is worth it.

--

It can’t be more than an hour later when Dean is woken by the quiet sounds of crying. He opens his
eyes, the light revealing that it’s early morning but it’s still too damn bright out. He hears the sound again, such a soft, aching sound. The waist under his draped arm moves in time with the sounds. Even on barely three hours of sleep and not knowing really where he is or even what damn year it is, Dean knows it’s Sam.

Sam’s crying.

Dean hasn’t seen Sam cry in at least two years.

“Sammy?” Dean starts to sit up but Sam freezes, sounds and movement halting completely.

“Don’t.” Sam breathes, breath shuddering in his chest one last time before he stops it completely. “Just. Just stay there, Dean. D-don’t.”

“What’s wrong? Are you okay? Are you hurt?” Dean doesn’t move because Sam asked him not to, and he normally wouldn’t listen but there’s something in Sam’s voice that makes him.

Sam shakes his head, the messy mop of his hair moving against the pillow. Dean watches him lift his hand to wipe at his face and he feels his heart skip, his blood run cold.

“Sam, what is that? What?” Dean reaches out and grabs Sam’s wrist, right above the perfectly round, fresh burn. Sam jerks his arm away so hard that he slams his elbow into the bed of the truck with the movement. He tucks his arm away, his breath coming out in panicked stutters now.

“Nothing. Please. Just leave it. Please, Dean. Please.”

“Did somebody hurt you?” Dean’s voice is even, low. He sits up a little more and looks around them, eyes on the road, on the grass, ears trained and listening for stray sounds. Maybe it’s a bite. Maybe it’s--

“No. Nobody hurt me. I swear.” Sam hasn’t moved, hasn’t looked back at Dean at all, and it’s about to drive Dean insane. He sits up completely now, looking down at Sam, seeing him completely now: the way he’s curled over that damn bag but Sam’s got that journal of his in his clutch, too, held tight against his chest. Sam’s eyes are squeezed shut and his chest is still heaving, breath loud as it leaves his nose. Every muscle in Sam’s body is tight, tense with whatever he’s holding inside of him.

Dean reaches out and rests a hand on Sam’s arm, his grip tightening almost to pain but it loosens again, fingers spreading out as he starts to pet his arm, slow, almost nervous. They don’t do this anymore. Dean doesn’t get to comfort Sam anymore.

“Talk to me, Sammy. Okay? Just. Just give me something. Anything. I don’t know what to do here, man. I don’t know how to make this better and it’s killin’ me.” Dean’s voice is tight with truth, with the emotions he’s tried so hard to keep under control. He can’t force his issues onto Sam. It’s not fair. It’s not Sam’s fault he’s growing up, that he’s an absolute little shit of a teenager most of the time. It’s not Sam’s fault that it hurts Dean more than any claw or bullet or fist ever has.

It’s quiet between them and around them for a long while. A car starts in the distance. A dog barks, big and loud and warning. All the southern summer sounds swim around them, so expected now that neither boys hear them. Sam is shaking all over now, a tiny, almost invisible thing but Dean can feel the tremor where he keeps his hand Sam’s arm. He watches and he waits and finally Sam just shakes his head, his throat so tight when he tries to swallow that Dean can see veins bulging there.

Dean replays the last few days in his head, tries to gather up everything that could have upset Sam. They’d fought back in Georgia over the shower, and it had ended with Sam getting shoved in with cold water blasting on his head. It would have been funny three years ago, but sixteen-year-old Sam
had been so furious he punched a hole in the wall. Countless things like have happened that lately, all because Dean can’t seem to just accept that Sam isn’t who he used to be, that Sam is growing up, that Sam isn’t his little pipsqueak of a brother anymore who finds humor in any of the stupid shit they’ve always done. He can’t accept that Sam is someone different now, and that this new Sam doesn’t really like Dean very much.

“I’m sorry about Amy,” Dean says quietly. It’s just a guess about all of this, a very vain guess on his part, that he could be any part of the reason Sam is so upset. But it’s an honest statement. He hears Sam suck in a huge breath, feels him go even more tense and he doesn’t really know what that means.

“I shouldn’t have brought her back here. I should have called. I should’ve--”

“We were supposed to go see the fireflies last night.”

Dean stops, frowns, confused. The what? What the hell is. Oh.

“Fuck. Sammy, I. Man, I forgot. Shit, I’m sorry. I really just forgot.” Dean pulls his hand away from Sam and shoves it up into his own hair, gripping and pulling at it in self-punishment. He sighs, his shoulders drawing in as he slouches in defeat. Sam has pulled in even tighter on himself, almost on his stomach now in his effort to get away from Dean. Dean just watches him, listens to the faint hitches in Sam’s breath and forces himself to realize that he did this. He made Sam feel like this.

“How ‘bout we go tonight? Hm? It’s still going on up there. We’ll head up to the mountains after I get off work, go swimmin’ in the river. I saw a barbeque place next to the shop that smells so good, you won’t believe. And then we’ll go see the fireflies. A whole day, just you’n me. What do you say?”

Dean watches Sam, watches him stop moving again as he thinks about it. Watches Sam uncurl his body a little and turn finally, finally onto his back to look up at Dean. Dean stares down at him, at his little brother who’s growing up so much, losing his soft edges everywhere, who’s getting longer and longer with his beautiful dark skin and dimples that come out so easy if Sam would ever just smile. Sam with his gigantic, amazing brain that Dean will never be smart enough to understand. They stay just like that for a few beats, just staring at each other, searching each other’s eyes for the first time in what feels like decades, to Dean.

Sam’s mouth purses into a little smile and he gives a single nod, eyes still glittering with tears but he’s smiling. Forgiveness. A truce, for now. Dean lets out a breath he didn’t even know he was holding. His return smile is huge.

“Yeah?”

Sam laughs, a tiny breath, and it’s the best sound in the world in Dean’s ears. “Yeah. Okay.”
Sam is waiting out on the front porch when Dean comes home, tired truck rumbling up into the grass. He watches Dean park the truck, kill the engine, look down at the passenger seat to clear a place for Sam. When he looks up and meets Sam’s eyes with a tired but true smile, it takes every ounce of restraint in Sam not to grin back.

“Lemme go find some boxers, lazyass. Then we can go.” Dean’s smiling as he saunters toward Sam, hands dark with grease and covered in a couple of dirty white bandages. Sam reaches up when Dean walks past him and plucks those fingers with his own, tugging Dean to a stop so he can examine them with a concerned frown.

“It’s nothin’. Perks of the job and all that.” Dean looks down at his bandaged fingers almost thoughtfully, touching them himself before he glances up at Sam and shrugs. “Be right out.”

Ten minutes later they ease out onto 321, heading straight towards the mountains that loom in the distance. Sam leans forward excitedly, watches where the river winds and plays with the road, appearing first on one side and then the other as they cross over bridges.

“You hungry?” Dean squints into the sun, nodding over to his left. “The shop’s right there. See that place next to it? That’s the barbeque place I was tellin’ you about. You smell it?”

Sam leans out the open window a little bit, hair blustering around his face as he inhales. There it is, smoky and spicy and the mouth-watering smell of barbeque. His stomach rumbles and he cuts his eyes over at Dean who is already grinning, flicking his signal on and easing over into the left lane.

“It’s more of a walk-up place, really. You can get stuff to-go. We can just get some stuff and head up to the river. Sound good?” Dean pulls into a parking place and Sam answers with an enthusiastic nod, practically jumping out of the truck.
The little building has a walk-up, concession stand type deal with a big menu nailed in below it, items and prices painted in red. Sam looks the menu over, trying to narrow down to at least a couple of things so he doesn’t just blurt out ‘everything’ when Dean asks what he wants.

“I’m gonna get a couple of shredded pork sandwiches and maybe some sides. And a few drinks. How does that sound? You want a couple of sandwiches, too?” Dean looks back at Sam, sweat on his brow, cheeks pink from the sun, freckles standing out stark. Sam almost sighs.

“Yeah, that sounds awesome.” He tries not to look shy or swoony or any of that silly stuff when he meets Dean’s eyes and Dean gives him a playful shove.

“Go sit over there.” Dean nods over at a little group of picnic tables, at the one that’s empty. “It’ll be ready in a minute.”

Sam scuffs his way over, dragging his feet through the crunchy gravel and sitting down on top of the table instead of on the bench. He lowers his head and stares down at his burn, not daring to touch it yet but he’s already memorized it with his eyes today.

“Excuse me?”

Sam’s head jerks up at the unfamiliar voice so close to his ear, his heart jumping with the surprise. He hadn’t even heard anyone approaching, which is disconcerting enough.

He finds himself face-to-face with a regular, middle-aged looking guy in khakis and a clean white polo shirt and expensive looking sunglasses. Sam must look confused because the guy pushes his glasses up into his greying hair and gives Sam a big smile.

“Sorry. My name’s Allen Graves. I run Next Modelling Agency in New York City. I don’t usually do this. In fact, I normally have people to do this for me, plus I’m on vacation with my girlfriend, so.” The guy stops himself and laughs self-consciously, shaking his head at his own rambling. Sam just watches him, eyebrows raised, waiting for him to ask for directions or something.

“Anyway. I’m sorry. What’s your name?”

Sam just keeps staring, his mouth parted a little. He feels the insane urge to get away from this guy who is staring at him so intensely, whose eyes have not left his face since he approached. He glances around, looking for this girlfriend that Allen is vacationing with but he sees no one, nothing but a nearby family that clearly doesn’t belong to this man.

“I’m. Uh. I’m Sam.”

“Sam. Good name. Nice to meet you.” Allen offers Sam his hand and Sam shakes it hesitantly, a little put-off by Allen’s overly strong grip.

“Look, I’m sorry, but. Are you lost or something? Because I’m not from around here, and I won’t be able to tell you where anything is.” Sam shields his eyes with his hand and watches as Allen’s face melts into a smile and he laughs. If Sam didn’t know any better, he’d say that Allen is charmed by him.

“No, Sam. I’m not lost. I’m sorry if this sounds strange, but. I was sitting over there enjoying my dinner, and I couldn’t help but notice how beautiful you are.” Allen sounds a little wistful and Sam can only stare at him dumbly.

“Handsome,” Allen corrects himself quickly before he powers through. “You’ve just. You’ve got such a great look to you. You’re tall but still thin like a boy, and you’ve got these great cheekbones
and those eyes. What color are your eyes?”

Sam leans back as Allen leans forward, his hand bracing on the table. “Uh. I don’t know?”

“Wow. They’ve got about three different colors in them. Amazing. Just amazing! You’re just such an all-American boy. Like, a real one, not a rich brat like me. I mean, you came in that truck.” Allen nods over toward the Ford. “You’ve got those beat-up shoes on and your hair’s dirty and you’re sunburned and just. You’re the real deal.”

Allen is staring at him, just staring at him like Sam is fucking Brad Pitt or something. Sam leans back even more, his mouth moving to try and come up with a response to all that.

“Um. Thanks?”

“Stunning. You’re just a stunning boy. How old are you?”

Sam feels his cheeks flush, all the compliments flying over him in waves and they make him feel so weird. Not exactly good, but. This guy put himself on the line and just came up to him and is making an ass out of himself, all because he thinks Sam is attractive. He ducks his head, trying his best to hide his smile.

“Sixteen.”

Allen touches a hand to his own chest, staggering back a little with a disbelieving, elated sound. “Sixteen. My god. You are just a dream. A dream boy, Sam. Listen.”

Sam watches Allen pull out his wallet and he tenses suddenly, terrified that Allen is going to try and ask Sam to do something for him. Or to him. He’s just about to make an excuse to leave when Allen produces a business card, a sleek black one with words written in a clean white font.

“I run a very successful agency. We employ models from all across the globe, the most beautiful of the most beautiful. And you’d be such a delicious addition, Sam. Just incredible. If--”

“Sam?”

Sam’s head jerks up, his heart feeling like it’s very truly in his throat and god there’s Dean right next to Allen, looking territorial and pissed-off and dangerous. Sam jumps up to his feet, the business card held tight in his hand.

“Dean! This is, uh. This. This is.”

“Allen Graves. President and founder of Next Modelling Agency. Is Sam your boyfriend?”

Sam nearly sinks to his knees in terror, in embarrassment, in want. He lets out a bark of laughter that is too high to be real, so loud it startles Allen and Dean both.

“No, Dean’s. Dean’s my brother. He’s just my brother.”

“Yeah, I’m his older brother. So whatever it is you’re sellin’, man, the answer is--”

“Brother, huh? Wow. You’re stunning, too. What genes you two have.” Allen clicks his tongue, giving Dean one last look before turning his laser-focused attention back on Sam. “I was just telling Sam here that I would love to have him come up to New York, take a few pictures, maybe build up a portfolio. See where it takes you! You’re so young, Sam. You can do anything. Especially with that face and that body.”
“Not interested.” Dean’s face is unreadable, his tone flat. He steps over to Sam’s side and puts a hand on his shoulder, guiding him away from Allen. Sam looks over at Dean and then back over his shoulder at Allen, the business card getting shoved into his pocket.

“Wait! Sam! Call me, okay? We can just talk about it! You won’t be under a contract, not at first! I think it would be a really good opportunity for--”

Dean is turning around and marching back across the gravel to Allen, the plastic bags carrying their food trembling in his grasp, before Sam can even react. He shoves a finger in Allen’s face, his broad shoulders tensed.

“Stop lookin’ at my brother, stop talkin’ to my brother, and stop thinkin’ about my brother or so help me god, you will meet the arsenal I keep in my truck. Do I make myself clear?”

Sam stands by himself a few feet away, hearing every word. He watches Allen’s eyes lower, his imperviousness finally wearing away. Dean watches him climb into his black Mercedes--alone, Sam notes--and he doesn’t look away until Allen leaves, turning right out of the parking lot and disappearing down the highway.

Dean turns and walks back toward Sam and past him, to the truck. Sam follows, avoiding the eyes of the family at the picnic table that has fallen silent. He climbs into the passenger’s seat, watching Dean put the food in the floorboard, watching him fumble with the keys, his jaw tense, face drawn.

“...Dean?” Sam’s voice is small, worried. He doesn’t want Dean to be angry at him, not for this. This was weird moment for him, and Sam wouldn’t know where to begin to argue himself out of it. He just watches Dean stare at his own hands for almost too long, to the point that Sam feels a little scared.

“I just. I’m not lettin’ some creepy pedophile get his hands on you. I saw the way he was lookin’ at you. Like a fucking predator. I swear to god, if he’d’ve touched you, I woulda shot him where he stood.”

Sam pictures the gun Dean always keeps in the back of his pants now, the gun Dad had given him on his eighteenth birthday. He pictures all that happening, everything Dean just said and his cheeks flush.

“I’m sorry.” He feels so lame for saying it but he doesn’t know what else to say. It feels so good hearing Dean talk like this about him, and Sam knows how fucked up that is. He thinks about what he’s read about negative attention, about how some people seek it out and he thinks, with Dean, he’s definitely, definitely one of those people. Wants Dean’s eyes on him, wants any word Dean can say to him because he knows, in that moment, Dean’s focused on him and him alone.

“Not your fault. You didn’t do anything. It’s not your fault that you’re. That people think you’re.” Dean pauses, struggling with his words. He finally just gives up and clears his throat, turning those bright eyes over to Sam again.

“So, uh. Do you still like Nirvana?”

Sam blinks at him, not following this line of questioning at all.

“Um. Yes?”

“Awesome. Cause, uh. I found a tape at the gas station earlier. This, uh.” Dean reaches down in the floorboard, rooting around in a different plastic bag and pulling out a cassette tape of Nirvana’s Nevermind, handing it over to Sam. Sam turns it over in his hand, running his fingers over the cover.
He had the CD, of course, but he lost it a couple of years ago, along with most of his other CDs when he forgot to grab a bag when they were leaving a motel early one morning. Dad had refused to turn around, wanted Sam to learn his lesson.

“You got me Nirvana?”

Dean shifts in the seat, starting the truck up, uncomfortable with this kind of attention, like he always has been. “It was in the clearance thing and I just, uh. Yeah. Yeah, I. So, you wanna listen to it? I’ve been listenin’ to John Denver ‘cause it’s what Bobby had in there, but.”

Dean hits eject and yanks the tape out, nodding down at the tape deck as he pulls out onto the highway again. “Go ahead.”

Sam watches him, living in Dean’s nervousness, his shyness about giving gifts, about being thoughtful. Sam loves it, absolutely loves it every single time it happens. He pushes the tape in and grins when “Smells Like Teen Spirit” starts up.

“Oh, yeah! I remember this song. The video.” Dean nods and reaches over to flick the volume up, the speakers blasting out the song as they head up towards the mountains, the moment with Allen momentarily forgotten.

The drive up into the mountains proper is gorgeous. It starts to rain halfway up to the park, the sun still shining, the sky still bright blue as the raindrops fall fat and loud on Dean’s windshield. Dean doesn’t miss a beat, just flips on his wipers and keeps on driving, both of their elbows poking out summer brown on the open windows.

Everything around them is green. Bright green, living green, the kudzu piled up on top of everything that isn’t already green just to make sure the color prevails. Sam reaches up when they slide into the park, the wooden Great Smoky Mountains National Park sign greeting them, and turns off the radio. Dean glances over at him with a raised eyebrow and Sam just shrugs, squints out his window. Dean shrugs right back, the silence settling in around them, sweet and warm as the wind.

The river rushes into view on the right, sudden and loud and Sam nearly scrambles into Dean’s lap in his hurry to see it.

“Chill out!” Dean laughs and keeps his eyes on the road, a hand out to press flat against Sam’s scrawny chest. “Think you’d never seen water before.”

Every pull-off they pass is packed, most of the license plates from Florida, which never fails to make Dean roll his eyes.

“Hilarious. They’re in like. The most touristy state in the freakin’ country, and they drive up here to stare at some trees.”

“Yeah, but you hate Florida,” Sam points out, unable to keep from staring at a girl who is walking around an SUV to open the passenger door at one of the pull-offs, her ass barely covered in an aqua bikini.

“Well, goddamn,” Dean grunts, head craning a little to watch her as they pass. Sam just hums in agreement. They lick their lips at the same time and Sam settles down to just sit beside Dean on the bench seat, looking out over his shoulder at the water.

They come up to a sign with a list of destinations, most of them pointing right but a couple of them
pointing left.

“Cherokee, North Carolina,” Sam reads, glancing around them to watch most of the cars going right, in the opposite direction of Cherokee. “That’s the Qualla Boundary, Dean. Where the Eastern Band of the Cherokee have their reservation.”

Dean looks over at Sam with raised eyebrows, not questioning him, just maybe questioning why Sam knows so damn much.

“So, you wanna go left?”

“Looks like most people are going right. It might be less crowded?”

Dean thinks about it for just a second and then turns on his left blinker, edging his way over and around the bend.

The road narrows down to barely two lanes and gets even more twisted and curved. The river stays right beside Dean like a loyal companion, forever rushing along beside them, like it wants to keep up with them, to be close to Dean. Sam smiles and glances up at his brother through his lashes, taking in the sight of his lashes and his nose and freckles and thinks that he understands the river a little bit.

They amble along for a good half hour until they see another wooden sign, this one smaller, pointing to the left and reading “Metcalf Bottoms.” They look at each other, just a single meeting of their eyes and Dean turns left again.

Turns out to be a campground with hardly any cars in it. There are a couple of small parking lots, but Sam has his eyes on the one-lane bridge up ahead.

“Just keep going straight, Dean. Look, a one-way bridge!”

They stop at the head of the bridge to let a car go across, a brand new Lexus that Dean scowls at on principle.

The bridge goes over the river, of course, and gives a gorgeous view of the long lazy line of it. Just over the bridge is another little place to pull off, this one completely empty and very close to the river. All it takes is a gasp from Sam for Dean to ease over to the side of the road and kill the engine.

They climb out of the car, Dean holding the food bag and Sam holding the one with the drinks. Sam rushes around to stand beside Dean and together they gaze out at the water, just listening to the nearly deafening rush of it. The rain has stopped and there’s a low fog over the water, in complete contradiction with the sun shining overhead and the heat surrounding them.

“I bet there’s a rainbow somewhere,” Dean says quietly, lifting his eyes to try and see the sky past the trees but it’s nearly impossible. They’re enclosed by the trees almost, right in the middle of the mountains. Sam grins at Dean and walks over to the big rock closest to them and sits down on it, opening up the bag with drinks and handing Dean a glass bottle of Dr. Pepper before pulling another one out for himself.

They clink their bottles together wordlessly after Dean opens both of them up and Sam gulps down nearly half of it in his thirst. He lifts his eyes and gazes around them, at the densely wooded river’s edge that goes along so far and twists and disappears into even more trees.

“The Cherokee lived here. Right here, along the river. This was where they lived, before they had to leave.” He finishes off his drink and reaches in for another one, handing it off for Dean to open on his ring.
Dean hums thoughtfully, untying his shoes after he hands Sam his drink back.

“Trail of Tears, right?”

“Yeah,” Sam says, his voice sad and distant. He follows Dean’s lead, taking off first his shoes and his socks, wriggling his naked toes and looking over to take in the sight of Dean’s. He lives with the guy, he sees him almost every single second of his life, but seeing Dean’s bare feet is always so rare. He smiles at the sight and forces himself to look away.

“Here, kid,” Dean hands Sam a squeaky styrofoam container, heavy with food. Sam takes it, opens it up and his stomach growls without his consent. He puts it on his lap and reaches in for one of the sandwiches, huge and messy with barbeque sauce and takes a huge bite out of it at the same time Dean does.

“Ohmygod,” Dean moans and Sam covers his mouth to hide his smile. They eat in a surprising hurry, both scarfing down two sandwiches, a big piece of corn on the cob and amazing mashed potatoes.

Two empty containers and four clinking bottles later, they’re both stuffed and piled into the bed of the truck once again.

“I never wanna move again.” Dean sounds unbelievably pleased with himself and in pain all at the same time. He’s pulled his shirt off in the heat and is rubbing his stomach that is a little distended with how much food he ate. Sam is sitting up beside him, shirt off, shoes off, his grin trained on his brother all stretched out in front of him.

“I told you not to eat the last bite of that sandwich.”

“But it was so good. Jesus. Hey, is there any more left? Did you eat all of yours?” Dean cracks an eye and looks over at Sam who snorts at him, kicking half-heartedly at Dean’s leg.

“Pig,” Sam laughs.

“They had cherry cobbler. God, we shoulda got some. Maybe on the way back. Or. Or tomorrow. Wanna get some tomorrow?” Dean’s pinky is resting right over his belly button and Sam couldn’t tear his eyes away if the world caught on fire.

“Sure,” he replies, drawing his legs up tighter to hide his dick and its current, despicable state. “Tomorrow.”

Dean grunts his agreement and promptly falls asleep. His hands are still dirty from work, still bandaged up only now they’re stained and sticky with barbeque sauce. His lips are rimmed in spicy brown-orange, too and he’s just stretched out right in front of Sam, like he knows exactly what he’s doing to him. Or like he has no idea. Both. Either.

Either way, Sam wants to wiggle down to the foot of the truck and blow Dean while he dozes.

“I’m gonna go swim,” he mumbles, lifting to stand up and then jumping over the side of the truck.

“Supposed to wait thirty minutes before you swim.” Dean is barely coherent but he, of course, still manages to over-parent Sam even now. Sam just rolls his eyes and pushes off his jeans, leaving him in his boxers as he walks gingerly over the rocks to get to the water.

“Shit,” he gasps, the water icy cold even after the decidedly hot day. Goosebumps shoot up and prickle all over his body, making his teeth start to chatter without even realizing it. He stands where
he is, contemplating climbing back out and putting all his clothes back on and burrowing up against
Dean’s warmth in the truck.

“Cold?” Dean’s voice is faint over the roar of the river but Sam hears him, of course. Sam doesn’t
have to nod, doesn’t have time really, before Dean keeps talking. “Just get all the way in. You’ll get
adjusted.”

“I’ll get hypothermia,” Sam mumbles to himself, feeling frozen and blue all over. He takes Dean’s
advice though and takes a few steps into the water, feeling it get higher and higher on his legs until
it’s nearly at his dick. He almost whines.

He turns to look to Dean to have someone to complain to and he nearly falls over when he sees that
Dean is very close to him, stripped down himself, in just a pair of dark blue boxer briefs and about to
stick his foot into the water for the first time. Sam watches sadistically, lips pursed in premature
amusement.

Dean gasps louder than Sam had and jerks his foot back out of the water, reaching back to steady
himself on a fallen tree branch.

“Shit! Are you fuckin’ kidding me? It’s summer, for Christ’s sake! Fuck this shit, it’s too fucking
cold for this. I’m not--”

Sam reaches for him then, can’t help it, just grabs Dean’s biceps and jerks him into the water, pulling
so hard that they both lose their balance and go sprawling into the river, Sam going all the way under
and Dean landing on his side, caught with an elbow so his face just barely gets wet.

All Sam feels is ice and he forces himself above water, drawing a huge breath to make a sound that
fits how cold he is but Dean beats him to it, howling and screaming *motherfucker* at the top of his
lungs.

Sam bursts out laughing and reaches over to shove at Dean’s shoulder. “Shut up, dude! They’re
gonna kick us out!”

“This isn’t a pool, Sam. It’s *nature*. It’s fuckin’ as-is, cold-ass fuckin’ water *nature*. Shit.” They’re
both shivering, trembling all over, chins vibrating with it, teeth clattering. Sam sinks down into the
water again and eases a little bit farther out.

“C-come out here, Dean. The sun’s still showing right here, so it feels better.” He wades into a
sunspot and tips his head back, so insanely grateful for the sun’s presence that he wants to cry. Dean
splashes over to him with the speed of a desperate man, and Sam shivers all over again when he
hears Dean’s moan.

“Suuuuun.” Dean is floating in the water now, laid out all flat on his back, his hand holding onto a
rock so he doesn’t get carried away in the current. Sam smiles and walks over to him carefully, trying
to not slide too much on the slippery, moss-covered rocks.

“Better?” Sam asks, even though it’s rhetorical. He ducks his head under again, getting his hair wet
and pushes it back from his face. He comes back out and Dean’s still right where he was, looking
serene where he’s drifting on the river’s surface. The water is rushing around him, dragging the short
strands of Dean’s hair around, the pull of it keeping Dean’s body tense so he can hold on. His eyes
are closed, mouth soft, nipples looking painfully hard and Sam just hovers right where he is, staring
because he cannot help it.

He knows how much Dean loves the water. Knows even though he never really gets to enjoy it. Not
really. No time in the motel pools during hunts, no time when Dad’s around and they’re near a lake or even an ocean. It’s too trivial for Dad, too distracting. And Sam knows that Dean’s too dutiful to argue, to go against what his father says even when they do find themselves with a spare few minutes.

Well, this is Sam’s time with Dean, and he wants Dean to do as much floating in the water as he could ever want.

“Here, let me,” Sam trails off, lost in thought as he climbs up the rock Dean’s clinging to. He’s dripping water everywhere and already shivering even under the sun, but he reaches down to pry Dean’s hand up, lacing their fingers together so he’s the one keeping Dean from floating away.

Dean cracks an eye open and squints up at Sam, a little smile on his face that shows he doesn’t mind it too much.

“You wanna hold my hand, Sammy?”

“No, it’s just.” Sam squirms, maybe holding on a bit too tight as he struggles not to defend himself too much. “This way you don’t have to think about it. Let me do it so you can relax.”

Dean looks hesitant, like he’s trying to think up an argument and Sam just gazes out along the river, watches a van pass over the little bridge while he waits for Dean’s verdict. He looks back down after a few minutes and sees that Dean’s eyes are closed and Sam smiles, relieved.

He doesn’t squeeze Dean’s hand like he wants to, doesn’t run his fingers over the now soaked bandages. He just stares at Dean’s knuckles thick with calcium from so much violence, at the wide rounds of his fingernails. He lets his eyes venture down, taking in the veins of Dean’s forearm, the curves of muscles that make up the rest of his arm. The hair in his armpit that is moving softly in the water.

Dean’s so relaxed, dozing almost, all because of Sam. Because he trusts Sam. Trusts him to keep hold of him, to not let him go.

They stay there, just like that for a good half hour, the sun drying Sam and warming him, drawing out a pink tint on Dean’s nose and cheeks. Sam sits cross-legged on the rock, holding his brother’s hand, his eyes falling closed, too.

Before Sam knows what’s happening, Dean’s tightening his grip on Sam’s hand and yanking him into the water, practically toppling Sam down on himself as they both go under. Sam resurfaces with a gasping sputter, confused until he hears the sound of Dean’s evil, unstoppable laughter where he’s leaning on the rock.

“You bastard!”

“Sam, you.” Dean throws his head back in a renewed bout of cackling, bringing his hand down to slap hard against the rock. “You didn’t even see it comin’. You shoulda seen your face, man.”

Dean draws his face up into cartoonish, flailing stupidity that apparently mimics what Sam looked like moments before his betrayal and Sam can’t help but snort out a giggle of his own at the sight.

“You’re such an asshole. Here I was, trying to be nice, to be a good brother, to let you relax a little after a long day at work, and--”

“Relax?! You pulled me in in the first place, you fucker!” Dean’s grinning as he lunges at Sam and Sam, being the wiry little bastard he is, ducks easily away, swimming away as best he can against the
current while not having very good footing on the slimy rocks.

“Just ‘cause I knew you were going to chickenshit out if I didn’t pull you in!” Sam has a valid argument and Dean knows it, but it doesn’t stop Dean from chasing Sam around in the water and clobbering him when he finally catches up, wrapping his arms around him from behind and shoving Sam face-first down into the river.

They fight and slap and punch lightly and shove until they’re both breathless, chests heaving as they drape over a different rock a bit farther out, grinning at each other.

“Dick,” Sam pants, his smile a little too adoring. Dean just splashes him and they both laugh again.

“Ohh, dude. Dude, look at that fish. That fucker is huge!” Dean sits up and points and Sam follows suit reluctantly, squinting where Dean is pointing and a movement in the water finally brings the fish into focus.

“Shit,” he breathes, instinct driving him up out of the water and onto the rock. Dean doesn’t notice Sam’s girly retreat because he’s too intent on the fish.

“Bastard’s gotta be like a foot and a half.” Dean sounds reverent but he’s getting closer to the fish, hands out, looking like they’re ready to grasp which is just ludicrous to Sam.

“Probably more like ten or eleven inches,” Sam guesses, curling down to get a better look at it. “Looks like a bass, I think.”

“I’m gonna catch us dinner, Sammy.” Dean’s in hunter-mode now, eyes focused, body tensed. He lunges for the fish but of course doesn’t catch it, just watches in a fair amount of anger as it darts away.

“Almost got it,” he defends, flicking his eyes up at Sam. Sam grins at him, trying to lighten Dean up a little.

“Were you gonna make us fish for dinner?”

Dean scoffs, eyes focused on the water, on the lookout again. “I was gonna catch dinner. You were gonna cook it. You’re the wife, remember?”

Sam’s body flushes hot all over and he represses a shiver where it starts at the base of his spine. He remembers.

“Dean’s a crappy caveman name,” Sam finally comes up with as soon as the heat on his cheeks dies down a little. Dean’s too intent on bare-hand fishing to notice the long pause.

“We could live out here, man. I’d catch us food and we’d build a fire and skin black bears for their fur to make beds.” Dean dives again for a fish and misses.

“Or we could just go to Wal-Mart,” Sam points out.

Dean looks up at that. “For bear furs?”

Sam narrows his eyes at him. “Yeah, Dean. For bear furs. Buy one get one.”

“I ever tell you you’re a--”

The sound of two distinctively feminine giggles stops Dean’s voice in its tracks. Dean stands straight up in the water, eyes now laser-focused on the pull-off beside the river where a navy Explorer has
parked and oh, god. Fuck.

“It’s bikini girl. From earlier. Sam, it’s my dream woman.” Dean is already making his way back to the side of the water, leaving Sam to perch on his rock and shamefully hate women.

“Hey, ladies.” Dean’s voice is oozing sex and even Sam, a veteran to Dean’s voice, shivers. He glances over and watches the girls, two stunningly beautiful, matching blondes, stop and get all shy in the face of Dean Winchester, river god and king of fish and Sam’s soulmate.

Sam sighs.

“Listen, did you all bring anything? I don’t just let anybody come to our little swimming hole.”

Aqua Bikini, the obvious ringleader, doesn’t miss a beat, just grins and steps out of her flip-flops and start towards the river and Dean.

“Well. We brought sunscreen.” Her eyes are on Dean and Sam knows how this is all going to play out. Knows it right down to the second. He draws his legs up and wraps his arms around them. He looks over at the other girl who is watching her friend and Dean get close enough to touch even though they don’t. Not yet. It’s all part of the dance.

“Sunscreen. I knew I forgot somethin’. What do you think, Sammy?” Dean turns to grin at Sam and it’s times like this that Sam hates hates hates his nickname. He grits his teeth and slides down off his rock, avoiding Dean’s eyes as he makes his way through the water and back over to the side where all the action is.

“Girls, this is my brother, Sam. He’s sixteen, single, Taurus, likes National Geographic magazine and music you’ve never heard of.”

Both girls are smiling at him but in a different way than either of them smiled at Dean. Their smiles for Sam are sweet, heads tipped to the side, like Sam is in a pretty pink princess gown and isn’t a threat or fuckable or anything vaguely interesting. Their smiles for Dean are loaded and purring, like they can smell Dean’s dick from where they’re standing, like they know how good he works his hips and uses his tongue and like they’re both about ten seconds away from dropping to their knees to worship at the altar of his cock.

Sam is kind of an expert at that smile aimed at Dean.

“I’m Diana. This is my twin sister, Emma.”

Dean turns to look at Sam, his expression like he’s already halfway to orgasm. Sam doesn’t have to even see Dean’s lips to know he mouths the word twins like it’s sacred.

“I’m Dean,” he rumbles when he turns back around. He pulls himself up out of the river and stands between the two girls, making his intentions very clear, at least to Sam. He acts like he doesn’t notice the girls’ eyes dragging over his bare chest, the front of his wet, clinging underwear.

Sam forces a smile onto his face, one that barely registers as anything but a grimace. He climbs roots and small rocks to get back up to flat land again, edging his way past Dean and the twins, not looking at any of them as he does.

The sound of the passenger door shutting after him is loud in his ears, louder than the water and the annoying breathlessness of girls flirting. He sinks back in the seat and closes his eyes, trying so hard to ignore what’s happening, what always happens.
If he was normal, it would just be annoying. Just frustration at an interrupted day that makes him climb in the truck and pout like a little kid. *If* he was normal.

As it is, as he is, it’s shattering. Every time, it’s shattering. It’s Dean picking someone else over him. He doesn’t care how simplified and, at the end of the day, untrue it is. It hurts like a betrayal, like heartbreak, every single time. And he doesn’t know how to fortify himself against it, how to just accept it.

He realizes now that he left his clothes out there, in embarrassing piles near the model-pretty twins, and that he’s soaking wet in Bobby’s truck. He grabs a towel out of the floorboard and pulls it up to drape over himself. He wants to just leave, to just drive back to the house and hide in his room and smoke.

He pushes his finger against the burn at the thought, biting back a whimper as the pain shoots through him. He hears the low rumble of Dean’s voice nearby, hears his heated laughter and he hopes they at least go somewhere first. That he doesn’t have to hear... anything. He can’t handle it, not so soon after last night. Not when he doesn’t have his cigarettes.

Sam opens his eyes and he sees Dean kissing Aqua Bikini, her sister sliding up behind Dean, her hands teasing all over his ribs. No. No no no no nonono.

He knows Bobby doesn’t smoke, so there’s no chance of any stale cigarettes in the glove box. He opens it anyway, finding a couple of knives, what looks like a hex bag, a flask of what he assumes to be holy water and a bunch of pretty old-looking papers.

Of course Bobby’s truck is just as huntery and boring as his house is.

He ducks down in the seat, a panic attack slowing building his chest. His eyes are a little crazed as they look over the dash, the steering wheel, at the.

Yes. God, yes.

He shoves his thumb against the cigarette lighter on the dash, the ache in his chest already easing out at just the thought. It’ll get better soon. Soon.

He watches it, waiting impatiently for it to heat up. Surely to god they won’t just have sex out there. There are cars driving by all the time. And this park has to have rangers. There’s gotta be--

The lighter pops out. Ready.

He reaches for it, hand shaking with the sick need to feel it against his skin. His mind flies over the placement, where it should go. The lighter is a bigger circle than cigarettes themselves are, so it can’t go on his thigh or it’ll mess up the pattern. He wants it on his wrist, wants to be able to touch it and see it but that just means that everybody *else* can see it, too. Maybe on his chest? Or his upper arm. Nobody really sees--

The driver door opens suddenly, the hinge creaking loud as it does. Sam lets his hand fall away from the lighter though it takes everything in him not to grab it and go through with it no matter who sees him.

He looks over just in time to get a face full of clothes thrown at him, first his own and then Dean’s. He scrambles to sit up, offering Dean the other towel. Sam just stares at him dumbly, his mouth open.

“Dude, you’re gettin’ the seat all wet. Why didn’t you put the towel under you?” Dean’s drying
himself off with his own towel, scrubbing it through his hair and over his body before draping it over the seat to sit on it.

Sam doesn’t answer, doesn’t know what to say. The girls come back from where they’d apparently gone to their own car and one of them hands Dean a piece of paper as she leans over into the car.

“That’s where we’re staying, and that’s the number to our room. There’s a pool. And a hot tub. And us.” She winks at Dean and doesn’t stand up straight to leave. Instead, she reaches down and tugs one of the tiny triangles of her bikini top aside, letting the gorgeous swell of one of her tits slide free. Sam and Dean both just stare at it, watching it bounce and settle, the nipple of it rock hard, her skin so pretty and tanned.

Sam sucks his bottom lip into his mouth and just keeps staring, watching as Dean reaches up to cup it in his palm, squeezing it and rubbing his thumb over her nipple before she stands up straight again. She fixes her top back into place, pushing her tits together to make the cleavage almost unbearably full before she steps back, tossing another wink over her shoulder at them.

“See you guys later!”

They both just sit and stare like idiots as they climb into the Explorer, radio blasting the Dixie Chicks as they peel out.

“They both just turned eighteen last week,” Dean says in a daze. “Summer vacation before college.”

“Hn,” Sam replies intelligently.

“Said they want both of us.”

“Oh.” Sam blinks for that, heat spreading through his body, starting at his balls.

Dean looks over at him, his mouth pink and wet from kissing, his hand still pretending to massage that beautiful breast.

“Just. Think about it.”

“Hm.” Sam grunts, clearing his throat a little and giving a jerk of a nod.

They head out to find the visitor’s center in silence, both lost in thought and maybe a little hard in their underwear.

Maybe Sam doesn’t really hate girls so much afterall.

--

By the time they find the right place and get their clothes back on, the sun is well on its way to setting. Dean’s dressed before Sam and he hops out of the truck, the frame squeaking as he does so.

“C’mon, Sammy, you can fix your eyeliner later!”

“Dean, I’m just!” Sam grumbles in frustration as he hurries even faster to tie his shoes again, fingers fumbling in his rush. He slams his feet down to the gravel and rushes after his brother the second he’s got the double knot tied, grabbing up his backpack from the floorboard.

“Did you--”

Dean holds up his own bundled up sleeping bag and a bag Sam hadn’t seen before, one full of
bottles of water and what looks to be bags of candy. Sam meets Dean’s eyes and finds him grinning, his eyebrows waggling.

“I’m like a sexy boy scout. I got this. C’mon!” Sam runs to catch up to Dean and he falls in line beside him, piling onto the bus idling in the parking lot next to all the cars. A man in a all-khaki uniform comes around and collects the money for parking. Dean gives the man a crinkled-up ten dollar bill and he hands them some red plastic wrap after making sure they brought a flashlight.

Dean takes Sam’s backpack and fishes the flashlight out, efficiently covering the front of it up with the red plastic wrap.

“It’s so there’s not any huge bright lights up there to distract from the fireflies,” Dean explains as he covers the light with careful fingers. “We won’t use it unless we have to.”

Sam just nods, getting more excited by the minute. The bus starts up once it’s full, entire families piled on with babies and toddlers and kids of all ages. There are a few teenagers, including a couple sitting directly across from them who insist on making out the entire way. Everything’s quiet except the for the quiet country song coming from the bus speakers, and Sam can’t help the blush that spreads on his cheeks as he watches the two kissing, spying from under his hair so he doesn’t look too obvious.

“Ten bucks says she blows him before the sun goes down,” Dean whispers in his ear, the smirk evident in his voice. Sam shifts in his seat, the heat spreading all the way down his body and burning in his belly.

“Why didn’t you go with them? With. With the twins?” Sam tries to keep his voice neutral, casual, letting his eyes flit around on the admittedly beautiful scenery outside.

Dean’s quiet for awhile, so quiet that Sam thinks maybe he’s mad about the question, but he answers right when Sam is about to look over to make sure.

“Cause I promised you.”

Sam does look over for that.

“Promised me what?”

“A day with just us.” Dean doesn’t meet his eyes, just fidgets with the flashlight, making sure the plastic wrap is secure even though they both know it is. “I meant it.”

Sam swallows hard, letting his eyes drift back out to gaze at the trees in the setting sun. The warmth in him feels permanent now, feels utterly real. Because he knows Dean means it. He really means it.

Sam laughs, a soft sound through his noise.

“So you’re gonna call ‘em tomorrow, then?”

“Oh, hell, yeah, I’m gonna call ‘em tomorrow, you kiddin’ me?” Dean’s grin is blinding and Sam can’t help but mirror it, shaking his head when Dean bumps his shoulder.

The bus drops them off about twenty minutes later, deeper in the woods. They walk along the rather large path that is mostly graveled, following behind people and walking in front of some. Sam can hear the river off to their left again, rushing along more quietly here.

There are people camped out on either side of the trail, loads of chairs and small grills and blankets
spread out. Kids rushing around, soccer moms reading books, dads drinking contraband beer and looking bored. Tons of girls in tiny, tiny shorts that Dean eyes with dedication.

They go about a mile before Dean’s tugging on Sam’s sleeve, nodding off the trail to the right, deeper into the trees where it’s already dark, where fireflies are already starting.

“There’s a level looking place right up there. Let’s go grab it before anybody else does.”

They trek through the woods easily, well-versed in doing so thanks to their dad and Bobby’s insistence that they practically be survivalists in these kinds of places. They manfully leave the flashlight off and Sam follows along close behind Dean, wanting to reach out and hold on to the back of his shirt but just barely refraining.

A tiny creek babbles along happily right next to the spot Dean picks for them, and Sam smiles at it as they unload their shit. Dean spreads out the sleeping bag and crouches down to rifle through Sam’s bag, making sure the flares, a silver knife, and a container of salt are in there. Sam watches him feel along his back, fingers touching his handgun and he sees the moment that Dean relaxes, feeling safe, prepared.

Sam digs into the bag and grins when he comes up with a pack of sour gummy sharks. He opens them and offers it to Dean who pulls a few out, resting back against a tree with a sigh.

They watch the trail down a little ways, the seemingly endless line of people filing along. Dean growls low in his throat when he sees a few people approaching them, annoyed that they dare have the same good idea they had. The little family continues on into the woods even past Sam and Dean, talking to each other and not even bothering to glance over and catch Dean’s death stare.

“I wonder if your boyfriend’s gonna make an appearance.” It’s so out of the blue, so nonchalant the way Dean says it that Sam can’t help but gasp, inhaling tiny granules of sour sugar as he does. He hacks and coughs, not daring to look over at Dean who is most definitely watching Sam with an amused smirk.

“What the hell are you talking about?” Sam manages, his throat raw, eyes watering.

“Alan whatever, the pedo model guy.” Dean pulls the silver knife out of the bag, unsheathing it and picking up a twig to whittle at one end of it.

Sam glares at Dean, slouching a little at the reminder, shoulders curling in as he wraps his arms around his bent legs.

“Real funny.”

Dean shrugs, his demeanor quiet, almost thoughtful. He fashions the end of the twig into a deadly, sharp weapon with hardly any effort at all, testing its sharpness with a calloused fingertip.

“I mean, he coulda been the real deal, who knows. I might have just made a millionaire piss his pants at a barbecue joint.” Dean pauses, setting the stick aside on the sleeping bag-turned-blanket and picking up another one.

“You gonna call him?” He only glances up at Sam, just a single second but it pins Sam where he sits.

“I don’t know,” he mumbles, hair falling in his eyes. He runs his hand over the grass next to him, letting a fat, black ant climb across his knuckles. “He wasn’t serious anyway. There’s no way I could be a model.”
Dean stops for a second, knife half-sunk into the wood.

“Why not?”

Sam just looks at Dean, staring at him like Dean had suggested that Sam get a perm.

“Uh? Because models have to be, like.” Sam fumbles a little, motioning his hand vaguely at Dean. Dean just stares right back, looking down at himself when Sam basically points at him.

“Horny, borderline alcoholic teenagers with violent tendencies?”

Sam huffs, grabbing up a handful of grass and throwing it at Dean.

“No! Asshole. Like. Like. Hot.”

Dean laughs outright at that, finishing his cut into the stick.

“I’m not hot, you little shit. It’s just the attitude. And the jacket. Chicks dig the jacket.”

“Dean.” Sam says it slow, real slow, like maybe Dean will understand him if he says it carefully. “You. Are. Hot.”

Dean grins down at his new mini-stake, tossing it down next to the first one and putting the knife back in its cover. “Aw, Sammy. You flirtin’ with me?”

Sam’s throat closes up at that, air refusing to leave or enter his body. His hands shake when they clasp together, wrapping back around his legs. He curls his neck and pushes his forehead hard into his knees, reminding himself in rapid repetition that Dean is kidding.

Dean sighs, abandoning his post and coming over to sit next to Sam, the dark hiding how tense and trembling Sam is when he puts his arm around Sam’s shoulders.

“I’m just fucking with you, man. Seriously though, you’re a good-lookin’ guy. You’re still just a kid, so don’t be too hard on yourself. You ain’t even finished growin’ yet, you know? Obviously, that guy saw somethin’ he liked in you, otherwise he wouldn’t have risked his life and his nuts to come over and try to pick you up, right?”

Sam can’t hold his smile back when Dean tightens his arm around him, clearly trying to make Sam feel better. He ducks from under Dean’s arm, pushing the stakes and the backpack off the blanket so he can lay down on it, curling up on his side, head pillowed by his arms.

It’s about the straightest way a guy can compliment another guy’s looks. Plus, Dean keeps calling him a kid. Just to reinforce Sam’s role to him, just in case he’d forgotten. Like he could ever forget. Kid brother. Got it.

“Yeah. Sure, Dean.”

“Aw, c’mon, man. Don’t go gettin’ all pouty on me. We’re supposed to be havin’ fun.”

Sam stays quiet, turned toward the dark, his back to the crowds of people nearby. A breeze has picked up, pulling all of the trees into a rushing dance that drags a cool wind over Sam’s face. He closes his eyes and draws in a deep breath that he lets out slowly.

“Hey, Sam, uh. You know if there’s.” Dean clears his throat a little, shifts beside Sam. Sam sees it and tenses up a little but refuses to look over at Dean. Refuses to open himself up in case this was
going to be embarrassing.

“If there’s anything you ever wanted to, you know. Tell me. Or talk to me about. I’m not gonna. I mean.” Dean pauses again and Sam’s heart is racing, his cheeks burning hotter on the sticky summer night. He’s so glad the light is failing, that Dean can’t really see him very well at all. He stays silent.

“I’m just sayin’ if you’re, uh. If there’s anybody you. You know. Have a crush on or somethin’. Or miss. Or think about a lot, I’m not gonna pick on ya. You can talk about that kind of stuff. If you need to.”

Sam is breathing harshly through his nose, his eyes focused straight ahead, on the few fireflies that are trying out their flicker in the distance. He feels the panic building, building. He wraps his arms around himself, nails digging into his own ribs, and he can feel Dean’s eyes on him.

“What do you mean,” he asks in a low tone. He’s trying so hard to sound clueless, casual, but he’s sure the tremble in his voice is heard throughout the entire forest.

“I’m just.” Dean huffs, a frustrated tone. Sam knows in the back of his mind that this isn’t easy for Dean, voluntarily bringing up something as awkward as feelings. But he’s fucked in the head if he thinks this is any easier for Sam. “Man, I’m just sayin’. You don’t have to keep secrets from me is all. So if there’s somebody you, you know. Have. Have feelings for or somethin’, you can tell me about ‘em. If there’s a girl. Or a guy.”

Dean’s voice is soft at the end, very soft but very clear. Sam looks back at him, his eyes huge, his chest heaving visibly now.

“I’m not gay!”

The woods around them go quiet for a beat, that weird silence that follows something stupid said much too loudly. Sam turns his back to Dean, faces away from him and tightens his arms around himself. This was dumb, coming out here. It was stupid. He’s. He’s.

“Sam, I don’t give a shit if you are or you aren’t. I don’t care, is what I’m sayin’. I promise I’m not gonna think you’re weird or gross or something. No matter what you say. Alright?”

Sam forces himself to nod, just to make this conversation go away. Just make it stop.

“O-okay,” he croaks, the word barely heard over the hitching sound he makes over it. Dean has no idea. He has no fucking clue what he’s saying and Sam knows it’s all bullshit. Dean would think he was the biggest freak on the planet if he knew. If. If he knew.

“Look, they’re starting for real now, I think.” There’s a rare tone to Dean’s voice that Sam can’t recall having heard before, or in a long time. He swipes a thumb under his left eye quickly before he lifts his head and glances around them, the dark settling in heavy and Dean’s right.

The fireflies are gathering together slowly, flashing still to their own beat but they’re starting to synchronize with each other, starting to put on the show. A hush falls over everyone pretty quickly,
the talking and movement dying down to whispers.

Sam doesn’t know when Dean lays down but he knows the second Dean’s behind him, pressed up right against his back, his chest against Sam’s shoulderblades. He can tell that Dean’s propped up with a hand on his cheek so he can see over Sam’s shoulders but he’s right behind him, like he was last night. Like he was when Sam woke up in the bed of the truck this morning. He’s warm and solid and a shield from everything and everyone else, everything but the streams of flashing gold lights in front of them now. Sam feels like he’s dreaming.

There’s a particularly gorgeous sheet of lights that appears suddenly and everyone around them gasps, just like at a fireworks show. Sam smiles in spite of himself, about to turn and say something stupid to Dean when he feels Dean’s hand on his waist, fingers spread apart, palm wide. It settles right on the curve of his hip, long fingers spanning halfway across Sam’s stomach. He shivers under the touch, his eyes wide, staring desperately into the glowing dark.

The hand doesn’t move, doesn’t so much as twitch for a solid five minutes, the fireflies increasing by the dozens every minute. It’s when there’s another murmur of wonder from the crowd that the hand moves, slides up along Sam’s ribs just a little, pulling Sam’s shirt with it purely by accident. Sam arches, can’t help it, he arches and sucks his stomach in, getting as small and worthy of Dean’s hand as he can.

He swallows, the sound loud between them, in the quiet of the now-night. He can hear Dean breathing right behind him, so close to his ear, steady and warm and heavy. Dean moves just a little, shifts and presses up tighter to Sam’s back and Sam has to chew on his bottom lip to keep from moaning. This. Yes, please god. This.

The hand moves back down, sliding over the soft curve of his boyish waist, over his slim hip, fingers bumping along the rivets and loops and pocket of Sam’s jeans. Sam pushes back, nestling into the warmth of Dean, giving Dean something good to rub against, if he wants.

He shivers when Dean’s hand slides up again, tickles over his bare skin, pushing a little bit farther down to stroke over Sam’s naked belly. He sucks in hard again, Dean’s fingers digging into the softness of him.

There’s a sudden, breathtaking waterfall of fireflies then, a massive wall of flickering, floating light that seems to tumble down from the side of the hill and into the trees, right in front of them. Everyone gasps, Sam and Dean included; Sam mostly because Dean’s hand is tight and possessive on him, his dick a perfect, undeniable point of heat against the small of Sam’s back.

“Fuck, that’s amazing,” Dean whispers, his voice soft with awe.

“Yeah,” Sam whispers right back, trying so hard not to just writhe against Dean like any of Dean’s stupid girls would do. Stupid, lucky girls.

Dean sits up then, pushing to sit back against the tree again as he fumbles around in the dark, the unmistakable sound of a water bottle being opened making Sam’s heart sink.

Sam sits up himself, moving over to sit closer to the creek, slipping his shoes off so he can stick his feet in. They watch the fireflies in silence after that, a few feet away from each other, Sam too confused and wanting to even glance over at Dean.

About an hour later, most of the fireflies have trickled out, leaving a few, persistent stragglers. The people are starting to clear out, too, flashes of blue and red-covered flashlights flickering down on the trail and in the woods as they leave.
Dean clears his throat, drawing Sam out of his pretty angsty brooding. The whole thing had been beautiful, absolutely unforgettable, but all he can really think about is the heat where Dean’s hand was on him and the lingering cold where Dean isn’t near him anymore.

“What do you say we head out, man? I’m so damn tired. I got about two hours of sleep, and I’ve gotta work in the morning.” Dean doesn’t really wait for a reply, just stands up and brushes off his ass before he starts to gather stuff, rolling the sleeping bag back up.

Sam just watches him, or watches where he hears Dean in the darkness, completely baffled as to how Dean is seeing anything well enough to pick it up. When the red-covered light comes on and shines right in Sam’s eyes, he sighs, forcing himself to stand up finally.

Dean hands Sam his backpack and hoists the sleeping bag onto his own shoulder.

“Hold onto me, alright? And walk where I walk.”

Sam rolls his eyes for that, so ready to bite back at him, to tell him that he’s spent time in the dark woods, too, thanks so much. But Dean’s starting to walk and Sam moves immediately, reaching out to grab Dean’s shirt right in the back where his gun is resting. He looks down, watching Dean’s feet in the low light, following along as obediently as he can.

The trail is practically abandoned, and they don’t say much as they walk. Sam is shivering a little, surprised at how much colder it is in the mountains than it is even where they live. Dean looks over at him, gives a little breath of a laugh before he wraps his arms around Sam’s shoulders.

“Chilly, iddnit? About ten degrees colder up here than it is back at the house. Just ‘cause of the water and all the shade.”

Sam doesn’t say anything in reply, just nods, tucking shamelessly up under Dean’s arm, against his warm body.

He stays right there, only separating when they have to climb back on the bus. He goes right back when they sit down, Dean’s fingers tickling over Sam’s sleeve.

They’re back at the parking lot half an hour later, and Sam even manages a smile and a mumbled thanks to the guy driving the bus. They make their way back to the truck with the flashlight, Dean not bothering to take the wrapping off yet.

About halfway home, down the highway, Dean’s phone goes crazy in his pocket, beeping and chirping one alert right after the other after the other. Dean frowns as he digs around for it, trying to keep his eyes on the dark road.

“I don’t know. Fuck, just--”

“I don’t know. Fuck, just.” Dean pulls over on the side of the highway, growling in frustration before he finally wrestles his phone out of his jeans. He flips it open, the engine idling loudly all around them. Sam just watches him, watches Dean’s moonlit profile draw up in tension.

“Dean.”

“Dean. What is it? What--”

“Dean.”

“Fuck. It’s Bobby. He’s called like ten fuckin’ times. Guess we just got a signal back right here.” Dean’s got the phone to his ear even as he’s talking and Sam is utterly still, just watching. Watching these last few seconds of ignorance on Dean, ignorance of whatever horrible thing has happened that they’re about to find out. Sam doesn’t know about Dean, but he’s always waiting on it. Waiting on that call from Bobby, from Caleb, telling them that Dad’s dead, that he didn’t make it out of this one.
He stares at Dean, memorizing him, just in case this is the last moment before he finds out the worst thing he could hear.

“Bobby,” Dean growls, his entire body sinking in relief. He kills the engine and runs a hand over his face and up into his hair. “Fuck, man, I’m sorry. Me’n Sammy were up in the mountains and there’s no signal up--”

There’s a silence as Dean listens, the faint rumble of Bobby’s voice on the phone filling the cabin. Sam’s hands shake in his lap.

“Yeah. Is he--”

More silence. Sam’s heart leaps at the pronoun, at just the thought of something happening to Dad. Dean’s tone is indecipherable.

“Sure. We’re on our way. It’s about three hours, but I can make it in two. Call you when I hit city limits.”

Dean snaps the phone closed and starts the truck again, tossing the phone on the seat between him and Sam and pulling out onto the highway again, the tires screeching a little as he does.

“Dean, talk to me, damnit. What happened? Dad. Is. Is he--”

“He’s alive. Not doin’ so good, but he’s.” Dean’s voice is tight, thin, and Sam can hear the tremble in it only because he knows Dean’s voice better than any other single sound in the entire world.

“He’s at Vanderbilt Hospital in Nashville. Just got out of surgery. Got torn up pretty good. Broke his arm in two places apparently. Tore some tendons or somethin’. We’ve gotta get our stuff. I’ve. I’ve gotta.”

“I’ll get all our stuff together. You go call Red and your boss down at the shop to see if he can mail your money to Bobby’s house. We can be on the road in half an hour.” Sam keeps his voice calm but not placating, knowing how much Dean resents the idea of needing help, anybody’s help.

“Yeah. Yeah, okay. Fuck, I just. I knew I shoulda gone with him. Bobby said it was a poltergeist. He doesn’t think it was the Bell Witch, just some bitch who was attracted to the area, probably.”

“Did they get it?”

“Yeah, Bobby did. Went back after he took Dad to the ER. Salt and burn and got his face bashed in by some flying rock. I think when we get there that, uh.”

“I can drive the truck, Dean. Back to Bobby’s. You drive the car.”

“Yeah. That’s.” Dean exhales heavily, the sound whooshing through the truck and out into the night. He’s tired already, dog tired, and now he has to drive another two hundred miles before he can even stop again. But he still manages a smile over at Sam. “Thanks, Sam.”

Sam smiles over at his brother, knowing that Dean won’t see it but he’ll feel it. He always does.
The motel room isn’t very big, just one bed, and it stuns Sam when he sees it. It’s stupid, really stupid, to be shocked by such a thing and he knows it. But he’s never been in a motel room with just one bed. They’ve always had two. Sometimes three, and he and Dean have at the very least shared a bed while Dad took the other one. Or that’s how it’s been for most of his life.

One bed.

He turns to look at Dean who is pushing into the room with Sam’s duffel and laptop bag on his shoulders, looking as tired and annoyed as he’d looked the whole way here. Dean throws Sam’s stuff down on the bed and huffs out a little breath, frowning completely by the time he looks over and sees Sam’s expression.

“What,” he grunts, glancing around with just his eyes before he looks back at Sam, eyebrows raised in impatience. Dad’s probably back in the car by now, waiting.

Sam looks away, trying for unaffected, busying himself with unzipping his laptop bag and pulling out his computer.

“Whatever. I gotta piss then I’m headin’ out.” Dean’s closing the bathroom door behind him before Sam even registers what he’s saying. He stares after him, swallowing over and over again to try and get the lump in his throat to go away. It’s terror, he realizes, rising up in his throat. Dean’s leaving. He’s actually leaving this time, going with Dad. Leaving Sam alone.

And Sam knows that he’s fucking seventeen years old, that he’s been capable of being left alone, of taking care of himself for at least five years now. And it’s not that. He’s not scared of taking care of himself. He’s scared of--

“He’s actually leaving this time, going with Dad. Leaving Sam alone.

“No, Dad already. He gave me a couple of cards. It’s. I don’t want to take your money.”

“Alright, I’m out.” Dean’s back out of the bathroom almost as soon as Sam hears the flush. He reaches into his wallet and hands Sam a thick fold of bills, not looking up at him as he does. Sam takes a step back, shaking his head.

“No, Dad already. He gave me a couple of cards. It’s. I don’t want to take your money.”

“Sam.” Dean’s really not in a good mood, not smiling when he finally meets Sam’s eyes. “Just fucking take it. I got it for you in the first place. We’ll be back in a couple of weeks. I’ll call you when we get to Akron. It’s only a couple of hours away. So if anything happens--”

“I’ll be fine.” Sam feels his throat closing up, threatening to cut off all his air. He doesn’t want a goodbye from Dean. He doesn’t. Dean can’t go. Dean can’t go he can’t go he can’t.

Dean is staring at Sam, really staring at him. Sam looks back at him, catches his eyes. He’s so afraid
that Dean can see everything there, all of him. All of it. He looks away, down at the money in his hands. Dean’s money. He runs his thumb over the edge of the bills, the soft ruffle of it the only sound in the room.

He knows Dean doesn’t want to go on this one. He doesn’t know what the reason is, but Sam knows it to be true in his bones. He can feel it in the hesitancy between them, in the way Dean’s shoulders are tensed, the way he’s been short with Dad all day.

And Sam.

Well, Sam wants to grab him by the collar of that jacket and taste the stale coffee in his mouth.

Dean ducks his head finally, scratches at the back of his neck. Clears his throat. Emotions. Right. None of that.

He heads for the door and Sam turns to watch him go, standing in the middle of a one-bed motel room, holding illegally won money for food he won’t eat.

Dean looks back at him just once over his shoulder, eyes catching again because it’s what they do. It’s who they are.

“I’ll call you.”

It’s as good a goodbye as any.

--

Granville is in the absolute center of Ohio, which is as far from anything interesting as Sam could be.

He deals with the secretary and the counselor of the high school, gives them his transcripts and goes through the song and dance of their concern for his transiency and their amazement at his excellent grades.

Sam gives them his winningest smile and is handed his schedule and textbooks in about twenty minutes of being in the office.

He stopped counting the schools in the seventh grade. He doesn’t really want to know how many he’s been to. The counselor had told him that Granville High is one of the best schools in the country, and had placed him in some pretty tough classes.

AP Stats first period, AP English second, AP Chem, and.

“Psychology. Shit.”

That’s all he needs. To fucking analyze his own fucked up brain some more.

He starts the long walk down the first hallway, the layout to every high school pretty much the same. He tugs his backpack up onto one shoulder, keeps his head down, letting his hair fall over his eyes. He hates getting taller. It just means that everybody can see him better.

And he doesn’t want to be seen.

His day goes by in a blur of information and notes and the isolation of being the new kid in a small town.

Dean hadn’t called last night. Hadn’t sent a text message. Sam had slept maybe four hours before
getting up to go for an eight mile run.

He spends lunch in the library, tucked in a corner next to the card catalogue, his face buried in a stolen copy of *Fight Club* that Dean had given him last week in Cave Creek, Arizona. Sam had read it immediately, finished it that same evening and left it on Dean’s bed while Dean was in the shower the next morning. The paperback spent the next few days tucked in Dean’s back pocket, the cat food coupon serving as a bookmark inside moving closer and closer to the end of the book until Dean finally gave it back to Sam last night in the car, right before they left for stupid Granville, Ohio.

The book is permanently curled now from its residence in Dean’s pocket, the pages dog-eared by both of them, words and sentences underlined in different colors of ink. Again, by both of them.

Sam’s rereading it because it maybe smells like Dean a little bit. And he knows which marks are his own, so his heart races a little every time he sees an imperfect, thick line drawn under the typed words, so different from his own thin, precise dashes.

Yes, Sam realizes he’s an idiotic, lovesick stupid fucking girl.

—

Psychology ends up being a pretty small class, and so Sam has no problem finding a seat towards the back.

He’s got his notebook out, textbook tucked under his desk, and he’s checking his phone for messages from Dean when someone sits down next to him. He smells nail polish, some sticky sweet lipgloss smell, and Doritos. He doesn’t bother looking over, just keeps his eyes on his phone, on Dean’s name highlighted.

Sometimes he does that. Just stares at his name on his phone because he could call him, if he wanted to. He could talk to Dean right now, hear his voice right this second. If he, you know. If he really wanted to.

“You like Chuck Palahniuk?”

Sam glances up for that, his eyebrows raised. He finds himself face-to-face with a girl with big, thick-rimmed glasses, looking a bit like that one guy from Weezer. She’s a normal-looking girl, pretty when she smiles at him, at how long it’s taking him to answer, probably.

“Oh, yeah. Yeah, he’s good. Kinda crazy, but.”

“But crazy’s good, right?” Her smile gets even bigger then, and it’s real, a true smile and not just a flirty one. Sam smiles back because it’s nice. Good to talk to somebody.

“Right,” he replies as conversationally as he can, giving her one last little twitch of his lips before he looks back down. Dean’s name. He could push send. Or.

He opens his text messages, goes to Dean’s name.

*good job calling last night dick*

He closes his phone and tucks it back in his pocket so he’ll feel it vibrate. When he realizes that the girl is still watching him, he starts a little, sinks down in his seat.

“I’m Audrey.” She offers Sam her hand which is just. So weird for a teenage girl. Sam takes it for that reason alone, shakes it.
“Sam.”

She nods, taking her hand back and tucking it into the sleeve of her striped shirt. She shifts in her seat, bending one leg under herself so she can perch on it.

“So, you’re new, right? Or am I just that unobservant?”

“No, yeah. I’m new. First day.” He pulls a pencil out and writes the date at the top of the paper. Shit. How is it already March?

“Well, on behalf of the Granville High student body, welcome to our humble institution.”

Sam snorts for that, shaking his head a little before he looks back over at her. She’s blushing only her thumb visible as she digs at the corner of her textbook. The nail is painted to look like a cat. How the fuck did she do that?

“Sorry,” she mumbles, reaching up to tuck her hair behind her ear before she’s back to ruining her Psychology book. “I don’t really.”

She looks up and around at the other kids near them, her voice falling quiet.

“I don’t really, like. Talk to anybody. You just seemed.”

Sam waits, gives her a minute to come up with a word. He leans toward her, his smile a little self-deprecating.

“Weird?”

“Yeah! No! I mean. Like. Like, weird in a good way. You know?” Audrey meets his eyes, apology and worry written all over her face. Her eyes are huge, insanely expressive and he can’t help but smile at her.

“No, I get what you mean. It’s. It’s cool.”

The bell rings and Sam’s pocket vibrates at the same time. He jumps and then scrambles to pull the phone out, flipping it open, eyes flying to read Dean’s text even as his cheeks flush happily.

*didn’t get in til 2 u dick. too late to call*

There’s a scramble of a few more kids coming into the room and then he hears the door shut. The teacher starts talking but he doesn’t hear. He bites back a smile as he replies to his brother.

*you miss me yet?*

It’s stupid. Flirty, even. He shakes his head at himself as he puts his phone away, turning his attention up to the teacher for the first time. He can feel every time Audrey glances at him, and he keeps his smile away when Dean texts back because he knows she’s watching.

*yeh like a hemroid*

Sam snorts out loud, covering his mouth as his fingers fly.

*i think you mean hemorrhoid. assface.*

The reply is almost immediate.
Sam closes his phone and tries to pay attention but he really just kind of floats through fourth period.

He’s halfway down the block from the school when he hears the scuff of shoes on cement behind him.

“Sam!”

He turns around, shocked that anybody knows his name here. But he sees Audrey coming to a stop right in front of him, a little winded but that big smile is back. Sam blinks at her.

“He’s halfway down the block from the school when he hears the scuff of shoes on cement behind him.

“Sam!”

He turns around, shocked that anybody knows his name here. But he sees Audrey coming to a stop right in front of him, a little winded but that big smile is back. Sam blinks at her.

“I was just wondering if maybe you wanted to. I don’t know. Go grab some pizza or something?” She’s looking at everything but him and she’s doing that thing again, pulling her hands completely inside of her sleeves. She finally glances up at him, lifting up onto her tiptoes in what can only be nervous energy.

Sam’s smile is a little strained.

“Look, Audrey. You seem really nice, and I’m sure--”

“No, it’s okay. Just forget it. It was stupid.” She starts to turn back the way she came, her cheeks pink just like Sam’s get way too often around his brother. He grabs the strap of her messenger bag and tugs her gently back toward him.

“Hey, no, listen. It’s not stupid. It’s just.” He licks his lips, looking up at the grey sky as he tries to come up with the words, with the way to explain that he can’t even really look at girls anymore, that nobody grabs his attention unless they’re twenty year old snarky fuckers with green eyes and a mouth that would make saints cry and also happen to share half of his DNA.

“It’s just that I’m gay.”

He blinks at her, stunned at his own words. Her eyes are owlish behind her glasses, shocked herself but it dissipates almost immediately. She lets out a laugh that sounds like relief and reaches up to squeeze his arm.

“Hey. Hey, that’s okay. That’s awesome. I’m. Thank you for trusting me and telling me that.” The look she’s giving him is nothing but warm now and she’s still rubbing his arm. His breath shudders in his chest as he tries to wrap his brain around his own admission.

“He’s. It’s not like he’s gay gay. It’s not like he’s “It’s Rainin’ Men,” checking out other guys’ asses, dreaming about dick gay, right? It’s. It’s just Dean.

Right?

His smile is wobbly but he forces himself to give it to her because she deserves it for being so fucking awesome. Just go with it, Winchester. Just go with it.

“Thanks,” he breathes, heat flooding his face as he imagines what Dean would say if he overheard all of this. “I’ve. I’ve never really told anybody before. Who. Who doesn’t know me, I mean.”

“Listen, how about we go over to my house? It’s just right up the street, and we can just order pizza
and do some homework. What do you say?” Her hand slides down and squeezes his but it’s 
different. It’s not like she’s flirting anymore. All that tension’s gone and it’s just. Nice. She’s just 
being nice. He grins at her.

“Sounds awesome.”

--

Audrey’s house is a nondescript suburban house, nice but comfortable and on a quiet street. There’s 
an old piano in the corner of the living room and there are floor to ceiling bookshelves spanning the 
entire space, volumes upon volumes.

Audrey orders the pizza while Sam gawks at all the books, not daring to touch any of them, but his 
heart is racing at what an impressive collection it is.

“My dad’s a lit theory professor down at Denison University. He raised me on books.”

“My dad raised me on AC/DC and the Sunday comics,” Sam replies absently, hands pushing into his 
pockets, his fingers closing around his phone before he remembers. Dean! Text messages!

sorry was @school. hows the case coming?

He turns around and sees Audrey watching him, a couple of textbooks cradled in her arms where 
she’s sitting on the couch.

“Is that your boyfriend?” Her smile is sweet but knowing and Sam almost drops his phone in 
surprise.

“Huh?”

“That you’ve been talking to.”

“Oh, um.” Sam looks down at his phone, digs his thumb in to fidget with the antennae, pushing it up 
and down and back again. His heart soars at just the thought, at just the idea of what she’s asking. 
“Yeah. Yeah, it’s. It’s my boyfriend.”

“Come here! Come on, sit down. Tell me about him.” She turns on the couch to lean back against 
one of the arms, her eyes bright with excitement. Sam crosses the room and sits down next to her, a 
little hesitant because. Well, why would some girl be excited about a gay guy’s boyfriend?

“What do you want to know?”

“What’s his name? How old is he? Where does he live? What--”

Sam laughs, reaching out to rest a hand on her arm, stilling her. “Okay, slow down! His, um.”

Oh, god. Could he really just do this? Just say this? Nobody would ever know. Nobody would ever 
find out.

“His name is Dean. He’s twenty and he, uh. He doesn’t really live anywhere.”

Her smile morphs into a concerned frown, her eyebrows drawing together and she opens her mouth 
to ask another question.

“I mean! We’re. We’re both from Lawrence, Kansas. It’s just that. Well, he travels a lot with his job. 
So we’re kind of on the road a lot.”
“What does he do?” She relaxes again, settling back in the couch, kicking off her battered Vans slip-ons and tucking her feet underneath her.

“He’s in sales. I don’t. I don’t really know what exactly he sells. My eyes glaze over everytime he tries to talk about it.” The lie comes easily enough, just like it always does. His little laugh makes her laugh and she pulls and pulls at her sleeves.

“So, you travel with him? And your parents just let you do that?”

“Yeah, I mean. They know Dean. I’ve known him practically my whole life.” He swallows, his heart feeling like it’s in his throat. “They know I’m safe with him. That he.”

God.

“That he loves me. And protects me.”

“Mm,” she sighs dreamily, resting her head on the cushion of the couch. “He sounds wonderful. How long have you guys been together?”

“Feels like forever,” he replies, his voice soft, a little vulnerable. He runs his fingers over his phone where it’s cradled in his palm. The phone lights up right then and he opens it up, thumbing through to get to the new text message.

you teachers pet yet? case is nothing so far. @library researching. yawn

“Your face changes when you’re messaging him.” Audrey’s voice is wistful and Sam glances up to catch her eyes, blushing for the dreamy look on her face. “It’s so sweet.”

let me know if i can help :)

Sam closes his phone and holds it close to his stomach. There’s a secret smile on his face as he stares down at his hands.

“He’s amazing. He’s. He’s gorgeous and funny and the smartest guy I know.”

“Why are you here? Where is he right now that you can’t be with him?”

He frowns a little for that, Dad’s voice in his head, telling him he doesn’t know about this one, that Sam can’t be too close. Has to be in another town, can’t get hurt, son. Dad never once says that stuff about Dean. Not even once.

“He’s gotta be in a few different places the next couple of weeks. Conferences and stuff. He wanted to make sure I stayed caught up at school and took the SATs while he’s gone.” And that part’s true enough. Dean had already signed Sam up for the SAT test as soon as he found out Sam would be in Granville. Paid for it over the phone and everything.

“Sounds like he cares about you a lot.” Audrey reaches out to touch Sam’s hair, her voice comforting probably because of the cloud that covers Sam’s face the second he thinks about how far away Dean is.

Phone vibrates.

will do kiddo. stay safe and ill call you tonight promise

Sam sucks in a deep breath that he lets out in a sigh. He curls up to rest against the couch, too, his eyes falling closed as he pictures Dean smiling in a dusty library, closing up his phone and getting
back to work.

“He does.”

--

The walk back to the motel takes about half an hour, but it’s a good walk. The streets are practically deserted, and Sam’s content just to shuffle along, to let his thoughts drift back over to the day he just had.

He’d told some stranger that Dean is his boyfriend.

Oh, god.

Anxiety races through his body, making him shiver. But underneath it all is a thrill, a burst of pure happiness for his alter-ego, the one who’s dating Dean. The one who gets those dreamy faces made at him when he talks about his loving boyfriend. Just the thought of it being real.

Just the thought.

He dashes through the motel parking lot, digging his key out of his pocket. He locks the door behind him and turns on the light beside the bed, tossing his shit down and stripping out of his layers. He falls down onto the unmade bed and shoves a hand down into his underwear, cupping his half-hard dick, fingers rubbing lazily at his balls.

“Fuck, yeah,” he sighs, letting his eyes flutter closed.

The creepy, robotic sound of his ringtone jolts him out of his little daydream about sucking on Dean’s fingers and he’s flying toward his backpack, searching madly for his phone. Dean’s calling. Hurry hurry hurry h--

“Hello?”

Dean’s laugh fills his ear, low and warm and Sam licks his lips. Damn, Dean’s so fucking sexy, especially when he’s not trying to be.

“Whaddy'a doin’, Sam? Hmm?”

“N-nothing. Just got home from doing homework with a friend. Couldn’t find my phone.” Sam collapses back onto the bed, letting his hand rest on his stomach, fingers tickling over his hipbones.

“Mm-hmm. Sounds like I interrupted something.”

Sam’s eyes are huge as he blinks at the ceiling.

“No!” Oh, god, did his voice just fucking squeak? “No, seriously, man. I just couldn’t find my phone. It was at the bottom--”

“Must be nice to have a room all to yourself. Gettin’ to jerk off whenever you want.” Dean’s voice is low and gruff, quiet enough to let Sam know that Dad is somewhere nearby.

Sam clears his throat, his face absolutely on fire. He does not want to talk to Dean about this. Well,
that’s a lie. He wants to jerk off on the phone with Dean. But it would only end in Dean laughing at
Sam for thinking Dean was serious about doing it and Sam being irreversibly humiliated when Dean
plays his own involvement off as a joke.

“So, um. How’s the case going?” Sam sounds a little meek, shyer than he even is anymore. But he’s
different around Dean. Every single thing about Sam is different around Dean.

“Ugh, fine, we’ll talk work. Case is still a fuckin’ bust. Dad won’t even tell me what we’re doin’
here even though I know he fucking knows. He’s on the phone with Bobby outside right now.
Won’t even let me hear what he’s talkin’ about. Just had me in that dusty-ass library practically the
whole damn day. My sinuses are killing me.”

Sam grins, his eyes fluttering closed as he holds in an adoring sigh. “There’s some Benadryl in the
pocket inside your duffel, remember? Take a couple of those and it’ll knock you out tonight as a
bonus.”

“Oh, yeah, you’re totally right.” There’s some shuffling and movement and the sound of a zipper and
Sam indulges and allows himself to think that it’s the zipper on Dean’s jeans instead of the one on his
bag.

He’s a terrible brother.

There’s the crinkle of a package and then Dean sipping water and finally letting out a sigh as he
apparently resettles on the bed. “Awesome. Thanks, man. So tell me about school.”

“Ugh, fine, we’ll talk about school,” Sam mimics and he hears Dean snort. “It was okay, I guess. It’s
some kind of prestigious school or something, so I’m in some good classes.”

“Good, like. Bikini studies and Hooters History 101 or good like your boring kind of good?”

“You’re such a douche. Good like Advanced Placement classes. And Psychology.”

“Ooh, Psychology. Analyze me, baby.”

Sam’s cheeks burn. “Already did that today. Apparently you’re brain dead.”

Dean lets out a bark of laughter followed by a snicker. “Fucker.”

“What can I say? You’re an easy study.”

“Do you have any groupies yet? Usin’ that new height to your advantage?” Dean gets pouty most of
the time when he talks about how tall Sam’s getting and Sam doesn’t really understand it. He just
knows that Dean definitely doesn’t like that Sam’s getting tall. Not even a little.

“Oh, yeah, you know me. They’re sleeping out in the parking lot right now.”

“Fuck that, dude! Let ‘em in. They can help you jerk off.”

“Dean!”

“Seriously, Sam, you talk to anybody today? Besides me, I mean.”

“There’s. Well, yeah, there’s a girl I made friends with.”

He hears Dean sit up in bed.
“Oh, a girl? Tell me.”

“Nothing to tell. She’s just a regular girl.”

“A butterface?”

“What are you such a dick?”

“Well! You’re the one that said she’s ‘regular.’ That’s Samspeak for ugly, right?”

“She’s not ugly! She’s cute. And she looks all normal in school but at home she’s like. This crazy punk rock fan. She has her own radio show and everything. She wants to be a music journalist or something when she gets older.”

“Whoa whoa whoa, wait. At home? You go to her house?”

“Yeah, we did homework, I told you.” Sam’s eyes are open again and he hears his stomach growl, loud and angry. He rubs at it, letting his hand slide down into the curve of it from his ribs. It’s childish, but he never eats anymore when they’re separated like this. Every time it happens, Sam eats even less than he usually does. As it is, he hasn’t eaten since they were at Connor’s Diner in St. Louis yesterday evening, en route to Granville.

Cigarettes going out on his skin used to take care of it, of that mawing, obsessive love he feels for his beautiful fucking jerk of a brother, but they don’t quite cut it anymore. Nothing hurts quite as clearly, as consumingly, as an empty stomach.

“Did homework like. Fuckin’ math equations or did homework like she sucked your dick while you memorized the Declaration of Independence?”

“Ohmygod, Dean.”

“Did she swallow? God, I love when--”

“Dean! She didn’t! She didn’t do that!”

“What, swallow? Man, I don’t know, Sam. You can’t really trust a girl who--”

“I mean she didn’t suck my. She didn’t do that, period!”

“Oh. Well, thanks for ruining it for me.” Dean sounds genuinely disappointed. Sam huffs a laugh.

“Ruin your spank bank fantasy for the night?”

“Well yeah, you did. The TV in this room doesn’t even work, so there’s not even a chance at finding porn.”

“I happen to know you have a very vivid imagination.” Sam’s hand has found its way down over his underwear, over his dick that has softened a little but it hardens when he gives it a slow squeeze.

“You’re right, I do. So what’s she look like?”

Sam gives a noncommittal hum. “Brown hair, real dark eyes, I guess. She’s pretty skinny. Says her mom is just the same way, but people think she’s anorexic or somethin’, but. She’s just. Little.”

“What about her tits?” Dean’s voice is a little lower, more gravelly, and it sends a shiver up Sam’s spine. He spreads his legs a bit on the bed and pushes his hips up into his hand.
They’re small, I guess. Not too small, just.”

“Perfect handfuls.”

“Yeah.”

They’re both quiet for a minute, and Sam can hear Dean breathing hot right into the speaker. God, if he’s. If he’s touching himself, thinking about this girl. About Audrey. About him and Audrey.

“She has these glasses with thick black rims. She said they’re made out of recycled vinyl records. She’s a huge music fan. It’s all she talks about.”

“Glasses, that’s hot. Sam’s hot little music nerd girlfriend.” Dean grunts and Sam’s dick reacts with a shudder, thickening right under his palm. He pushes his hand down into his underwear then, just in time to catch a splash of precome in his palm to spread over himself. He sighs into the phone, boldly letting Dean hear it. Letting Dean know what he’s doing.

“Her name’s Audrey.”

“Nice. God, Sammy, you feel her tits? Gotta get her to suck your dick, man. Wearin’ nothin’ but the glasses.”

“Yeah?” Sam gasps, not exactly thinking about what Dean’s saying, just listening to his voice. Knows Dean is touching himself, rubbing that big dick through his dirty jeans. Thinking about Sam getting his dick sucked. Oh, Jesus Christ. God.

“Think I can do it, Dean?”

“Oh, fuck yeah, Sam. Fuck.” Dean’s panting now, making gorgeous sounds that has Sam fisting his dick, his underwear tucked right up under his balls and he’s so fucking close already, so ready to blow his load when Dean does. “I know you’ve gotta good-sized dick now. Gettin’ all big now and her fuckin’ mouth’ll water when--”

There’s the distinctive, terrifying sound of a door opening and there’s a scramble with the phone. Sam can hear their Dad’s voice, the rumble of it if not the exact words.

“Yeah, Dad. Just, uh. Just talkin’ to Sam. Seein’ how his first day went.” Sam is decidedly not touching his dick now, is sitting up rod-straight in bed, his eyes huge. God, he’s so fucking glad he’s not Dean right now.

“Put me on speaker,” Sam hears Dad say.

There’s more movement and then the sound changes in the phone and Sam sighs. His dick is already softening.

“Heya, bud. How’d it go today?” Dad sounds tired but at least he’s trying.

“Pretty good,” Sam replies automatically, rubbing at his face. Shit. God, if Dean were here, Sam would so try. He’d put his hand over in Dean’s lap and rub at his thigh and just fucking see what Dean would say to that.

“Just good?” There’s a squeak of the mattress as Dad sits down next to the phone, next to Dean. Oh, poor Dean.

“Yeah, I mean. Got my classes and had some homework. Was getting ready to go to bed after I got
off with D--got off the phone with Dean.”

“You do that. Listen, take care and you call if you need anything, got it?”

“I will, Dad.”

“Night, Sammy.”

Sam grumbles to himself over the nickname, waits for Dean to figure out how to take the phone off speaker again. He relaxes back against the pillow when he hears Dean’s breath against his ear again.

“Sorry, he just barged in. You know how he is.” Dean’s voice is barely above a whisper now, and Sam smiles to hear it.

“S’okay,” he says back just as soft, the whole conversation feeling beyond intimate now, almost sweet. Sam turns on his side and drags the covers up over his body. “You tired?”

“Am now. You know what those damn pills do to me.” Dean shifts and moves and Sam imagines him turning and curling up exactly the way Sam is now.

“It’ll be good for you. You don’t sleep enough.”

“So if we’re playin’ Momma, did you eat today?”

Sam blushes even though Dean can’t see him. It unnerves him how much Dean knows him. It scares him to think about what else Dean can see.

“No,” Sam admits, the word small in the otherwise empty room.

“Why?” Dean’s voice is patient and unsurprised and Sam is practically cuddling with the phone now.

“Didn’t feel like it.” It’s the truth, no matter how hungry he is. He feels like a dog whose master leaves and the dog punishes both himself and his master by not eating the entire time he’s gone.

“Here’s what you’re gonna do. You’re gonna get up early in the morning and stop at a diner before school and order something to eat. Short stack, omelet, a fuckin’ fruit cup, I don’t care. But you eat it. Whatever you order, you eat all of it. You hear me?”

Sam tenses, teeth digging into the soft flesh on the inside of his bottom lip. He knows he’s going to tell another lie, one of dozens today, and he feels a dull ache in his chest as he does.

“I will. I will, Dean.” He exhales after he says it, relieved to just have the lie told.

“I mean it, Sam.”

“Jeez, Dean, I will. Just drop it.”

A pause.

“You need me to come down there?”

It’s not a threat or teasing or mean. It’s an honest question. It’s do you need me dressed casually. And god, Sam does. He does and he does and he needs.

“No,” he manages, eyes squeezed shut so tight he sees bursts of color behind his eyelids.
“Sam, if--”

“I’m gonna let you go, Dean. Go sleep, okay?"

He listens to Dean sigh, listens to him shift on the bed, waits as Dean debates whether to press the issue or not. Sam doesn’t know if he wants him to.

“Yeah, alright. Listen, you send me a text message in the morning and tell me everything you eat for breakfast, got it?”

Shit.

“Okay.” He’s going to try and eat. He is.

“I’ll know if you’re lying.”

Sam snorts for that. “By reading a text message?”

“I know you, boy.”

_Then come down here and know me all night until I can’t fucking move like you do all those girls._

“Night, asshole.”

He hears Dean’s smile. Finally.

“Night, Sam.”

---

Sam finds himself at Audrey’s again the next day after school.

Sam had shuffled along beside her on the way home, admiring her posture and her easy smile out of the corner of his eyes as she talks to him about the early 90s East Bay hardcore scene. He listens with as much diligence as he can find, clutching _Fight Club_ in a white-knuckled grasp, his phone turned up to the highest volume in his pocket, waiting.

Sam had broken his promise, hadn’t eaten breakfast. He’d ordered a piece of toast with strawberry jam and a side of bacon with a big, cold glass of pulpy orange juice. The orange juice had disappeared within three minutes, leaving him with a gnawing, burning stomach and ten minutes to get to school.

He hadn’t text messaged Dean about it and Dean hasn’t called yet.

---

He’s standing in the middle of Audrey’s kitchen, leaning against the island while she stares into the open fridge, her eyes sleepy and vacant.

“Nothin’ to eat,” she reports, and Sam hums agreeably. He’s stroking over the faint scar of the burn on his wrist, the only one. It’s his pet obsession, this scar, this one that he can touch whenever he wants.
Anytime he jerks off lately, it’s with his lips sucking at that scar, pretending with breathless vehemence that it’s Dean’s mouth on it, tendering it, healing it, being so sweet and understanding.

*Of course, Sam, daydream-Dean would say. Of course I understand why you did this. Why this was the only way you knew to deal with it. I understand and it doesn’t make you any less beautiful to me.*

“--to make grilled cheese, I guess. Mom’s getting groceries right now to make dinner. How does that sound?”

Sam’s eyes snap up and lock onto Audrey’s face. She’s watching him, a tiny smile on her face. An understanding one. Like she gets why he’s been acting like a zombie all day.

“You tired?” Audrey shuts the fridge and slides across the tile to him. She wraps her arms around his waist and tucks her face into his neck, letting out a sudden gasp of a yawn. Sam jumps for the sound but rests his arms with no small amount of reluctance on her shoulders. He remembers only then that she’d asked a question.

“Oh, uh. Yeah. Yeah, I didn’t get much sleep.”

“Hmm,” she replies, her hands making incredibly soothing circles on his back. “Miss Dean?”

Sam sinks back against the island, his legs going weak with truth. He closes his eyes and pushes his face into her hair.

“Yeah.” It’s barely a word at all, more just like a sound. Probably closer to a whimper than any other verb. He shakes his head at the thought, at the realization of how pathetic he really is.

“C’mon. We can do homework later. Let’s just go hang out in my room until dinner, okay?”

“Dinner? Um. Audrey,” Sam takes a step back, hands clasping on her shoulders to hold her back just a little. “I don’t know, I mean. Are you sure your parents want to meet me? What if they find out that--”

“Sam, they’re totally fine. I already told them about you and Dean and how much you miss him and just need a friend. They’re excited to meet you! Mom’s making some kind of supposedly amazing lasagna tonight just for you.” She gives him her best reassuring smile, reaching up to push his hair out of his eyes.

Sam feels all the color drain from his face.

“She. She’s making food. For me?”

“Well, yeah. What’s wrong with that? Why don’t you want food?” Her voice is slow, careful. A little confused. She squints at him, studying him, an expression that is so much like his own arsenal of expressions that his heart starts to pound, his eyes widening.

“No, it’s not that I don’t want food. I’m just on a juice fast this week, so.” It’s the second dumbest lie he’s told her. Nothing will ever top the first one.

“A juice fast.” Her eyes are narrowed at him, not buying it for a second. He licks his lips, glancing around the kitchen.

“Hey, can I see your room? I want to see your famous CD collection.” He grabs her wrist and tugs her a little away from the island, away from this fucking conversation. He feels her hesitate, feels her draw breath to argue but she takes pity on him, turning their hands around so that she can lace her
fingers with his and pull him up the stairs.

Audrey’s room is nothing Sam is prepared for. It’s insane, the walls covered in a wallpaper of pictures, of song lyrics, of posters. Hundreds of faces, musicians and writers and people from across history piled on top of each other, covering nearly every available inch of wall space. There’s a burst of CDs in one corner, piled into shoeboxes and a CD rack and in freeform stacks by themselves, all surrounding an impressive-looking, venerable stereo system.

Right beside her bed, he sees the radio she told him about, the one she records her super secret radio show on, surrounded by small stacks of cassettes. The rest of the room is a typical teenage girl like in the movies, really, just clothes and shoes and magazines and nail polish, interrupted by little mountains of books, a stuffed bull perched on the desk, and a huge, messy bed tucked in the corner next to the window.

Sam gravitates not for the CDs, not for the view of Audrey’s backyard through the window, but right for the bed. The warm-looking, messy bed. He sits down as polite as he can, having to force himself to not just curl up and fall asleep right there. Another night of three hours of sleep, and a six mile run before his orange juice breakfast. He’s just tired.

“Your room is awesome.” He looks up at her, the smile spreading across his face completely genuine. She smiles right back at him, stepping up to him and carding her fingers through his hair, fishing out the tangles as she goes.

“Don’t take this the wrong way, but.” She’s looking down and to the side, her shyness blooming pink on her cheeks. “Can we like. Cuddle, maybe? Just. Just for--”

“Yeah. No, yeah, that’d be great.” He toes his shoes off and actually sighs when he finally sinks back into the mattress, his eyes slipping closed before he’s even settled. He feels a slight dip in the bed when Audrey joins him, her cheek warm against his chest, her arm a welcome weight on his chest. He sighs again.

“Do you and Dean cuddle a lot?” Her voice is soft, fitting with the quiet of the room. He knows she’d rather have music on, would rather have him listen to a fleet of songs that he’d be more than happy to hear, but she’s giving him this. Giving him quiet and a dim room and indulging him by letting him talk about Dean. Sam knows right then that she’s the best friend he’ll ever have.

“Yeah,” he manages finally, his voice hoarse like he hasn’t talked for hours, or maybe like he hasn’t stopped talking for that long. Her arm tightens around him a little, and it does nothing to ease the lump he feels in his throat. “Yeah, always.”

“How do you cuddle? I mean.” She shifts, her other arm coming up to rest on the pillow over Sam’s head, fingers sinking into his hair again. He hums in thanks. “I mean, how exactly do you guys lay? You know?”

“When we were younger, we would lay like spoons, yanno? He’d just be right behind me and have his arm around me. And he knew if I had a nightmare or had to go pee or just couldn’t sleep. He always wanted to know. Just wanted to always be right there, I guess.” This part is real, true. Too true. The memories come like ghosts, painfully vivid and still warm, somehow.

“He protects you,” she whispers, her thumb stroking his temple. He swallows and nods, just a tiny movement.

“Always felt like it was his place to. And, um.” The lie comes, trembling and paper thin, barely concealing what is really just an all-consuming wish. “N-now, we lay just like this. Except. Except
it’s me where you are. So I can feel his heartbeat against my ear. And I breathe when he breathes so that our hearts match up and that’s the only way we can fall asleep. Is. Is if we’re breathing together.”

The silence is sweet, reverent of his and Dean’s imaginary love. She finally sighs, the movement pressing her breasts into his ribs. He just feels warmth and softness and safety from her.

“Do you. Do you guys.” Her cheek heats up against his chest and he blushes, too, just for the thought of what she can’t get out. Sex. She wants to know if. Oh, god.

“Yeah,” he breathes, shifting as minutely as he can on the bed. His dick stirs at just the thought. “Yeah, all the time. Constantly. At least once a day. He usually wakes me up in the morning by just sliding inside of me, and. And we just stay like that, Just connected until I’m at least a little bit awake and then he just.”

“Just what?” She’s enrapt, the myth of Dean glimmering in her voice.

“He just takes me. Just holds me in his arms and presses me down into the bed and just.” His breath shudders into the stale air, shaking with want. “Takes me.”

“Wow,” she whispers, her head tipping up, eyelashes tickling at Sam’s chin. “He makes love to you.”

“Ohh, deal.” He cuts himself off with a yawn, tucking back down into the bed, intent on a nap.
“...Sam?”

“Hn.”

He feels one of her hands encircle his wrist, her thumb circling over the protruding bone there.

“Why are you so thin? I mean. You’re pretty tall. You. You shouldn’t be so thin. Right?”

He tenses, eyes sliding open to look down at her.

“I. I don’t. I mean. People call you skinny all the time. Don’t they? It’s just the way I am. Same as you.”

“I-I know. It’s just.” She lets go of his wrist, her hand splaying on his chest, fingers dancing over his ribs that he knows are visible through his shirt like this. He blushes, a weird shame spreading down through his whole body. “It’s just that I don’t think I’ve ever seen you eat, you know?”

“It’s n--”

“And I just think that,” she rushes on, intent on getting to her point. “That I know you miss Dean, and that you feel lost without him, but. Don’t you think he’d kick your ass if you didn’t eat? That he’d want you to take care of yourself since he’s not here to make sure you do?”

The cynic in him rolls his eyes, wants to inform her that Dean hasn’t really cared, not like he used to, for a couple of years now. When he does, it’s distracted, half of Dean’s attention on him and half on whatever Dad’s got him doing for the day. It’s habit and not real concern. Sam’s old enough now to know the difference.

“Yeah,” he finally sighs, knowing it’s easier to give in than to argue about it. About this. He can never argue rationally with or about Dean.

“Good. So maybe eat a salad tonight, and a little piece of lasagna. And maybe a piece of garlic toast that my Aunt Bobbie swears is better than almost all the sex she’s had.”

Sam snorts a surprised laugh for that, the muscles in his body easing up just a little. He shakes his head.

“Even so. I know for a fact that Dean’s the best lay in the entire universe, so this had better be some damn good toast.”

He can feel Audrey’s smile against his neck.

“Guess you’ll have to try some and find out.”

“Stephen, are you kidding with this? Get your clothes off the stairs! Nobody wants to slip and die on your dirty jockstrap!”

Sam cracks an eye open, blinking into darkness. Where the fuck--

“Audrey, honey. I think you should go wake up Sam. Nobody wants to eat when they’re groggy.”

Oh. Right.

Sam sits up in bed, rubbing so hard at his eyes that he sees spots before he drags his fingers through
his hair, trying blindly to fashion it into something presentable. Before he can get out of bed, the door to the room opens, letting in a lemon slice of light from the hallway.

“Sam?” Audrey is whispering, soft like maybe it’s the way her mom wakes her up every morning.

“I’m up. I’m. I’m so sorry, Audrey. I didn’t mean to fall asleep like that. Guess I was tired.” He swings his legs out of bed, forcing himself to stand up when all he really wants to do is pull the covers back up to his nose and sleep for about two weeks.

“No, it’s totally cool. I’m glad you got to sleep. Mom told me to come wake you up because dinner is almost ready.” She turns on the lamp by the bed and sits down next to Sam, her smile a little adoring and kind. Sam glances over and smiles back.

“I smell the garlic.”

“You hungry?” She rubs his back when he yawns, and he leans into her and closes his eyes again. He grunts, an ambiguous sound that makes her shove gently at him.

“What time is it?”

“Um.” Audrey moves a bottle of Surge out of the way and leans over to read her alarm clock. “6:42.”

“Shit,” he breathes, sitting up straight again and digging into his pocket for his phone.

Seven missed calls.

“Shit!” He flips the phone open, seeing call after missed call from Dean. Three voicemail messages. Five text messages.

*sam what the shit answer the phone*

*are you getting laid????????*

*sam seriously answer the fuckin phone stop fucking around*

*called the motel she said you hadn’t been there since his morning*

*okay fuck this im coming down there*

“Oh, god!” He selects Dean’s number and jumps up from the bed, pacing in circles with a hand pulling hard at his hair. Ohmygod, Dean can’t come here. He can’t. He can’t he can’t he--

“Sam, goddamnit!”

“Dean, don’t come here!”

“I’m halfway there, you little bastard. Why didn’t you answer your phone? Where the fuck have you been?!?”

“I just fell asleep! Dean, I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you. I’m sorry, I just. I just haven’t been sleeping all that well.” He sits down on the edge of Audrey’s desk, picking up the stuffed bull and running his fingers over the velvety ears.

Dean sighs in his ear, the sound loud and strangely soothing. Sam glances up at Audrey and finds her watching him carefully, eyebrows and mouth drawn in worry.
“Sam, it’s just. This fuckin’ case. There’s something weird going on and Dad won’t tell me nothin’, but he just keeps talking to Bobby about how you’re safe and Bobby keeps wanting to go down to Granville and get you and--”

“Are you driving?”

“Uh, yeah?”

“Dean, pull over. Please. I don’t want you to be talking to me while you’re upset and driving. Okay?”

“You’re such a pain in my ass. Fuck, okay. Hold on.” There’s a loud shuffle and Sam can hear the rumble of the Impala’s engine as Dean apparently pulls over to the side of the road. More movement and then Dean’s back, grumbling incoherently.

“Did you pull over--”

“Yeah, Sam! I pulled over, Jesus Christ. Seriously, I’m. I don’t know what’s going on and then you weren’t answering the phone and I just. Christ, Sam, you can’t just fall off the radar like that!”

“I’m sorry,” he says again, his voice soft. “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“You didn’t scare me,” Dean scoffs, the rush of the words completely negating their sentiment. “I was just worried. I’m. Seriously, I’m halfway there. Are you sure you don’t want me to come down? Is everything alright?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. I promise. I’m at Audrey’s, and I just fell asleep. Like I said, I. I just haven’t been sleeping at night, you know?” He sinks down to sit in the desk chair, the bull curled in his arm now, his whole body drawn inward, cradled around the phone. Dean sighs again, and it sounds so tired that it makes Sam ache.

“Yeah, me neither. I had to keep watch last night at some fuckin’ warehouse for Dad, and he’s had me running around like crazy all over town. I think it’s a demon. Just from what I’ve heard him saying to Bobby. And I found some weather reports on the table this morning.”

“Are you okay? Dean, you seriously need to sleep. How are you supposed to help anybody if you’re hallucinating because you’re exhausted?”

“Don’t worry about me. Seriously. Just. Sam, goddamnit. Keep in touch with me. Answer your fucking phone. And is there salt on the windows and doors at the motel?”

Sam hesitates a second too long and he can hear the distinct sound of the heel of Dean’s hand slamming into the steering wheel.

“Are you kidding me?! You know better than that, Sam! It’s the first thing you’re supposed to do when you get anywhere! You know that! You fucking know--”

“Dean, quit yelling at me!”

“Then fucking do what you’re supposed to do! I can’t be there to keep you safe, and what the fuck am I supposed to do when I know I can’t trust you to do it for me?”

“I can take care of myself! I’m not a little kid anymore!”

“Then act like it! Salt the fucking windows and the doors when you get back to your room. I’ll call
you tomorrow, Sam. If you don’t have it done by then—”

“Dean.” It’s a plea, and his voice is trembling. He curls down even harder, bringing the bull up to his face to hide against it. Dean’s an hour away. He’s only been gone for two days, but it hurts. It hurts it hurts it hurts. He wants him, and he wants him to come back.

“I’m sorry, man. Shit. I just freaked out on you. I’m just stressed and tired. I don’t want to be on this hunt. Dad’s treating me like I’m too stupid to share anything with, and I’m just.”

“It’s okay, Dean. Promise.” Sam sits up straight again, wiping tears from his eyes as he turns away from Audrey. “Go home, okay? Just get something to eat and go to bed early tonight.”

“Can’t. Dad has us staying with some family tonight. Two kids. I’m supposed to stand guard outside their room or something.”

“I wish I was there. To help.”

“Just. Answer your phone. Do your homework. Study for the SATs. And be careful, Sam. Okay? I don’t know what’s going on, but I don’t like that... that you could. Just, fuckin’ be careful.”

“Promise.”

“Okay.” There’s a little bit of a smile in Dean’s voice, and it makes Sam smile, too.

“Drive safe, buttmunch.”

Dean laughs, and it’s all Sam needs to feel better.

“You know me, man.”

They hang up and Sam stares down at the phone, tears blurring in his eyes again.

Audrey is across the room, kneeling at Sam’s feet and spreading her hands over his, resting on top of the silly stuffed bull.

“Are you okay? Is he okay?”

“He’s fine. He was just worried about me. I didn’t answer the phone and he thought.” Sam lifts a hand from under hers to wipe at his eyes, refusing to let any of the tears fall in front of her. She doesn’t need in on his shit life and his fucking shit problems.

“Thought something had happened to you?” She’s smiling, rubbing at his knuckles as she shakes her head. “He’s a papa bear, isn’t he? Really protective of you.”

“Yeah, I guess so.” He sighs, turning his head to stare outside, the sun starting to sink, a orange-gold glow spreading along the horizon. He sees who he assumes to be Audrey’s younger brother playing basketball by himself at the goal out there. He smiles to himself, faint and sad, and turns to look back down at her. She’s waiting on him patiently, head tipped to the side as she studies him.

“Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. Sorry. Jesus. I’m just a little weird when I first wake up. And that on top of Dean being worried and he’s. He’s just not taking care of himself, and.” His eyes burn again but he grits his teeth hard, concentrating on not fucking crying again.

“Sounds like you’re both protective.” Audrey stands up and reaches down to offer Sam one of her
hands. “Come on. Time for dinner. You know Dean would want you to eat something.”

He sighs again, feels like he’s always sighing nowadays. He takes her hand and stands up, turning to put the bull back on the desk. He pats it on the head and gives a shy little laugh for doing something so childish.

“Who’s your friend?”

“Hm?” Audrey raises her eyebrows at him and then follows where he nods down at the stuffed bull. “Oh! That’s Pedro. My Aunt Bobbie got him for me. She lives in Madrid. I’m going to go stay with her next summer.”

“That sounds awesome. Do you speak Spanish?” Sam stops at a small mirror above the dresser and swipes at his hair to try and tame it. Audrey leads him out of the room and into the hallway, in no hurry to get downstairs.

“Mm-hmm. I’ve been taking it since freshman year, and I’ve had a few people teaching me outside of school, too. Bobbie says that she knows of some awesome punk clubs in some neighborhood there. And she said they never card you there for anything, so I’ll be able to do whatever I want.” She hops the last two steps and lands in the foyer, turning to grin back up at Sam who shuffles down quickly after her.

“Maybe you’ll find a hot Spanish punk boyfriend.” He bumps into her and laughs when she shushes him.

“God, don’t let my dad hear you say that. He’ll never let me go.”

Sam’s smile fades a little. “Is he strict?”

“Oh, no! God, no. It’s not that. It’s just. We’re really close, you know? He just gets kind of sad whenever he thinks about me leaving. And running off with a Spanish punk boy would probably depress him for a month.” She turns to look at him just before they reach the kitchen, her eyes traveling over his hair and his clothes, making sure he’s not sleep-rumpled.

“You ready? My parents are cool. Seriously.”

“Uh, yeah. Sure, I’m good.” He tries to tuck his hair behind his ears but it falls back down around his eyes almost immediately. He shoves his hands into his pockets and follows Audrey into the cheerfully lit room, trying not to look so tall and trying not to look like the son of a man who is probably killing something right now.

He sees a man who looks surprisingly young and surprisingly handsome setting the table, listening to the woman who is pulling a cookie sheet of garlic bread out of the oven talk about traffic on the way home from work. Audrey walks over to the man and lifts up to press a kiss to his cheek, beaming when he returns the kiss.

“Hey, guys! This is Sam. Sam this is my mom, Carrie, and my dad, Henry. You can call them that.” Audrey steps to the side as Henry strides up, offering Sam a big smile and a strong hand.

Sam stands up straight, his shoulders back, and shakes his hand firmly. “Nice to meet you, sir.”

Henry squints at Sam. “Your dad’s military, huh?”

Sam just blinks. “Um. How did you know that?”
Henry nods at Sam’s body, the set of his shoulders. “Your posture. Your tone. Your politeness. None of Audrey’s other friends are this nice.”

“Hey!” Audrey laughs and punches her dad in the arm, scampering off into the kitchen to hide behind her mom. “Abby’s nice!”

“Abby is a smartass. And that’s why we love her. C’mon, Sam. Do you mind putting the silverware on the table?” Henry wraps an arm around Sam’s shoulders and guides him into the kitchen. Carrie is waiting with a handful of silverware and an unreadable smile that she gives to Sam completely.

“God, you’re beautiful. Audrey, you didn’t tell me he was so beautiful. My god.” She hands Sam the silverware and reaches up to cup his cheeks, pulling him down so she can look straight into his eyes, searching them like she’s staring at the Mona Lisa. “I swear, every color in the world is in your eyes.”

“Mom, stop! You’re embarrassing him. Sam’s a little shy.” Audrey is right there at Sam’s side, a hand wrapped around his forearm, ready to drag him away. Sam’s cheeks are hot under Carrie’s palms and he lowers his gaze, a sheepish smile ghosting on his lips.

“Th-thanks, m’am.”

“Tell me about this boyfriend of yours. I think Audrey’s half in love with him and she hasn’t even met him!” Carrie piles a plate with the hot pieces of toast and passes it off to Audrey before she grabs five glasses and follows her to the table. Sam blinks at Audrey in a little bit of panic, frozen halfway to the table with the silverware clutched in his hand.

“Mom, please don’t.” Audrey’s blushing a little, too, stretching out her sleeves as far as they’ll go so she can curl the fabric into her hands, hiding them like she always does. “Don’t overwhelm him, okay? Let’s just eat.”

Henry opens the door that leads out into the backyard, lifting his voice so it’ll carry. “Stephen, come on! You can go back out later!”

A boy just a little shorter than Sam jogs up and into the kitchen, sweat dripping off of him. He grins at Sam, stepping up to offer him his cupped hand. Right, the dude handshake.

“What’s up, man? I’m Stephen, Audrey’s brother.”

“Hey, I’m, uh. I’m Sam.”

“Awesome.” Stephen gives him a million dollar grin and steps back, nodding up the stairs. “Mom, I’m gonna go wash up real quick. Be right back down.”

He disappears with the thunder of feet up the stairs and Carrie sits down at the table. “Well, I’m not waiting. I’m hungry, damnit.”

Audrey sits down next to Sam and Henry follows, and they start piling food onto their plates without ceremony. Sam relaxes a little and grabs a piece of the fabled garlic toast when the plate comes around.

“Stephen’s on the JV basketball team, so he thinks that means he has to practice if he’s not sleeping,” Henry informs Sam as he pours himself a glass of iced tea. Sam smiles in response, watching out of the corner of his eyes as Audrey puts a big chunk of lasagna on her own plate.

“You want maybe half this size? And a little salad?” Her voice is soft, only for him and he fidgets a
little, embarrassed for being treated like a kid but he’s grateful for her. She fills his plate in a very short amount of time, giving him more carrots and salad than anything else and grinning as she passes him the Italian dressing.

“Thank you both so much for letting me stay for dinner. It looks so good. And Audrey told me all about the toast, so.” Carrie and Henry laugh and Sam picks up the toast, tearing off a small corner of it and forcing himself to eat it. It feels greasy and heavy on his tongue and he can barely keep himself from gagging. He grips his fork in his right hand, stabbing into a few leaves of lettuce and a carrot before he’s even swallowed the bread. He can do this. He can eat. He’s done it literally thousands of times.

Stephen comes flying back down the stairs and slides into the chair across from Sam, looking a lot less sweaty and even more adorable than he had when he left. He meets Sam’s eyes and gives him another one of those carefree grins that has Sam feeling a little light-headed and nervous at the same time. He eats the salad and finds that it’s a lot easier than the bread.

There are at least two conversations going on around him, but it’s all noise as he focuses on his food. Cherry tomato, more lettuce, the rest of his carrots. He eyes the lasagna but reaches for the pitcher of water, filling up his glass and drinking half of it down.

“...decided where you want to go to college, Sam?”

Four sets of eyes turn to him and he coughs a little, grabbing his napkin from his lap to wipe his mouth. “What? Oh, where, um. Where I might want to go to college. No, I.”

The rest of the lettuce, the last cherry tomato.

“I haven’t really decided yet.”

“Did Audrey tell you where she wants to go?” Henry smiles at Audrey, reaching over to grab a cherry tomato from her plate and eating it triumphantly.

“The University of Huddersfield. It’s in Queensgate, England! There are zero schools in the US that have music journalism as a major, but there are a bunch in England. This school is apparently awesome. I’ve already been in touch with an advisor there.” She says it in a rush like she says anything that she’s excited about, half of her lasagna already gone. She grabs the salad bowl and makes a new little pile of salad on Sam’s plate, trying as covertly as possible to get his lasagna onto her own plate.

“That sounds so amazing. You’ll get to be kind of where the origin of punk was.” He eats a little more lettuce, this time without dressing, carefully not looking up so he doesn’t see if any of the others notice the way he’s eating (or not eating).

“Exactly! Dad, Sam is so smart. Seriously. He’s in all AP classes and he’s a freakin’ genius. It’s amazing.” Sam glances around and sees everybody smiling at him, like it’s a good thing that he’s so smart and not just annoying or show-offy or useless.

“Sam, I don’t know if you’re interested, but I have a contacts at a lot of universities. You should maybe shoot for one of the top schools, just to see if you can get in. I could write you a letter of recommendation, if you want.” Henry passes Stephen the plate of garlic toast but his eyes are on Sam, kind and patient and well-intended. Sam just stares at him.

“You wanna help me get into college?”

“Sure! From everything Audrey’s told me, you’re a special person, Sam. Gifted people need to
nurture their talents and grow their knowledge in the best places they can find. Tomorrow I’ll get together some information and give it to Audrey to pass along to you. If you see anything you like, we’ll go from there. How does that sound?”

Sam is struck dumb, staring helplessly at Audrey’s dad, a piece of lettuce dangling from his fork.

“That, um. That would be amazing, sir. Wow, just. Thank you so much. Really.” It’s the effort that floors him, the simple kindness of it all. He moves his salad around on his plate, letting the conversations start up and swirl around him and he just sits back, observing and absorbing it all. He knows nothing will come from it. He knows he’s not going to get into any college any time soon, but it’s just nice. Just kind of amazing to think about. To think that somebody could honestly believe Sam could go to a school. A good school.

“...Prom is two weeks away, you know. You need to figure out if you’re going, Audrey. Unless you want to Pretty in Pink up a dress the night before.” Carrie is finished with her food and she’s leaning back, one leg propped up in the chair, shin braced against the table. Audrey grumbles next to Sam and frowns at her second piece of toast.

“I don’t wanna go to some stupid prom. It’s boring and full of brain-washed, overly groomed, hormonally explosive teenagers who think that the Barenaked Ladies are the second coming and wouldn’t know Tim Armstrong if he was serving them spiked punch.” Audrey stabs into a tiny tomato particularly hard, causing it to explode, bursting bright red-orange all over her hoodie and in her face. Sam covers his mouth to hide his snorting giggles but the sound is very quickly drowned out by everyone else laughing their asses off.

Audrey wipes herself down even as she laughs, trying to compose herself enough to continue on her diatribe.

“And anyway, Tim Armstrong didn’t write me back and tell me he could go to prom with me, so there’s no way I’m going. No way.”

Sam drags a carrot around on his plate through a leftover smear of tomato sauce. “Who’s Tim Armstrong?”

Audrey gasps, loud and dramatic while everyone else at the table groans.

“Tim Armstrong,” she begins, her voice low with importance, “is the lead singer and guitarist of Rancid? He was in Op Ivy?” She stares at Sam, waiting for recognition to flash across his face.

He blinks at her, bottom lip drawn into his mouth. He shrugs apologetically and she grabs his hand as her eyes widen.

“He’s my future husband! I was talking about him earlier today!”

“You talked about a lot of people! I guess the name just didn’t ring a bell?”

“Besides, Audrey, isn’t he married?” Stephen looks all too pleased with himself, beaming at her with a big, tomatoey smile. Audrey just scowls at him.

“Brody Dalle,” she seethes, glaring at Stephen for all she’s worth. “You just wait. She’ll break his heart. And then he’ll respond to my letter!”

“I’ll bet Dean is cuter than Tim Armstrong,” Carrie singsongs airily, shooting a wink over at her husband. Audrey makes an inhuman noise and turns to Sam, pleading with him.
“Look, I’m sure Dean is cute and all, but Tim. Timmy. My Timmy!”

“What’s he look like, Sam?” Carrie leans forward, her eyes sparkling with amusement.

“He’s just.” Sam pauses, glancing over at Stephen and Henry who don’t seem to be as uncomfortable with Sam talking about his fake boyfriend/real brother as he assumed they would be. He braves on. “He’s, um. He’s tall. Kind of light brown hair, I guess. Really green eyes. Olive green, not. Not blue at all. And he’s got a few freckles and this just. This mouth. This really, really, really nice mouth.”

“So, he’s kind of a pretty boy?” Stephen smiles at Sam but it’s not cruel, not mocking. It’s strangely sweet and the easy acceptance of it makes Sam nervous. He tries to smile at him.

“No. I mean. I mean, yeah, he’s. He looks like a model, but he’s the kind of guy that, you know. Wears a leather jacket and boots and works on his car and worships Led Zeppelin.” Sam is folding his napkin now, creating several small squares with five folds each and maybe avoiding their eyes a little.

“Mm, a bad boy.” Carrie reaches over and squeezes Sam’s arm before she stands up, taking Sam’s plate with her own into the kitchen.

“Kind of.” Sam grins just for the thought, imagining how annoyed Dean would be at being called either a bad boy or a pretty boy. “He’s just. He’s just Dean.”

“Do you have a picture of him?” Henry takes Audrey’s plate with his own, leaving Stephen to get a second helping of lasagna. Sam raises his eyebrows at Henry’s question, about to say no before he remembers.

“Oh. I guess I do.” He pulls his wallet out of his back pocket, opening it up and pulling out a crinkled, worn picture he’d taken at Bobby’s around Christmas last year. Dean is leaning forward on a chair in Bobby’s study, grinning as he watches Dad open a stack of skin mags Dean had managed to collect over the year. He looks happy and relaxed and as young as he is, for once. Sam had taken the picture and caught hell for it afterwards, but it had been worth it when he saw it developed. It’s been in his wallet, secret and forgotten, honestly, until now.

He hands Carrie the picture when she wiggles her fingers for it.

“Well, fuck,” she blurts out, her mouth open as she stares at the picture.

“Mom! Lemme see.” Audrey pushes in close to her mom and holds the side of the picture with one hand. Her eyes widen comically behind her glasses, and she looks up at Sam after a long moment.

“Sam. Holy shit,” she whispers, like it’s a secret. “This is Dean? Are you serious? This is your Dean?”

He grins, can’t help it, can’t hold it in. All four of them are gathered around the little picture now, Henry and Stephen joining the other two in staring at Dean, his Dean! Henry lets out a low whistle, shaking his head before walking away.

“How the hell are us normal-looking guys supposed to catch a break when there are guys like that out there, huh? It’s not fair!” Henry ruffles Sam’s hair on his way out of the room, giving him a wink as he leaves.

“He looks like he should be in a boy band,” Stephen finally remarks, and Sam bursts out laughing.
“Oh my god, I can’t wait to tell him you said that.” Sam stands up and heads toward them, reaching out to try and take the picture back. Carrie snatches it away and holds it behind her back, grinning up at Sam.

“Hey, wait! Don’t I get to keep it? It’s not fair that you get him and the picture!”

“Mom, stop perving on Sam’s boyfriend!”

“Oh, alright, fine.” Carrie makes a show of staring at the picture one last time before she hands it back, heading back to the table to continue clearing it. “You’d better dig your claws in and hold onto him for dear life.”

“I always have,” Sam says down at the picture, a little too soft for anybody to hear but him.

“Are you coming over after school?” Audrey stops on the sidewalk, one hand clasped around the strap of her bag. There are grey clouds rolling overhead, sweeping in steadily, determined to bring in the rain at any minute. Kids are still spilling out of the school, shuffling on the sidewalk all around her and Sam.

Sam hefts his bag up onto his shoulder, phone clasped in his hand like it’s a lifeline. “Not tonight. I’ve got an assignment from Hopkins that I’ve gotta do.”

“Oh, what kind of assignment?” She starts to walk with him in the direction of the motel, not seeming to care at all about what the weather will be doing. Sam walks close to her, grateful for her company, for her utter acceptance of him, her genuine caring about him. She gives him a bottle of some kind of juice every morning, asks him thoughtful questions about Dean, and has made him two kick-ass mixed CDs of her favorite punk music. He kind of wants to keep her forever.

“I have to call Dean and ask him a bunch of questions. The assignment is to like. Choose the most influential person in my life and ask him these questions and write an article about him and turn in his answers.” He’s a little shy talking about it, so he has no idea how he’s actually going to go about asking Dean this shit. Sam knows he could just as easily make up a person and some answers, but the thought of Dean being involved in his assignment has him jittery, wanting to get started right now.

“Christ, that is so cute. Will you let me see it before you turn it in? I bet he’ll give you the best answers.” Audrey hops a little beside him, her hair bouncing and settling around her shoulders. Sam laughs at her energy, shaking his head in amusement.

“Sure. Yeah, of course. Your mom was right. You totally have a crush on Dean by proxy.” He smirks over at her and bumps her with his shoulder, grinning when she does it right back.

“I do not!” She sounds indignant, and then a little guilty. A pause. “Hey, do you have that picture with you?”

“Back off, he’s mine, Bryant!” Sam shoves her and they both laugh. She takes off after him and they run another block or so, pushing each other whenever they get into reach. They stop across the street from the motel, just as sprinkles start to splatter on the sidewalk around them. Audrey pulls a little black umbrella from her back, opening it up and smiling at Sam.
“Alright, scrawny ass. Go talk to your baby daddy. Call me before you go to bed?” She reaches out and squeezes Sam’s shoulder, and he feels a wave of affection wash over him. She’s so sweet, and so pretty. Her nails are penguins today, black and white with orange beaks against a sky blue backdrop.

“Promise. Bye, Audrey.”

She waves at him, a wiggle of the penguins and then she turns and walks away, just as the sky really starts to open up. Sam pulls the hood on his sweatshirt over his head and uses his long legs to dart through the parking lot of the motel.

He locks the door behind him when he finally gets it open and steps in, checks all the salt lines, and closes the curtains. The rain is steady, the sound completely filling the room. He toes his shoes off and sinks down onto the unmade bed, phone still in his hand. He’s taken to sleeping with it there, clutched against his chest, like he’s keeping Dean close that way, maybe.

Or maybe he’s just a childish, co-dependent, pathologically lying idiot.

He finds Dean’s number and dials it, turning to lie on his back, his eyes falling closed.

“Hey, man, how’s it goin’?” Dean sounds tired but at least he’s not annoyed, as far as Sam can tell. God, his voice. That fucking voice.

“Hey, Dean,” he replies softly, unable to keep the smile from his voice. “Are you busy?”

“Nah, just taking a break from being Dad’s watchdog. Watchin’ Springer. Why would you go on this fucking show to find out a big secret somebody’s been keeping from you? You know that shit’s not gonna end well.”

Sam grins. “Curiosity, I guess.”


The smile falls away from Sam’s face at that. It’s completely random, that sentiment, but it hits too close to home. Sam clears his throat, opening his eyes to settle them on a water stain on the ceiling. It’s definitely going to leak tonight.

“So, I kind of have a favor to ask. If you’re not too busy.”

“Never too busy for you, baby.” Dean snorts at his own humor. “Wait, you’re okay, right? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. I swear. Just got home from school. It’s pouring rain here.”

“Oh, yeah, man. It’s been rainin’ here all day. Dad said it’s gonna storm tonight, so we’ll probably get the night off. Thank fuck. Hey. Did you eat today?”

Sam sighs, rubbing hard at his face and pushing his hair off his forehead. “I, uh. I told you I ate last night, right? Salad and lasagna?”

He didn’t mention last night that he’d thrown it all up right after in the guest bathroom at Audrey’s house. And he doesn’t mention it now, either.

“Yeah, you told me last night. That’s awesome. What about today? Did you have lunch?”

“No, I was in the library studying. Big paper due this week.”
“What are you gonna have for dinner?”

“So, get this, Dean,” Sam hedges, his socked toes pushing at each other nervously. “So, I have an assignment in English. I have to figure out who the most influential person in my life is and ask them some questions.”

Dean’s quiet for a minute, probably trying to figure out how to make Sam eat and trying to figure out what the hell this all has to do with him.

“So, uh,” Dean says finally, his voice hesitant. “You wanna talk to Dad, or?”

Sam laughs, he can’t help it. If Dean were here, he’d hit him. Adoringly, of course. But still hard.

“No, you fucking idiot. You. Are you kidding me?”

“Yeah. I just wanted to hear you say it.” Dean’s grin is all over his voice and Sam licks his lips, eyes slipping closed again, just for a second. God, he wishes Dean was here. He wants to see him: greasy-headed, scruffy-faced, pretty-eyed lazy boy.

“You’re an asshole. So, seriously, man. I have to read your this whole introduction or whatever and ask you some questions. Do you have time for it right now? Please?”

Dean sighs, so put-upon. “But I’ll never find out if this woman’s gonna take her ex-girlfriend back if she divorces her dad.”

“Dean.”

“Oh, okay, fine. Hold on, lemme find the damn remote.” There’s some struggling, some movement and grunting on Dean’s part and then it goes decidedly quiet on the other end of the phone. “Okay, got it. So. Hi.”

Sam smiles. “Hi.”

“You got some questions for me, kiddo?”

Oh.

“Oh. Right, sorry. Hold on, let me.” Sam flops over onto his stomach, rummaging around in his bag on the floor before he finds the right folder, pulling out the assignment sheet and his favorite notebook and pen. “Okay, I have to read you this like. Explanation thing first. It’s kind of cheesy. Just bear with me, okay?”

Dean laughs, the sound low and sweet in Sam’s ear. “I always do.”

Sam blushes.

“Oh. So.” He clears his throat, putting on a falsely peppy voice. “Congratulations! You have been chosen by yours truly as the most influential person in my life. Chances are, you’re aware of this, or at the very least, this does not come as a surprise. You’ve shaped me and made me who I am more than anyone else. I’m taking this opportunity to ask you a few questions, to get to know you, the person who has had a profound impact on me, a little bit better. Four questions have been created by the instructor, and four of them have been created by me! I am going to compile your answers into an interview-style article that I will hand in to my teacher. Please provide answers that are as honest and thorough as you feel comfortable giving. Don’t worry about the fact that this is a school assignment! This is also a life assignment. Are you ready?”
There’s a beat of silence and then Dean snickers.

“Sam, that was awesome. You sounded like a game show host.”

“Dean.” Sam full-on pouts, bottom lip out and everything. He drops his pen on his notebook and sits up, folding his legs up Indian-style and slouching over the notebook. “Please.”

“Alright, Trebek. Go ahead, hit me.”

“Okay, so, um.” Sam takes his things and shuffles across the room to the small table near the window. The rain is so loud it’s nearly deafening. “Dean, can I put you on speaker?”

“Course. Come on, ask me stuff, Barbara Walters.”

He hears Dean grunt and shift and Sam knows that Dean’s turned over on his back on the bed. He pushes the heel of his hand against his dick and squirms in his chair as he fumbles with the speaker button. He puts the phone down next to his notebook and flicks his eyes over the questions. Might as well go in order.

“So, uh. Dean.”

“Yeah?”

“Tell me five things you like about yourself and five things you dislike.”

Dean groans and the sound fills the empty room. Sam grins.

“Wow, no easy questions to ease me into this, huh?”

“Do you want some easy questions first?” Sam taps his notebook with the end of his pen.

“Uh. Sure?”

“Okay.” Sam fidgets in his chair, pushing the curtain back on one side to stare out at the dreary late afternoon going on without him. “Favorite color?”

Dean snorts.

“Blue.”

“What kind of blue?”

“Huh?”

“There’s a million different blues. Sky blue, denim blue, cornflower blue, turquoise blue, midnight blue, navy blue, blue raspberry sucker blue, cerulean—”

“Okay, okay, Jesus. What are you, a fucking box of crayons?”

Sam grins. “So, which one?”

“Man, I don’t know.” Dean huffs a little, clearly pouting and Sam is clutching hard at his pencil. “Like. Like, night sky blue. You know?”

“So midnight blue?”

“Yeah. Yeah, I guess so.”
Sam scratches that down on his notebook, even if it’s not a real question. It’s a real answer.

“Hey, wait, so what’s your favorite color?” Dean sounds very pleased with himself. Sam snorts.

“Green.”

“What kind of green? Turtle green or baby shit green or 70s couch green or grass green or--”

“Your eyes.”

Dean’s quiet for a beat and Sam’s face heats up. God, he shouldn’t have said that. He shouldn’t have said that.

“Well. I do have beautiful eyes.”

Sam laughs, a cracked, relieved sound. He huffs out a sigh and wiggles again in his chair.

“Okay, um. Top five favorite bands.”

“Jesus, man. Are you kidding?”

“Just off the top of your head, Dean.”

“Fuck, okay. Uh. Zeppelin, of course. Metallica. AC/DC. Skynyrd. And, uh. I’ve been listening to a lot of Bob Seger and the Silver Bullet Band lately, so. There.”

Sam writes them all down, underlining Led Zeppelin and putting stars and hearts all around it.

“Five things you like about yourself.”

Dean sighs, but it’s quiet. His hesitation and the tone of his voice when he finally speaks tells Sam how hard it is for Dean to talk about himself, even for a dumb school assignment.

“Well, I have a great ass. Pretty eyes. And a pretty hot mouth. I’ve got nice, big hands. And every girl I’ve ever been with says I have a fucking fantastic--”

“Ohmygod, Dean!”

“But it comes out more like Deeeeean with an actual frowny face at the end. Dean is cackling through the tiny speaker, apparently gleeful about making his little brother’s dick chub up in the middle of a school assignment. The heel of Sam’s hand digs in hard.

“Oh. Oh, it’s what I like about myself, not what you like about me.”

Sam goes from pink to scarlet in two blinks. He opens his mouth a couple of times to speak but before he can, Dean is outright laughing, hand apparently slapping at the headboard.

“You’re such a jerk.”

“Okay, okay, okay. I’m sorry. Oh, Sam, I miss you. You’re so easy to fuck with. Okay, seriously.”

Dean laughs a little bit more, the grin in his voice keeping Sam from just hanging up on him.

“Oh. Well. I’m pretty loyal, I guess. Wouldn’t you say?” He sounds so nervous all of a sudden, so uncertain. Sam digs a nail into the faint white circle of the scar on his wrist. Habit.
“Yeah, Dean,” he says, his voice soft, affectionate. “You are.”

“And, uh,” Dean mumbles on, his voice strained and quiet. “I don’t get scared real easy, you know? It takes a lot to freak me out.”

“Brave.”

“Hmm?”

“You’re.” Sam blushes, writing the word down even as he struggles to say it. “You’re brave.”

Dean huffs but it’s only in self-deprecation.

“I guess, if you wanna make me sound good.”

“What else?”

“I don’t stop ‘til the job’s done. I can’t just leave somethin’ half-done, you know? Unless it was something stupid, like homework. But, like. Real stuff, you know? Hunts and helping people and getting girls off.”

Sam ignores the fact that he’s now half-hard in his jeans.

“Dedicated?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“Okay, that’s three.”

“That’s only three?” Dean’s voice is actually whiny and it makes Sam grin.

“Come on, you can do it.”

“Well, I mean. I’m pretty damn funny.”

Sam’s mouth twitches, dimples winking on his face.

“You are.”

“I’m hilarious.”

“Wicked sense of humor.” And that’s just what Sam writes down.

“Sure.” Dean laughs, an almost shy little breath. “We done?”

“One more.”

“God.” Another groan. A sigh. “Man, I don’t know. I don’t even like myself all that much.”

“There’s gotta be one more thing.”

“What would you say?”

“Hmm?”

“Something good about me. You’re better at this shit than me, man. What would you say about me? Just one thing.”
“Something nice?” Sam smiles, knowing how much this is making Dean squirm.

“Sam, c’mon.”

“You’re.” Sam licks his lips, his throat tightening up with all of his favorite things about Dean, the endless lists, the tiny, idiotic, simplistic things. The big things. The things that nobody knows but Sam himself. “You’re charming.”

Dean’s shit-eating grin is nearly audible.

“I am, ain’t I?”

“I mean. You get people to talk to you and tell you stuff they wouldn’t normally. And, you know. Girls.”

“Chicks love me. They really love me.”

“I know, Dean.”

“Last night, this one girl--”

“Please don’t.”

Dean makes a show of sighing. “Okay, fine. So’s that five?”

“Yeah, um.” Sam looks down at his notebook. “Loyal, brave, dedicated, wicked sense of humor, charming.”

“Christ. Makes me sound like a douche.”

“It makes you sound like a romance novel character.”

“Well, I am.”

“Five things you dislike, Dean.”

“Well, fuck that’ll be easy.” More shifting around, the sound of a can opening. Sam’s pen is ready. “I worry too much about shit. About you. I can’t talk about anything remotely serious without turning it into a fucking joke. I don’t trust, like. Fucking anybody. I’m too sarcastic pretty much all the time. I’m reckless if I feel like somebody’s gonna get hurt. I hate my freckles. I hate how much I don’t fucking relate to anybody remotely my age. I hate how I never really feel comfortable unless I’m in the car, or I’m somewhere with. With you. Or I’m hunting something. I hate how violent I am sometimes. I have a little bit of an overbite. Oh, I hate--”

“Dean.” Sam is gripping his notebook now, his eyes burning.

“Hmm?”

“That’s. That’s a lot more than five.”

“Yeah, well. Make sure self-loathing is one of the things you do write down.” Sound of Dean drinking right near the speaker. Sam writes down a few of the things, easing the wording on some of them, trying to keep the tears from even making it to his eyes. Dean waits, drinks what Sam is sure is an entire beer while he does.

“Okay, so. Question two. Who has had the greatest impact on your life?”
“Jesus. Well. I mean, Dad is the obvious answer, isn’t he? If it wasn’t for Dad, I literally wouldn’t be here, for one. And I wouldn’t be where I am right now, in this shady ass motel room, waiting while Dad is off doing the job without me because he doesn’t trust me or something. And Dad’s kind of the reason for all that good and bad shit we talked about earlier.”

“He’s the reason for all the good and bad things about you?” Sam’s pen is flying.

“Yeah. I mean, most of it. You know? And I couldn’t say that Mom’s had the greatest impact on my life. Her death had the greatest impact on my life. And you. You know. You kind of give me a purpose. You know what I mean? A reason to do all this shit. I can’t say I know what I’d be doing if you weren’t around.”

Sam stops writing for that, pen hovering.

“What do you mean, Dean?”

“Well. Shit. You know, like. Like we’re protecting people, right? On a pretty large scale, from all the bad shit in the world. Like, these bastards would go on killing and hurting people, if we didn’t stop them. So that’s large scale. But. It’s like when you think about the Holocaust. Or. Or starving kids, you know? It’s. It’s obviously horrible and there’s a lot of suffering, but it’s faceless. Until you put a face to it. Until they have one of those stories on the news about one survivor, or one little kid whose parents were just murdered and he’s starving to death on the streets. That’s when it really hits home. Sinks in.” Another beer can opening. “You’re. You’re kind of like that, for me. With all this shit. Except it’s all my life, on a daily basis.”

“I—I’m. I’m the face of the people you save?”

“Yeah.” Dean sounds relieved, like he explained it well enough to be understood, at least by Sam. “Yeah, exactly. The people I protect, you know? You’re kind of. The main one.”

Sam isspeechless, blushing, and frozen. He’s so glad Dean’s not here to see his reaction, but he wants him desperately to be here because he needs to hug him. To meet his eyes. This is one of those moments. One of their moments. And he wants to be near him.

“Dean.”

“Shit, why is this always so sappy? You’re not gonna make me cry, dude. I don’t care if that gets you an A or not. Okay, what’s question three?”

“Um.” He blinks down at the paper, so fucking grateful for this project now because he knows that he’d never get to hear any of these things otherwise. He suddenly and capriciously wants to go to school for journalism, get his degree and glue himself to Dean’s side, writing books and books about his brother and only his brother.

“What are some things you wish people knew about you?”

A pause.

“You mean, like. Just like, people in general, or people I meet?”

“Just. Maybe people who see you and judge you before they know you.”

“Oh, uh. Maybe that I’m not as dumb as I look. Or as I seem like. I’m. I’m not like you or anything. I’m not brilliant and know fuckin’ paragraphs of books or the population of New Guinea—”
“Dean--”

“But I’m not an idiot. So. There’s that. And. And people have no idea what I do. What we do. That we. That I save people. That it’s all I do. I mean. It’s my entire life. Like, these fuckin’ guys that were at the bar last night? Fuckin’ college boys, in their khakis and their hundred dollar stupid haircuts, actin’ like they know shit. And they look at me like I’m their servant. You know? Or. Or some kind of retard.”

“Dean, don’t sa--”

“Slow person. Sorry.”

“Keep going, I’m sorry.”

“And they’re standin’ around, talking about the fuckin’ global economy and how they signed some petition for somethin’ and all this shit. And you know what I did last week? I saved a mom and her three kids from being killed. That’s what I did. And they look at me like that? Like they’re some fuckin’ heroes for having opinions? Fucking do something with your big opinions, motherfuckers.”

Dean takes a long drink and Sam scratches down what Dean’s saying, not yet thinking about how he’s going to have to translate this for an article to take out all the hunter-talk. He’s seething at the thought of those assholes, at the thought of anybody looking down on his brother.

“You could have kicked their asses.”

“Yeah, but what would that accomplish? Besides them feeling right about me.”

“Fine. I’ll come kick their asses. And I’ll quote Goethe while I do.”

Dean snorts but it’s a sweet sound. It eases some of the tightness in Sam’s chest but it doesn’t loosen his grip on his pen.

“What’s the next question, kiddo?”

“What, uh. What are five things that give you complete peace of mind?”

“Jesus. I don’t think there are five things.”

“Think about it.”

“Uh. Knowing that I’ve killed this week’s evil motherfucker. When I go to bed that night, I can actually sleep, you know? Um. Zeppelin. Obviously. Drivin’ in the car late at night, with you asleep. ‘Cause then I know where you are, and I know you’re okay. And I can get to you if anything isn’t okay.

Sam draws in a deep breath, a long-lost warmth spreading through his belly.

“...And when, um. When I’m getting. You know. Pleasured.”

Sam’s eyes widen. “Pleasured.”

“Yeah, you know. Getting my dick sucked.”

“Fuck,” Sam breathes, leaning back in his seat, left hand gripping his dick and squeezing.

“However you need to word that so you don’t get kicked out of smart boy classes. But I’m answerin’
honestly, arrite?”

Sam writes it down, biting on his bottom lip to keep from offering to suck Dean’s dick late at night in the car while they listen to Zeppelin after they hunt down a monster next time and see how fucking big his peace of mind is at that.

“O-one more thing, Dean.”

Dean’s quiet for a long while, breaths coming in stops and starts as he tries to answer and then holds it in. Finally he sighs.

“That’s all I got, Sammy. I’m a nervous wreck most of the time. I don’t have much. I’m sorry, man.”

“Okay, Dean. That’s okay. These are really good answers. We’re halfway done, okay?”

“Christ. How are people famous? Can you imagine people asking you this shit all the time?”

“I know, but. It’s me. I’m not actually Barbara Walters.”

“It’s even scarier then, really.”

Sam frowns. “Why?”

“‘Cause you know me. I can’t lie to you. Or tell you some bullshit story that sounds good.”

He smiles a little at that. “Yeah, but. I also understand what you mean better than most people.”

“Better than all people,” Dean corrects. They’re both quiet and it’s so stupid and sappy that Sam feels embarrassed for them.

“So,” Sam clears his throat, smile still pulling at his mouth. “So, here are my questions.”

“Oh, Christ.”

“How do you think the interviewer would describe you in their article? What would be the opening paragraph?”

“So, how do I think you would describe me? When you’re trying to get a good grade?”

Sam smirks. “Just in general, Dean. Don’t worry about my grade.”

“Uh. Um. Fuck, man, I don’t know. You’d use big words that make a lot of sense and shit. ‘Dean Winchester is my brother. He’s a handsome son of a bitch, and he’s a massive pain in my ass. He’s a badass with a gun, has killer instincts and a killer smile to match. He rocks a leather coat like most people only fantasize about doing. He thinks he’s the funniest son of a bitch alive. He’s been my favorite person for my whole entire life and I don’t know what I would do without him. He saves my scrawny ass all the time, from monsters and bullies and raindrops. He keeps me safe and makes sure I fucking eat dinner. I am so fuckin’ glad that Dean’s my big brother.’ Somethin’ like that. Maybe less cuss words.”

Sam laughs, trying to write as fast as he can. “Yeah, just maybe.”

“Was that good enough?”

“Yeah, Dean. Perfect. You jackass.”
Dean lets out a bark of laughter, and Sam hears the unmistakable sound of a lighter being flicked. He sighs.

“Are you smoking pot?”

Dean exhales before he speaks. “Yeah, so? I’m bored!”

“You’re talking to me!”

“Yes, but you’re not here! It’s not the same.”

“This is actually easier over the phone,” Sam admits quietly. “I don’t think you’d answer me like this if you were right in front of me.”

“Yeah, it’s not as awkward on the phone. ‘s weird.” Another deep inhale. A few long beats and a slow exhale. “But it’s good, right? Am I doing okay?”

Sam smiles. “Yeah. I just want you to be yourself. That’s the person I’m writing this about.”

“Sammy, you’re so sweet to me.”

“Shut up. Don’t call me that.”

“Next question!”

“Why do you think the interviewer chose you as their most influential person?”

A pause.

“Uh. ‘Cause you don’t know many people? I mean, who else were you gonna pick? Dad? Bobby? Pastor Jim? That girl who gave you head back in Fairmount, Indiana?”

“You’re an asshole.”

“Hey, I’m serious! I’m the only obvious choice. And I mean, you love me best, so.”

“Maybe not today, I don’t.” Sam is still blushing at the mention of Sunny. At the fact that Dean remembers that.

“Oh, yes you do. I’m baring my soul to you. Givin’ you all my secret thoughts.”

“If you could pick your last meal, what would it be, and who would you invite to dinner?”


“Dean, you’re stoned.”

“God, and some cheese fries. Like, waffle fries with cheese sauce. And some waffles! With chicken. Southern style. And I want to eat it all off of Playboy Bunnies. Like, sucking barbeque sauce off of some Grade A fuckin’ tits, man. Eating apple pie out of a pretty pink pussy. Pouring beer inside of--”

“Who would you invite to dinner?”
“Oh, uh. Well, you, of course. Because you’d never let me forget it if I didn’t invite you.”

“Last meal,” Sam reminds him.

“Jimmy Page. He can just get stoned and munch and play guitar. Doesn’t even have to talk. Anna Nicole Smith from like, 1992. Naked. Halle Berry. Naked. Jennifer Aniston. Naked. Lisa Bonet. Naked. That “Genie in a Bottle” chick. Fuckin’ naked. And I’d just cover them all in syrup and make them lick it off of each other.”

“Even Jimmy Page?”

“Oh. Well, no. He’s gotta play guitar.”

“Even me?”

Sam would swear that the silence that follows is nervous.

“Hell, yeah, man. If you want. Jump right in there. Just start lickin’.”

“Will you be covered in syrup, too?”

“Just my dick. Eyes on the prize.”

Sam flushes.

“Very shrewd.”

“Told you I’m smart.”

“Okay, last question.”

“Good,” Dean grunts, taking another long hit, talking as he exhales. “I’m fuckin’ starving.”

“What, or who, do you think about right before you fall asleep?”

“Depends. You know? If it’s during a hunt, I’m thinking about the job. Trying to figure shit out. Worrying about the possible victims. If I spend the night with a girl, I’m usually thinking about that. The sex and everything. Otherwise, it’s just. You know.” Dean clears his throat. “Just thinking about you, you know? If you’re okay. How you’re. How you’re doin’. That kind of stuff.”

Sam feels a band around his chest, a tight, clenching thing that confines him, makes him feel breathless, warm, aching. He smiles.

“Really?”

Dean snorts, flicks his lighter again. Inhale, hold, exhale. “Well, yeah. I mean, I’m practically you’re bodyguard, you know? Fuckin’ knight in shining armor.”

Sam rolls his eyes and gives a little laugh. It makes Dean laugh, too.

“So, uh. Yeah. Anyway. So’s that it? We done?”

“Yeah, we’re done. I’ll go figure out how to take all the ‘shits’ and ‘fucks’ out of this and make it something I can share with my teacher.”

“Don’t take the tits out, man. Leave the tits in.”
Sam smirks.

“I’ll do my best.”

“Okay, kid. I’m gonna go find a diner. I’m about to chew my own hand off. Listen, I’ll call you in the morning, okay?”

“Okay.” Sam puts his pen down, sits up. He doesn’t want to hang up. He doesn’t want Dean to go anywhere. To be anywhere but here.

“You gonna be okay?” Dean’s moving around, probably pulling his shoes on. Sam takes the phone off speaker and presses it back to his ear, savoring the sound of Dean so close for just a few more seconds.

“Yeah, I’m. I’ll just work on this. Might go to bed early or something.”

“Check the salt lines?”

Sam sighs.

“Yeah, Dean. Already did.”

“Where’s your gun?”

“On the nightstand.”

“Sam?”

“Hm?” He pushes the curtain back, eyes going unfocused on the rain.

“Please eat. Just eat something. For me.”

Sam grits his teeth. Digs his thumbnail into the scar, pressing hard enough to break skin. He doesn’t sigh.

“I’ll. I’ll try.”

It’s not enough, but Dean’s too stoned to fight and Sam knows it.

“Alright, man. I’ll call you tomorrow.”

“O-okay.”

“Seeya, Sam.”

“Seeya.”

Sam hangs up the phone that is now hot with use. He tosses it onto the bed before flinging himself down on it. He sighs into the pillow, his stomach clawing restlessly at his insides, empty and begging. He focuses on the ache of it until it’s a single point of pain, white hot and sharp. It eases him down into sleep, the rain soothing him with its cadence, Dean’s voice echoing around in his mind.
Four days later, the interview is edited and slightly high school friendly. He’d written about Dean as lovingly and honestly as he could, though there may be a slight bias toward him being the center of the entire universe. Changing all the times Dean had said ‘brother’ to ‘boyfriend’ had been done without thinking about it. He couldn’t think about it. Couldn’t think about what Dean would do if he found out.

He’s watching Audrey read it at lunch. She keeps going from her chicken salad back to the papers spread out in front of her, and Sam can only watch and shift in his seat, a half-empty bottle of water clutched in his hand. She finishes finally, at least with the interview, and lifts her eyes to look at Sam.

“He’s so hilarious. Isn’t he?”

Sam smiles for that, ducking his head to try and hide any blushing.

“Yeah, he’s pretty funny.”

“And he talks about you all the time.” Her eyes turn back to the papers, flicking over all the words, and Sam feels a warmth spread through his body. It’s true. He hadn’t changed Dean’s words, not really. He feels a stupid amount of pride as he nods.

“What’s it like?”

He looks up at her again, fingers twisting at the cap of his water bottle. He raises his eyebrows.

“What do you mean?”

“Just.” She shuffles the papers into a neat stack, her fingers running over the top of them almost in reverence. “What’s it like to have someone love you so much? To. To be the last thing they think about before they go to sleep. To only have peace of mind when you’re there. To. To be everything to the person you love the most?”

Sam slouches in his seat, tightening the bottle so tight he doesn’t know if it’ll ever open again. He lifts his eyes and glances around, watching the other kids getting their lunch, eating with their friends, flirting and laughing and arguing and ignoring and being ignored. It’s all so foreign to him, all of it. He’s always felt like a spectator in these situations, being around people his own age. He can’t relate to any of them. Not really. He can’t even really relate to Audrey, except that they’re both wallflowers, maybe. And she listens to him in a way that he doesn’t think he’s ever experienced.

He shrugs.

“I don’t. I don’t really know. I mean. I’ve never known anything else. He’s. He’s always just been there. Sometimes it drives me crazy. Sometimes I wanna punch him in the face. But. But sometimes I just.” He sits up and scoots his chair back deeper into the corner, and Audrey leans forward to hear him better. He drops his voice to barely a whisper.

“I just want to be under him and have him just. Covering me. Hiding me. I don’t wanna feel or hear or see or breathe or know anything but him.”
Audrey sighs, her cheek resting in her palm. She closes her eyes and watches her cheeks flush, watches the smile that ghosts over her mouth. He hasn’t seen Dean in nine days. Sam hasn’t eaten anything but a few forced bites here and there in that same amount of time, and his jeans are falling off of him most of the time now.

He means every single thing he’s saying, but there’s so much there he can’t tell her. The truth. The real stuff. How he and Dean hardly talk anymore. How it hurts Sam to be in the same room with him too long anymore. How they argue about the tiniest, stupidest things, like Sam has always been with Dad. But not Dean. Never Dean. Until now. How he feels so alone that he thinks it’s going to swallow him whole.

“I’m so jealous of you,” Audrey says finally, piling her trash onto her tray and giving Sam a smile. “C’mon. One more period and then a freakin’ pep rally, and we’re free.” She stands up and he watches her, eyes going unfocused. He’s tired. He’s just really tired and he wants to go to sleep right now and wake up with Dean’s arms around him, Dean’s voice in his ear, talking about some diner he’s dying to go to. Sam would go with him. He’d eat everything Dean put in front of him.

Only the bell ringing drags Sam out of his seat, forces his slightly trembling legs to move.

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“Can I come in?”

Audrey and Sam both look up from their sprawl on Audrey’s bed. Sam pushes himself to sit up at the sight of Audrey’s dad.

“Sure, Dad. What’s up?” Audrey refocuses on her equations, seemingly not bothered at all by the shimmy and grind of Pennywise coming from the speakers of her stereo. Sam meets Henry’s eyes and gives him a smile. He stands up and walks over to the stereo and turns the music down just a little.

“Actually, um. I kind of wanted to talk to you, Sam. If you have a minute?”

Audrey and Sam exchange a quick glance before Sam looks back up at Henry.

“Sure. S-sir.”

“Hey, turn that back up, man.” Audrey doesn’t even look up, just grins down at her homework, her feet not missing a beat. Sam smiles and he looks up at Henry, shaking his head as he turns the volume back up a little.

He follows Henry out of the room and down the hallway, not stopping until they come to a door Sam’s never been through. They step in and Sam hovers for a moment just inside, frozen in amazement.

It’s a library, a lot like the one downstairs in the living room, but it’s more. It’s a true study. A big oak desk, a fireplace, a couch, a few comfortable chairs, all in classic, warm colors.

“Can I live here?”

Henry laughs, looking around the room with Sam, probably trying to see it the way Sam must be seeing it. “It’s really hard not to just stay in here all the time. Carrie has the downstairs with her piano, and I have. Well. My nerd room.”

Sam laughs, a soft sound, but he finally tears his eyes away and looks up at Henry expectantly.
“I just wanted to see if Audrey had given you the booklets I passed along. See if anything stood out to you?” Henry leans back against his desk, nodding for Sam to sit down in the chair nearby. He sinks down into the buttersoft leather, amazed that people live like this. They just have these rooms, these hideaways, the same place every single day. It’s amazing.

“Yes, she did. I read through them this weekend.” Sam strokes at the arms of the chair before realizing he’s doing it. He stops. Hands in his lap. “Um. Columbia seemed really amazing. And. And Harvard. And Stanford, too.”

“Great!” Henry is practically beaming at him, truly thrilled, and it makes Sam sink deeper into his seat. “That’s awesome. Look, I know it must be tough for you and Dean right now, moving around a lot, with money and everything. Why don’t you...”

Henry walks around his desk and opens a drawer on it, sifting through files while Sam just watches. He comes back with a handful of papers and passes them over to Sam.

“Applications. Just fill them out, do the essays, and get them back to me. I’ll worry about the application fees. Do you have an address that you can have mail sent to?”

Sam licks his lips, staring down at the daunting papers in his hands. “I, uh. I-I have an uncle that lives in Sioux Falls. I can have stuff sent there.”

“Perfect. Just make sure to put his address down as your permanent one when you fill them out. Take your time with them and get them back to me when you’re done. Have you taken your SATs?”

“I just took them a couple of days ago, at the school.” He hadn’t studied that much, but they weren’t as hard as he was expecting. He hasn’t talked to Dean yet to tell him about it, hasn’t found a way to thank him for getting the whole thing set up for Sam to do in the first place.

“Good. Alright, we need to make sure that the schools get your test results as soon as they come back. We can take care of all that, too. If you need any help, you can always come talk to me, okay?”

“O-okay.” Sam jumps up when he realizes that Henry’s heading for the door. He clutches the papers as carefully as he can, not really able to meet Henry’s eyes for a long moment. “Listen, I don’t. I don’t know why you’re being so nice to me, I just. I just want you to know that it means a lot. I appreciate all of this, so. So, thanks.”

Henry offers Sam his hand, which Sam takes and shakes firmly, just like his Dad does. Henry’s smile makes his eyes crinkle.

“There’s just something about you, Sam. The truly special kids just have something about them, and I just want to help you. I just want to make sure you’re as successful as I know you can be.”

They’re in the hallway now. Sam can hear Carrie and Stephen downstairs, laughing at the television. He can hear the music from Audrey’s room, can smell the wood burning in the fireplace from Henry’s study. He never, ever wants to leave here.

“Thank you, sir.”

“Go study.” Henry squeezes Sam’s arm, nudges him gently back toward Audrey’s room. “Have a good night, Sam.”

Sam walks back to Audrey’s room in a daze.
“Hey, mathlete! C’mere!” Audrey motions Sam over to the bed. “Explain this shit to me again.”

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“Sam!”

Sam comes to a sudden stop just a few feet away from Audrey’s house, the night dark and alive around him. His fingers slip down into his pocket to slide over his butterfly knife. He turns around, the hairs standing up on the back of his neck.

Audrey’s brother jogs the few feet separating them, still sweaty from his incessant time spent at the basketball goal. Sam relaxes almost immediately, a tired smile playing on his lips.

“Hey, Stephen. What’s up?”

Stephen clutches a basketball against his chest, fingers dancing uncertainly over the textured surface. He looks up and meets Sam’s eyes, and Sam could swear there’s a faint pink coloring his cheeks.

“Are you, uh. Are you heading home?”

Sam glances around at the seemingly deserted neighborhood, his eyebrows quirked in amusement.

“Yeah.” He lets out a short laugh, a little uncomfortable with the tension ratcheting up between them. He licks his lips, fast and wet. “Everything okay?”

“Oh, yeah. Yeah, I was just.” Stephen shrugs, everything about his body language changing. His shoulders droop, eyes slip away from Sam, his face falling. Whatever it was he chased Sam out here for, he’s changed his mind. Dark blue eyes flick up to meet Sam’s again and, just like that, whatever it is that brought Stephen out here, is back. “Listen, can I, um. Can I talk to you for a minute?”

“S-sure.” If Sam sounds hesitant, that’s because he is. He hitches his bag up on his shoulder as Stephen walks toward him and then a little past him, wordlessly leading Sam away from the house and down the street.

They walk for about ten minutes in a loaded silence, their shoulders brushing every few steps. Sam looks down at their feet, at Stephen’s worn but still nice Nikes shuffling along next to his destroyed All-Stars. He can’t fathom what this is going to be about.

They veer off the sidewalk into a park eventually, swing sets and slides giving way to a paved walkway, picnic tables, and benches cradled by trees. Stephen leads Sam to one of the picnic tables, climbing up to sit on the table part of it. Sam crawls up and sits beside him, hands dangling between his legs, eyes on the basketball that Stephen balances between his feet on the bench. He waits him out, letting Stephen gather thoughts and courage and whatever else he needs to say what he’s trying to say.

“How did you know you were gay?” Is what finally comes out of Stephen’s mouth, but it sounds more like howdewknowyourgay to Sam. He wades through the rush of words, trying to wrap his brain around them as fast as he can so he doesn’t make Stephen lose his nerve.

“Uh,” he begins eloquently, scratching at a hole starting on the thigh of his jeans. He mulls the question over, really thinks about it. “I don’t. I don’t even know if I am gay.”

Stephen leans forward, cranes his head toward Sam. His eyes are huge in the near dark.

“But. Audrey told me you were. And. And your boyfriend, and. Never. Um. Nevermind. It’s
“nothing.” He stops suddenly, sucking in a huge breath and then he’s moving, jumping down off the table and it takes Sam a few seconds to recover, to reach out and grab his arm and tug him back.

“Stephen, wait. Hold on, let me.” Sam uses his ever-growing strength to pull Stephen back to the table. Stephen sits down again, on the bench just next to Sam’s feet. Sam can’t really avoid his eyes now. “Just. Gimme a minute to explain.”

It’s Stephen’s turn to wait Sam out, but he does it with a lot more fidgeting and shuffling of his basketball. Sam finally sighs, dragging a hand through his hair.

“Look, it’s. It’s more complicated than that. Sometimes I like girls, too. You know? It’s not really an easy answer.”

Stephen takes that in, sitting so quiet that Sam wonders if he’s fallen asleep.

“So. So you still look at girls? Even though you have a boyfriend?”

Sam blushes, grateful for the darkness around them. His fingers drag over his scar.

“You don’t lose your eyes just because you get a boyfriend. Or a girlfriend. I don’t really.” He takes a deep breath, letting it out in a rush of words. “I don’t really understand the need to stick a label on someone. Especially because I’m—we’re—so young. You know? Maybe later, after a few years of experience. Shit, I sound like a guidance counselor.”

Stephen laughs, and it eases some of the tension from Sam’s shoulders. He looks over at Stephen, at his profile while he smiles. He’s a really cute guy, he has all of Audrey’s dark features and thick eyelashes, but his eyes are a dark blue that almost look black in this light. Sam’s heart skips. Midnight blue.

“How old are you, Stephen?”

“Fifteen.” The answer sounds shy, almost vulnerable.

“Is.” Sam pauses, not wanting to push Stephen into a corner by being too blunt. “Is there somebody you’re interested in? A guy?”

“I don’t know,” Stephen mumbles, digging at a hangnail on his thumb. “Kind of. It’s not really about just one guy. It’s just, kind of in general. Just looking and seeing and.”

Even in the dark, Sam can see how red Stephen’s face is.

“You’re just attracted to guys.”

Stephen sits up for that, about to defend himself, breath sucked in, face drawn into anger before it disappears just as fast as it came. He slumps down again, not daring to look up at Sam when he answers with a nod.

Sam nods right back, waiting a few seconds before he slides down from the table top to settle in beside Stephen on the bench. Sam chews on his lip as he stares out across the trail, eyes settling on the woods beyond, absently scanning for anything out of place happening, any stray movements or sounds.

“It’s not for anyone else to tell you, or decide for you. And it’s your truth, not anybody else’s. If you don’t want to tell people, you don’t have to. Not until you’re sure, and not until you’re ready. But, I’ve gotta tell you, man. You’ve got the best family in the world. If anybody will be awesome and
supportive, it’s them. You know?”

“Yeah, I know. That’s what made me start really thinking about this. Seeing how they were with you, you know? They were so happy for you, and they weren’t freaked out. Not even Dad. They don’t act weird around you, or talk about you when you’re gone. Not. Not that I thought they would, but.”

“It’s what most people do,” Sam finishes for him, finally looking over and catching Stephen’s eyes again, giving him a small smile.

“What did your folks do? When they found out?” Stephen is searching Sam’s eyes, looking for guidance and honesty, and Sam has to look away at that. He shakes his head a little, lifting a shoulder in a shrug.

“Dunno. It’s. It’s not really something that I talk about with my dad. He’s. He’s always got something else on his mind.”

“But he supports you, right? You and Dean?”

“Yeah. I guess he does. I haven’t really needed my dad in a long time. I’ve had Dean for so long that. That my dad’s just. Just kind of in the background.”

Another nod, more silence. Stephen turns toward Sam after a minute, the basketball cradled in the angle of his bent leg on the bench. Sam still can’t meet his eyes.

“Do you miss Dean?”

“Yeah,” Sam replies, as unemotionally and with as much neutrality as he can muster, ignoring the way his heart rate picks up at the change in Stephen’s tone.

“How long has it been since somebody kissed you?”

Sam’s head shoots up at that, his eyes huge when they meet Stephen’s.

“What?”

Stephen moves even closer then, eyes moving from Sam’s and down to his lips. Sam licks them on instinct.

“You’re so hot, Sam. I can’t stop thinking about you. What. What you would do to me. What you would look like naked.”

Stephen leans forward and Sam leans back just enough to keep their lips from attaching. He reaches up to put a hand on Stephen’s shoulder, hoping to snap him out of whatever hormone-drenched place he’s in right now.

“Wait. Wait, wait, Stephen. You don’t want me. You’re just confused. This. This isn’t about me. C’mon.” He smiles, his heart racing, sweat breaking out above his top lip. Stephen pushes even closer to him, reaching up to slide a hand through Sam’s hair.

“No, Sam, I do. God, I promise I do. Will you kiss me? Please? Just so I know what it feels like. Just. Just so I can find out.”

Sam leans back, shying away from the hand in his hair. His heart is stammering in his chest and he’s looking at this boy who is staring at him in a way that no boy has ever looked at him. He’s desperate
and wanting and pleading for Sam to give him some affection, any affection. He lets out the breath he didn’t even know he’d been holding, searching Stephen’s eyes as he tries to keep his voice even.

“Just. Just one kiss. Okay? Just one.”

Stephen nods before Sam’s even done talking and he’s practically vibrating out of his skin. Shit. How the fuck did this happen? Sam’s so fucking tired and so hungry and he hasn’t talked to Dean in nearly two days. He leans forward, letting his eyes fall closed on the sight of Stephen just gazing at him, his eyes soft with utter adoration.

Their lips touch and Stephen’s mouth is dry but still powdery soft. Stephen gasps against his lips and then surges forward, his surprisingly strong arms snaking around Sam’s neck to pull him closer as he deepens the kiss.

Sam’s never kissed a boy before.

“God, you’re so sexy,” Stephen sighs right against Sam’s lips, his hands slipping up to grip the back of Sam’s head, fingers pulling on his hair. Sam’s eyelashes flutter as Stephen sucks on his bottom lip, tongue sliding just over the slippery inside of it. “So fucking hot, Sam. Wish you could fuck me. Wish I could suck your dick.”

Sam has, in all honesty, never thought about fucking a guy before. Being the one to stick his dick as far as he can fit and just rut and fuck. The idea, just the thought of it, has his head spinning. His tongue slips and laps at Stephen’s, letting him control the speed and depth of the kiss. He keeps coming back to the thought of Stephen sucking his dick. Fuck, of anybody sucking his dick. He’s hardening in the warm hug of his jeans, dick swelling sweet and sticky with each passing second.

“Fuck,” he whispers, unable to keep it in. Stephen pulls on his hair urgently, just once, and Sam’s eyes fly open.

“Let me.” Stephen is so intense staring at him, so focused in his hunger. “Let me suck you. God, let me suck your fucking dick.”

Sam can only watch as Stephen slides down off the bench, the basketball bouncing away toward the grass. Stephen edges between Sam’s legs, fingers prying at the button of Sam’s jeans, the long of his fingers pushing down the zipper. Sam lifts his hips a little, lets Stephen get his jeans down just enough to reach in, wrap his hand around Sam’s cock and pull it out. Sam gasps, leans back, staring up at the late spring sky, at the stars winking at him.

Stephen grips his dick like he owns it, bringing it up to slap against the flat wet of his tongue, eyes up and staring straight at Sam. Sam slumps back on the bench, the wood table digging into his back. He lets his eyes slip closed when Stephen starts to tongue the head, his lips closing into a suck at the base of the crown, a move that has Sam spurting an embarrassing amount of slick that blurs and oozes down over Stephen’s fingers.

He can only watch as Stephen licks it all up, licks over his own knuckles before he wraps his lips around him again, hand sliding down into a twisting stroke as he takes Sam’s dick into his mouth finally, finally.

“What,” Sam groans, his left wrist sliding up to brush over his own mouth, bringing his scar to his lips. He starts to suck almost compulsively at it, his own sucks matching the rhythm that Stephen is setting up as he bobs on Sam’s cock. It’s wet, messy, spit slopping everywhere on his dick, his
thighs, all over Stephen’s hand, but it’s good. It’s really, really fucking good.

Stephen has so done this before. God, he’s had to have done this before.

Sam doesn’t even have it in him to imagine that it’s Dean, doesn’t have the mind to superimpose Dean’s fuck-sin mouth over Stephen’s, doesn’t even know how to begin to replace Stephen’s breathy, submissive little moans with Dean’s gravely, rutting grunts. He just pictures Dean gnawing on his scar, just like Sam’s teeth are doing right now, imagines Dean holding him down and sucking on it until it hurts, hurt hurt make it fucking hurt.

He feels just a hint of Stephen’s teeth on an upstroke, just the slide of an incisor on the soft-hard ridge of his dick and he’s off, just like that, he’s sparking all over, lighting up bright from the inside and shooting warmth into Stephen’s mouth, his entire body convulsing on the bench, not a sound leaving his mouth but aborted gasps.

Stephen mouths at him through it, sucks and begs at his slit for more until Sam reaches up to pry him off, to beg him wordlessly to stop. He barely feels Stephen wipe his thighs off with the edge of his shirt, doesn’t register his pants being pulled back up, his cock being tucked away like it’s something precious, his pants being done up. He’s boneless against the picnic table, mouth parted to pant.

Stephen kisses him just like that, letting the bittersweet taste of Sam’s own come flood his mouth. Sam takes it, lets him kiss and lets himself be kissed, drinking down the taste of himself.

“Thank you. Made me come, too. God, just watching you. Feeling you. God, Sam.” Stephen is shaking on him, breathing harsh and hot right into his mouth. He brings Sam’s hand to the front of his shorts and lets him feel, lets Sam feel the dampness seeping through the soft fabric. Sam can only moan a reply, impressed approval.

They stop kissing what feels like hours later, when Sam comes back into himself and can feel all his limbs. He hadn’t come in a month before that moment. He’s drained and exhausted beyond comprehension right now. He nudges Stephen off of him, standing up right after he does.

He wipes a hand over his mouth and up into his hair, looking over at Stephen out of the corner of his eyes. “That. Stephen, that can’t happen again.”

Stephen handles it gracefully, manages to nod and even to find a smile even though he’s very obviously hurt. He goes to find his ball and Sam grabs his bag off the ground, his legs wobbly, head still spinning a little.

“Bye, Sam.” Stephen gives him another smile, this one a little bigger but infinitely sadder. Sam watches him head back toward his house, the basketball propped against his hip, held there by a draped arm. Sam sighs, his eyes falling closed just for a few seconds before he starts to walk the opposite direction.

He thinks about calling Dean, thinks about listening to Dean breathe through a phone speaker. Thinks about Dean finding out about this. Thinks about Dean smelling sex on him, about him getting upset about it. Jealous maybe. Thinks about Dean fucking a girl in a bathroom stall in a shitty bar, his hips working like a machine, bruising sweet inner girl thighs. Thinks about stopping to buy a pack of cigarettes, to find new places to put scars. Hasn’t done that for nearly seven months.

He thinks about getting back to the motel and finding Dean there. Thinks about curling up in a bed with Dean like they used to when Sam was younger. (Not Dean. Sam doesn’t think Dean was ever younger.) Thinks about feeling safe in Dean’s arms. He’s so afraid that he’s forgetting what that’s like, what that’s really like. He knows that he felt safe then, but he can’t recall just what safe feels
like. How exactly it feels to fall asleep with Dean around him.

What he does know for certain is that he wouldn’t be walking away from an empty park with a sated, spit-slicked dick, away from a hungry teenage boy, if Dean was there, waiting for him.

It’s so fucked up. He’s so fucking *fucked up*. He wants his fucking brother, and no matter how thoroughly you tell their story, their sad fucking life story, their tragic interludes and lonely nights and how they would be touch-starved without each other, no matter how you fucking paint it, it’s wrong. It’s wrong, it’s wrong, it’s wrong. Sam is fucking wrong. He has been for as long as he can remember, has felt it racing through his veins, wriggling fitfully under his skin. He’s wanted claws for years, wanted to being able to sink them into his skin, let them press and hook and drag, flaying flesh and uprooting all that wrong in him. Like it’s something he can just dig out. Like it’s not something that’s in the very marrow of his bones. Like it’s just not who he fucking is.

And forget the fact that he wants to infect Dean with it, too. Wants to pull Dean into the deep with him, wants to drown him in the darkness, no regrets. He wants Dean to be fucked up, too. To want him right back. Wants Dean to fuck him in the secret dark, to wrap Sam up with no apologies, to make a religion out of the negative space between their bodies.

He ends up in front of the door of his motel room, finds himself deep inside of a panic attack. Can’t be here can’t be here in this place. The room doesn’t smell familiar anymore, all the smells he’s gathered up over the years as *home* are gone, gone gone and might not ever come back. He wants the car, wants his backseat, wants the rumble of the engine and cock rock on the speakers and Dean laughing in the front seat and Dad giving orders and he finds himself falling into bed, the door kicked closed by his foot, salt lines blurred by his stumbling feet.

He sobs into his pillow, ripping his clothes off after he can finally draw a deep breath. He’s furious all of a sudden, breathless with anger, with impatience. He rips off his own clothes, shirts over his head, jeans and sticky damp underwear gone, shoes and socks, gone. Naked on dirty motel sheets and he presses his nails to his thighs, presses hard and pictures talons instead, digs and digs until he breaks skin and he drags his nails across his thighs over and over, rakes and rakes until the skin splits, blood rushing up in their wake. Digs and digs until the pain is searing white, until it’s a pinprick of intense, focused agony and he stops. Collapses on the bed, gasping, eyes shock-wide, unseeing.

The blood slicking up his thighs feels black.

Sam misses the next day at school. Calls Audrey to tell her so that morning, puts his phone on silent after. Showers around noon, scrapes dried blood off his thighs for half an hour. Considers giving himself stitches, but doesn’t even bother bandaging them up. Strips the bloodied sheets from the bed and leaves them in a pile outside the room for the cleaning lady. Puts on some clothes and walks down to the drugstore on the corner and buys a bottle of apple juice and a bottle of grape juice and a bag of pretzels. Comes back to find new sheets on his bed and an extra pillow, both feeling like a sympathetic smile.

Settles in and fills out the applications Henry gave him the night before, that night that seems sweet already in memory, when he felt hopeful about any timid dreams he might have. Doesn’t think about the park.
Doesn’t answer the door when Audrey knocks around four. Does his college essays like a man on a
task from God, pen scratching over his notebook, paper easier for him as a blank page than his
laptop screen. Finishes them, drinks the last of his apple juice, brushes his teeth until the toothpaste
turns pink in his mouth. He digs through his bags until he finds a tranquilizer from Dad’s last stay in
the hospital. Washes it down with lukewarm water from the sink. Never even opens the pretzels.

He sleeps for eleven hours.

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The next few days pass in a haze. He gives Henry his applications and his essays and tries not to feel
stupid at the charmed smile Henry has when he sees that Sam’s essays are all on paper ripped from a
spiral-bound notebook. Promises he’ll have his assistant type them up, promises he’ll send them all
out with the fees. Takes Sam’s hushed, mumbled thanks for the trembling gratitude they really are.

Saturday afternoon, the same night as the Granville High School junior and senior prom, his phone
rings.

Bobby.

Sam pushes the green button, tucks the phone up against his ear.

“Hey, Bobby.”

“Sam, long time, no see.” A pause. “Well, you know what I mean.”

The grump in Bobby’s voice, the familiar ornery scratch of it bringing the thought of a smile to
Sam’s face. He sits in the rickety chair at the table in his room, the whole surface of it having slowly
turned into his office over the last several days. The sun is high and bright out, clouds fat and
cartoon-fluffy.

“Haven’t seen you in awhile,” Sam agrees, finger poking around in the hole in knee of his jeans.
“How’s everything goin’?”

“Oh, you know me. Sorority party after sorority party.”

“Yeah, you and me both.” Sam huffs, the closest thing he’s come to a laugh in a few days.

“Listen, Sam, I don’t wanna keep ya. I know you’ve got better things to do on a Saturday afternoon
than talk to an old man, but I just.” Bobby trails off, probably assumes Sam is going to elaborate. He doesn’t.

“You doin’ alright? Salt the doors and windows? I know you know your exorcisms. Did your
Daddy leave you a gun?”

“I’m fine, Bobby.”

“Look,” Bobby sighs. Sam can picture him lifting up his hat to rub at his hair before replacing it.
Bobby probably sleeps in his hat. “I know you haven’t talked to Dean or your Dad in a few days--”

“Six days.”
“They’ve just been busy, is all. There’s something nasty goin’ on up in Akron. John can’t afford to take his eyes off it.”

Sam doesn’t respond, doesn’t know what to say to that. He doesn’t care. Doesn’t give a shit about fucking Akron, Ohio.

“I’m fine,” he repeats.


“Bobby, you don’t have to make small talk with me. Don’t feel bad just because nobody’s talking to me. I’m fine. School’s fine. I don’t have a girlfriend. I have a gun. Salt lines are fucking salt lines. I’m fine.”

He shifts in his seat, eager to get at the scabs that are healing up restlessly on his thighs. Wants to rip right into them again. He tucks one hand under his leg and lets the other hold the phone instead.

“You don’t sound fine.” It’s not sympathetic, but it’s not mean. It’s just blunt, just a helpful observation. It makes Sam’s face red, makes his teeth grit so hard they squeak in his mouth, makes him slam his hand down on the table, his notebook bouncing in place, pens flying off onto the sandpaper scratch carpet.

“Who the fuck cares!? Right!? Because there’s a fucking demon in Akron! Who cares how I’m doing or if I’m fucking okay or if I haven’t eaten in ten days or if Dean breaks his fucking promises?! Who cares? Because I sure fucking don’t!”

There’s a stunned silence and Sam wants so badly, more than anything, to hang up on him. But he can’t. Because he’s lonely, he’s lonely for his brother, even for his dad, for everything he’s gathered up close to make into a home, and Bobby is better than nothing.

“Well,” Bobby finally manages, clearing his throat quietly. “That’s better than ‘fine,’ I guess.”

Sam sighs, all the fight leaving him the moment his lungs are empty of air. He slumps back in his seat, pushes a hand up into the tangle of his hair.

“Sorry, Bobby.”

“No, no, don’t be sorry. You got every right to wanna sucker punch ‘em both. Believe me, I’ve wanted to do that to John Winchester more than I’ve wanted to smile at him. Hell, I’ve gone through with it a few times. I know you feel left out and probably pretty damn miserable down there, just waiting.” Another pause on Bobby’s end, a little more fidgeting. Sam finds his favorite water stain on the ceiling, lets his eyes go unfocused on it.

“I told John to bring you out here with me. You’ve gone to Roosevelt High out here a couple of times. But, no, he wanted you close to him.”

Sam snorts for that, rolling his eyes up so far in his head he has to close them. There’s a burn at the back of his eyeballs, in his nose. He will not fucking cry over his dad. Over any of this. No more.

“Didn’t want me too fucking close.”

“There’s something bad goin’ on, Sam. Worse than your typical beastie bad. Your Daddy’s got some God-given instincts in ‘im. I’m not one to question them, not even on his worst days. If you’re close by but not with him, there’s a reason. We’ve just gotta trust him, okay?”
“I haven’t trusted my dad since I was eleven.” Sam’s just being mean now, that cruel kind of honest that means he’s regretting every word coming out of his mouth, if only because they’re all so true that he can never truly take them back.

“Then trust your brother. If he’s not calling, it’s only so he can keep you off this thing’s radar.”

It’s a weird thing to say, for Bobby to say to him at all. Sam frowns.

“What thing?”

“I don’t know, Sam, whatever this thing is! Listen, I’m getting ready to leave. I’m headin’ over to Fort Wayne to meet up with a friend who might have some intel for me. I’m gonna meet John’n Dean in Akron after I leave. You want me to stop through Granville and check up on you?”

“I’m not a fucking infant. I don’t need anybody to change my diapers. But thanks for your concern.”

“Well, I don’t know about your diapers, but that sure sounds like the voice of somebody who’s wearin’ a poop face. God, I can’t wait ‘til you’re done bein’ a teenager.” The last sentence is grumbled but Sam hears it and he knows he’s meant to. He rolls his eyes, glaring at the water stain with all he’s fucking worth.

“Thanks for the heart-to-heart, Bobby.”

He can hear Bobby’s eyeroll. “Yeah, it’s made my whole day, too, kid.”

Sam gasps right when Bobby goes to hang up, frantic suddenly as he remembers.


Silence.

“Well? You’re a bitch to me until I wanna hang up? What is it, boy?”

“I just.” Sam shoves to sit up in his seat, finally deciding to stand and pace. “I sent off a few. A few, um. College applications, and I gave ‘em your address to send replies to.”

Sam holds his breath as he waits for a reaction.

“Well, alright. So you want me to call you if anything shows up?”

“Just. Just if anything big comes. A regular-looking letter’s just going to be a rejection.”

“Okay. Yeah, alright. I’ll get ahold of ya, okay?”

“Thanks, Bobby.” He lets out the breath in a whoosh, gratitude flooding him with warmth. “Look, don’t. If you could just. Not tell Dad and Dean about it. About any of it, I’d. Just. Please don’t say anything to them. Okay?”

“Sure,” Bobby says after a couple of beats, wary but agreeable. Sam sighs. Finally smiles, a tiny, breakable thing.

“Thanks.”

“Anytime, son. Alright, I’ve gotta head out. I think it’s time for your bottle and your nap, don’t you?”
Sam snorts, rolls his eyes but the smile’s still there. “Screw you, old man.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

They hang up, and Sam feels more human than he’s felt in days.

Calls Dean, gets his voicemail.

--

There’s a knock on his door around six that evening. He opens it and finds himself face-to-face with Audrey, her hair pulled back in a ponytail, nails painted like Sgt. Pepper’s jackets. She gives him an understanding smile and holds up three bags, one of them clinking. Beer.

“My dad felt sorry for us,” she explains, her eyes massive behind her Daria glasses. “Got us some Miller High Life and told me to tell you that we’re too cool for prom anyway.”

She scrunches her nose to push her glasses up higher and Sam sighs, his smile unstoppable. He steps aside and lets her into his room.

She puts the bags down on the table-turned-office space, rifling through them and pulling each thing out, naming them as she goes. “Apples, Cracker Barrel cheddar cheese, Fruit Roll-Ups, sour cream and onion Pringles, Reese Cups, and beer.”

She turns to him, an apple in her hand. She tosses it at him and he catches it, his eyebrows raised. “The apples are for you.”

He smirks at her, hair falling over his eyes as he looks down at the honeycrisp in his hands. “Thanks.”

He can feel her watching him for a few seconds, the air heavy with the possibility of the things she could say to him but, in the end, she doesn’t say any of them. She turns back to the six-pack, pulling two out and twisting the caps off, handing one over to Sam. He puts the apple down on the table and takes the beer, tipping it so that Audrey can clink her own against it. They smile at each other before they take their first sips.

Audrey wrinkles her nose as she swallows and Sam, Dean Winchester’s little brother, gulps down a third of the bottle in two swigs, downing them like water. They sit down on the bed side by side, eyes on their drinks. Sam clears his throat after a moment, looks over at her.

“Thanks. For comin’ over.”

She smiles, directing it down at her hands and then finally over at Sam, studying him for a long moment.

“You doin’ okay?”

He looks away at that, standing back up and tipping the bottle against his mouth again. Half the bottle empty now. He walks over and turns on the shitty TV against the wall, grabbing the remote off the top of it.

“There’s a Twilight Zone marathon on the Sci-Fi channel.” He passes the remote off to her and sinks down into the unmade bed, settling back against the headboard. She toes her Vans off and follows him, settling warm and comfortable next to him, their arms touching. She finds the right channel and settle in to watch.
Audrey gets up to pee after the second episode, the one with the guy with the time travel helmet. She comes back and Sam is opening another beer at the table and she stops halfway to him, frowning at the door.

Sam look at the door and then back at her, eyebrows raised.

“What?”

“Why is there...” She walks past him to the door, leaning down to squint. “Sugar? Spilled sugar?”

“It’s.” Sam blushes, clears his throat. Scrambles to think of a lie. “Salt.”

“Salt?” She stands up, her eyebrows still up. She takes the beer Sam hands her and watches as he retreats back to the bed, a new beer and an apple in his hands.

“Yeah, it’s. Dean’s superstitious. His, um. His dad is, too. So Dean was raised to think that salt protected you from bad things. So. Whenever we’re apart for awhile, he makes me promise to put down salt on the doors and windows. Just in case.”

Sam’s proud of himself. It’s the truest thing he could have said without giving a single thing away. He bites into the apple, the sweet crunch incredibly satisfying.

Audrey seems to buy that, somehow. She’s slow to nod but she does, finally, grabbing up the Fruit Roll-Ups and the Pringles and joining Sam back on the bed.

“He must be the most protective guy alive.” She breaks open the box, pulling out a red tube of rolled-up, stretchy goodness. Sam takes another bite of his apple.

“Just feels guilty, mostly. That he can’t be here.” He doesn’t want to talk about Dean, doesn’t want to think about him. The beer is cold where he’s cradling it between his thighs, and it feels nice on the gashes on his legs. They’re healing, yeah, but they’re still tender. Still warm to the touch. “Can we, um. Can we maybe talk about something else?”

Audrey has successfully peeled the candy from the plastic covering and she’s holding it with her fingertips, ready to tear into it. Sam doesn’t look over at her when she pauses, glancing at him.

“Everything okay with you two?”

Sam’s chest is rising and falling a little faster every second, eyes burning with too-familiar tears.

“Please.” He hates that his voice wavers, that it’s so fragile. He’s supposed to be brave, supposed to be at least a shadow of Dean and Dad, and here he is. About to cry over a few words. Dean would roll his eyes so hard they’d get stuck.

“Okay.” She settles back in against his side, her cheek resting on his arm. They eat in silence that’s only a little tense, but Audrey finds the remote and turns the TV back up a little. “Which one is this?”

“Oh! This is the one where the power goes out and this kid tells everybody it’s an alien invasion, and the whole town basically freaks out and gets paranoid and turns on each other.”

“Ooohh.” She crunches into a Pringle chip, tipping the tube to offer some to Sam. He shakes his head with a smile, takes another drink of his beer. “Is it really aliens?”

Sam rolls his eyes, nudging her with a grin. “Why don’t you just watch, genius?”

She mocks him in a classic, annoying kid sister tone and they relax back together, eyes on the screen.
By ten, they’d ordered a pizza, and Audrey had shamelessly eaten half of it. Sam is patient with every single time she asks him if he wants a slice, if he wants another apple, if he wants her to run to the store and get stuff for a salad. It’s kind of nice, the attention to his well-being, how protective she seems to be of him.

They’ve switched to *Saturday Night Live* by midnight, both of them admittedly amused by Britney Spears’ go as a comedienne in the skits. Halfway through the episode, when she starts to sing as the musical guest, they mute it.

“I saw her once,” Sam tells Audrey casually as he watches her eat all the sausage and pepperoni off the piece of room temperature pizza she’s holding. She glances up, an eyebrow raised.

“Who? Britney Spears?”

“Yeah.” He’s on his fourth beer and it’s making him feel a little warm, more relaxed than he has been in weeks. He could really, really go for a fucking joint right about now. “We were in LA for a-” He pauses, takes another drink, considers how to say it.

“Dean had a job. We were walking down the street and saw this swarm of people.” He leaves out the part where they thought the people were some kind of weird demon mob. “Turns out they were following her. She was just like. Shopping. Holding some little wind-up toy of a dog and talking to her friends. Like there weren’t a hundred people following her with cameras in her face. It was weird.”

Audrey is quiet, going over it all in her head. It’s one of Sam’s favorite things about her. She’s careful with her words when it really counts. She goes over and over the information and makes sure that what she says is what she means. It makes Sam wish he’d told her the truth, all those days ago. She would be the best person he’s ever had to confide in.

“I don’t think it’s fair. I don’t care what people say. Just because they’re famous, doesn’t mean they signed up to be exploited and stalked and harassed. They’re still just people. And she’s just. She’s so young, you know? That kind of stuff fucks with your head.”

They’re both quiet, watching Britney dance and sing with the volume off, the weight of Audrey’s words hanging in the air. Sam smiles.

“Her music still sucks though.”

“Jesus, tell me about it,” Audrey groans, flopping over on her stomach, one of her socked feet brushing Sam’s shoulder. Sam moves, joins her where she’s at the foot of the bed, and he smiles over at her. She smiles right back, sighing in what can only be called adoration. “Sam, promise me something?”

“Mm?” His eyes droop a little, lazing with contentment.

“When you leave, when Dean comes back for you and you guys disappear, you. You won’t forget about me? That we’ll still talk sometimes?”

He smiles at her, turning to lie on his side, facing her. He reaches up and touches her cheek, leaning forward to press a kiss to her temple. “Audrey, I could never--”

The sound of an engine outside stills the entire world. There is absolutely no mistaking it. It couldn’t even be *another* ’67 Impala. It’s Dad’s car. Panic settles into Sam’s body so quickly that he cannot
breathe. His chest spasms with how tight it is, and when he tries to speak, tries to move, he finds that he can't.

Audrey scrambles to sit up, her eyes huge with alarm. “Sam? Sam! What’s wrong? What’s going on? Are you okay?” Her hands trail over his body, checking for anything hurt, to comfort him, Sam doesn’t know.

There's a key in the door and Sam thinks, of course. Of course Dean got a second key to this place. The bastard. Sam can't even sit up in time before the door opens and there's Dean, scruffy-faced and haunted-looking, his eyes grass green and exhausted and landing right on Audrey. He stops, eyebrows raised as high as they’ll go.

“Uh. Who are you?” He finally looks down at Sam, blinking at him in surprise. “Dude. Who is this? That chick you were telling me about?”

“Dean.” Sam can barely breathe, so caught in the middle of his lies, trying to figure out what to say to Dean, to Audrey, how to get out of this fucking room and away from both of them. But God, Dean is right there, Dean who he has missed so badly that he can barely function. He stands up and Dean looks him over, concern distorting every other emotion on his face.

“Jesus fucking Christ, kid. What the fuck happened to you? You look like shit. Why the fuck have you lost so much weight? Goddamnit, Sam.” Dean steps up and puts a hand on Sam’s waist and it sends a jolt through Sam’s body. He feels Dean’s fingers tugging at the elastic waistband of his sweatpants, feeling how loose they are on him.

“I told you to eat.” Dean’s voice is low, and Sam’s cheeks burn. He stares at the amulet on Dean’s chest, just breathes him in, not meeting his eyes, trying his damnedest not to pay attention to the astonished movements of Audrey behind him.

“I. I told him to eat, too.” Audrey finally says, standing up so she can be near Sam. She puts her hand on his back as if to support him, but Sam feels trapped here between these two people who care too much. They care too fucking much about somebody who isn’t fucking worth it. “I told him you’d be worried about him when you got back, but he. He just hasn’t been able to.”

Sam looks up through his lashes and watches Dean look between him and Audrey, watches as he tries to process any of it. He finally smiles at her, green eyes tracking her up and down.

“Sorry if I interrupted anything. I didn’t think Sam would have company.” There’s a sparkle in Dean’s eyes that only shows up when sex is involved, and heat floods Sam’s face.

“No, no, no, Sam and I are just friends. Of course. Don’t be.” Audrey stammers, nervous in the face of Dean just like any hot-blooded girl or (dick-minded boy) would be. “He’s just missed you so much. I was just keeping him company.”

Dean’s eyebrows go up again. “Missed me?”

Sam jerks awake from his fear-induced coma, pushing at Dean a little so he can move. “Why are you here? Why didn’t you call me?”

Dean laughs, a short, annoyed sound. “I have tried to call you, princess. I’ve called you for the last three fucking hours. It went straight to voicemail. Why the fuck is your phone off?”

“You haven’t worried too much about it in the last six days, Dean. Why the hell would I think that you cared now?” He’s standing between Audrey and Dean, Audrey at his back and clearly uncomfortable and Dean with his hackles up, a little furious in front of him. Before Dean can even
take a step toward him, the door opens again and Sam nearly collapses with fear. No. No no no no.

“Sammy, we gotta go. Now. We’re meeting Bobby over in Fort Wayne and then we’re all going together to Pittsburgh. You’re not safe here anymore.” Dad is in hunter-mode, his eyes narrowed and calculating, absolutely no room for argument or bullshit or stalling. He glances over and sees Audrey. Audrey just blinks at him.

Dean smirks. “This is Sammy’s little girlfriend.”

Dad nods just once at her. “Hi. We’ve gotta go. Sorry to break this up.” He turns back to Sam, giving him a quick once-over, clearly not liking what he sees. “Sam, help your brother pack your shit and load up the car. Say goodbye to your friend. We’re leaving. Now.”

Brother. Brother. Oh, fuck. Oh, shit. Sam looks over to Dean who is already gathering up Sam’s things, shoving them into his duffel, putting papers into notebooks and shoving them into Sam’s school bag. Dad leaves the room, phone already to his ear. Sam turns to look at Audrey who is just staring at him, her mouth open. A pair of shoes lands at Sam’s feet. He looks over at Dean.

“Put ’em on. We’re not staying in Fort Wayne tonight, and we probably won’t get to sleep until morning anyway. Don’t worry about changing.” Dean marches to the bathroom, a grocery bag in hand to pack up Sam’s stuff in there.

“Sam?”

Audrey sounds so confused, her voice small. Sam closes his eyes. Doesn’t look at her.

“Who is that man? What.” She takes a step closer to him. “What did he mean, your brother?”

Sam doesn’t respond. Doesn’t move. He stares down at his shoes, at the dirty laces that have been repaired from breaks with thick knots. He doesn’t notice the tears building in his eyes. Audrey is right next to him now, her breath shuddering in his ear.

“You lied to me?” Her voice is a whisper now and it’s not really a question anymore. He finally looks over at her, shocked to see the tears streaming down her face. He opens his mouth but nothing comes out. He’s out of lies, at this point. “Why? Just because you didn’t want to go out with me? Is that it? You could have just said no, Sam. You didn’t have to lie to me.”

“Audrey, that’s not it. God, that’s not it at--”

The slap comes from nowhere, really. It explodes and stings on his cheek, followed by a sob from her. “I trusted you. I tried to be your friend! I let you talk to my Aunt Bobbi on the phone! I listened every time you talked about Dean! I thought.”

Dean is in the doorway of the bathroom now, watching them. Probably heard every word. Sam is crying too, at this point, tears spilling on his dirty shirt. He closes his eyes, looks down.

“I’m so sorry,” he offers pointlessly, not even flinching when she shoves him.

“Are you his brother?”

Sam opens his eyes and sees with growing horror that Audrey is looking right at Dean, her chin trembling. Dean just blinks at her, hopelessly confused, glancing between Sam and Audrey like maybe there’s a right or wrong answer here.

“Uh. Yeah?”
There’s an eerie stillness in the room, none of the three people in it moving for several beats. Then Audrey is moving, grabbing her shoes and her bag. She shoves past Dad who is just coming back into the room, probably to tell Sam and Dean to move their asses. He looks surprised that he’s pushed back against the door by a tiny girl, but he’s more amused than angry.

Dad and Dean are both looking at Sam now, and Sam can’t move in fear that he’s going to come apart at the seams, that he’s going to have a breakdown right between the two people he tries to keep everything from.

“I take it she didn’t take too kindly to you breaking up with her?” Dean is smiling, of all things. Sam looks over at him, his face red and shining with tears. It’s a strange moment, for him. It’s the first time he’s ever truly wanted to be dead. That he thinks about the gun in his bag and craves its cold metal under his chin. It’s a terrifying feeling, this recklessness, this craving for his own violence.

He wonders suddenly if he’ll ever go through with it. If he could really ever kill himself. If he could stand to leave Dean.

He wonders if he’ll kiss Dean before he does it. If he’ll find the courage even then.

It feels like a matter of time. But he knows he won’t kiss Dean, not ever.

It’s spreading through him like poison, this feeling. Thinks he could go outside right now and stand in the street. It’s so dark out, not many streetlights on the county side. A car would hit him before they even realized he was there. It might be messy though, might not get things done.

The gun would though.

“Sam, what are you doing?”

Sam blinks back into himself, climbing up out of the ever-expanding blackness of his mind and he’s in the motel room with Dean. Dad is gone again, the motel room door closed. Sam finds himself sitting on the bed, his gun in his hand. Dean is right beside him, a hand on his back. Sam is shaking.

“Hey. Hey.” Dean’s voice is soft, red-rimmed with raw worry. His big hand is resting over both of Sam’s on the gun, spanning almost the whole handle, all of Sam’s fingers. “Talk to me. What’s wrong? What happened with that girl?”

Sam stares at Dean’s hand. Knuckles busted and scarred, like always. Misshapen with calcium from hitting so many things. Middle finger crooked from being broken when Dean was sixteen and again last winter. His thumbnail is missing now, the nailbed just starting to grow a new one, the skin above it raw and deep pink. His hand is so warm on Sam’s. Sam is always cold now, always cold. Piles blankets and blankets on and still cold. Dean touches him for thirty seconds and he’s burning up. That means something. Even with his finger toying with the safety on his gun, he knows it means something. This hold Dean has on him will always mean something.

He leans against Dean, sinks into his side. He’s not crying anymore, and he can’t find his voice, doesn’t know what happened to it. He lets Dean take his gun, doesn’t watch as he empties it and tucks it into his jeans at his back, right beside Dean’s own gun.

“Sam, we really gotta go. This thing.” Dean is kneeling in front of him now, shoving Sam’s feet into his shoes, tying them with the efficiency of a man who practically raised Sam, who has tied his shoes hundreds of times. “This thing knows we’re on it. It... Dad’s afraid it might’ve been coming after you. Heading for you. We got here as fast as we could. We have to hole up. Hide out. Keep you safe. Okay? Hey, you hearin’ me?”
His shoes are tied and Sam can’t even lift his eyes now. Doesn’t care. Can’t even find the words to tell Dean to leave him here, let the thing come, let it have him. He feels himself being pulled to his feet, an arm going under his, holding him up.

“We gotta get some food in you. God, Sammy, you’ve probably lost ten pounds since I seen you.”

It’s balmy and dark and Sam knows they’re outside now. He hears the creak-groan of the backdoor opening on the car and the smell of it floods his nose, brings tears to his eyes without his consent. Home. He’s home.

He sinks down into the vinyl backseat, curling up on his side. The door is still open and Dean is gone. Sam can hear Dad talking on the phone, leaning against the driver door. Talking to Bobby. Audrey is gone. She hates him. She’ll never know the truth. She was the best friend he’s ever had, and she’ll never know anything real about him.

A crunch of footsteps goes by the car and then the trunk’s being shut. Dean is near him again, his warmth all over Sam as he leans over him, lifts Sam’s head to put a pillow underneath his head, draping a blanket over his body. “You’re freezing,” Dean growls, his hands all over Sam like he owns him.

Dean’s hands spread out and span Sam’s waist, thumbs bumping over his jutting hipbones. They slide up to his ribs and out over his arms to his bony wrists. Sam hisses when Dean touches the scar on his wrist that is bitten-open, that is an angry red circle now instead of pale white. Dean’s thumb slides over it and Sam moans, can’t help it. His dick stirs in his pants and he shifts on the seat, his eyes fluttering but not opening.

“What is going on with you? God, Sam.” Dean sighs, drops Sam’s hand after a minute, reaching up to push Sam’s ever-growing hair away from his face. “You’re gonna eat when we get to Fort Wayne. You hear me?”

Sam nods, an automatic reaction. Dean is here. Dean’s smell, the smell of the car, Dad’s voice, everything he wanted. He feels hunger scratching at him, the feeling absolutely overwhelming and seeming to come from nowhere. Dean’s hand is still in his hair, still petting when another door opens and the car moves, creaks when Dad sinks down into the driver’s seat.

“C’mon, get up here, Dean. We’ve gotta go. Bobby’s almost there.”

“I’m gonna stay back here with Sam.”

“No, you’re not. Bobby’s gonna call back, and I need you to be up here. I’m runnin’ on fumes, boy. Now.”

Dean pauses and Sam, even in his half-aware state, can sense the struggle in him. He hears Dean sigh finally, feels that warm hand leave him and the car moves again, a door closing, a door opening, Dean sinking into the front seat next to Dad.

“Sam needs to eat.”

“Sam can take care of himself. He doesn’t need you to hold his hand anymore. He’ll eat when we get where we’re goin’.”

The car starts up and Creedence blares from the speakers. Sam stays right where he is as they pull out of the parking lot, his hands slipping under his sweatpants, nails digging in to re-open barely-healed wounds. He falls asleep with blood spilling over his shaking hands.
It’s late November in when Sam’s phone lights up beside him, vibrating and on silent because he’s in the library, studying.

Bobby.

His heart rate picks up as he grabs his phone, mashing the answer button while he jogs to the exit, not saying anything until he’s outside.

“How’s it going, Sam?” Bobby sounds far away, like he’s standing in a cave. Sam walks and sits down on a bench near the entrance, the sun setting off in the distance, splashing brilliance colors all over the sky.

“I’m okay, I guess. Studying at the library.”

“Where y’all at?”

“Uh. Grand Junction, Iowa.” He wrinkles his nose as he says it, not trying to hide his disdain. The town doesn’t even have a stoplight. Just two stop signs. Bobby snorts.

“Your daddy sure knows how to pick holes in the wall, duddn’t he?”

Sam hesitates, gnawing on his lip. “Look. Bobby. I know that Dad’s real sorry about what he said back in July. He didn’t mean it. He’s just been really stressed out lately and--”

“Sam, I didn’t call you to discuss the on-going soap opera I’ve got goin’ with your Dad. You told me to call you if you got anything in the mail, and I’m callin.”

Sam blinks. Nothing moves around him, not a leaf, not a bird. No cars or people. He can only hear the blood rushing through his ears as his heart leaps and jumps around in his chest.

“What.” He clears his throat, his voice surprisingly steady. “What did I get?”

“A packet. Like you said.”

Sam jumps to his feet, pacing back and forth in front of the bench for a minute before he finds his voice again. “From where?”

“Stanford.”

August 2001
Sam has freshman orientation at Stanford in a month. Thirty-three days, to be exact. He has a roommate, a full scholarship, and nearly $3,000 saved up in a bank account with his real name on it.

And the only person who even knows vaguely about any of it is Bobby.

--

Denver is bigger than most places they’ve spent any real time in. They have only been here for a week, but Sam still doesn’t plan on venturing any further out than the Highlands neighborhood they’re staying in. He doesn’t need any new adventures, any new friends. He’s leaving in a month.

“Sam, why don’t you get off your ass and go do something?”

Dad is lounging around on the couch, a cold beer in his hand. Sam looks up from where he’s making a sandwich in the kitchen.

“Huh?”

“Linda is going to be here soon.”

It’s all Dad says, but the words linger in the air like a weird smell. Sam frowns down at the lettuce he tears off and rinses in the sink. It’s not until he’s halfway through slicing a tomato that he gets it. His eyes fly open wide and he turns to look at his father.

“Ew!”

Dad looks up, amusement all over his face. He raises his eyebrows and tries to do his best impression of an innocent person.

“What?”

“I don’t wanna know if you’re having sex!” He cuts the tomato faster now that it seems he has an impending deadline. He piles a couple onto his sandwich and slaps the second piece of bread on top.

“Then you’d better leave in the next half hour, man.” Dad sounds way too satisfied and it makes Sam shudder.

Linda is the woman letting them rent this house for a suspiciously low amount of money for an unspecified amount of time. And now Sam knows why.

She’s around Dad’s age, pretty in that middle-aged way, and definitely flirts with Dad. A lot. Just the thought of seeing her kiss his father makes him grab a paper towel and wrap it around his sandwich.

“I’m leaving.”

“Hey. Why don’t you make a couple for your brother and bring ‘em to him down at the shop? He was runnin’ late this morning. Don’t think he had time to grab anything for lunch.”

Sam sighs, a low, familiar ache settling across his stomach at just the mention of Dean. They haven’t exactly been best friends lately.

“Dad.”

“Are you kidding me with that voice? Why do you sound more and more like a toddler the taller you get? Is that some kind of reverse psychology thing?”
Sam scowls and drags the bread back out. Doesn’t bother responding to his father.

Thirty-three days.

--

He makes it down to the shop about forty-five minutes later. It’s in an old brick building that looks like it’s always been an auto repair shop, but this particular business is pretty new, as far as Dean’s said.

It’s Dean’s third day on the job, and it’s the fourth and final garage that he had tried to get on at. He’d started looking for jobs their second day in town and hadn’t stopped until he found one. He can’t sit still at the house and just enjoy summer, it seems. And getting to play around with engines is an added bonus.

A dull-sounding bell announces Sam’s arrival into the tiny lobby of the joint, and he’s surprised by how clean it is. The woman behind the counter to his left raises her eyebrows at him, smiling in a strained, professional way that everyone who interacts with the public for a living understands. Even Sam.

“Can I help you?”

“Hi, yeah, uh. My, um. My brother works here? Dean? I was just.” Sam blushes, looking down at the grocery bag swinging in his hand. “Bringing him some lunch.”

Her smile melts into something genuine, her eyes softening. She looks a little younger than his dad, but old enough to get gooey in that mom sort of way at the shy, lanky boy standing in her lobby.

“He’s right through that door there, sugar. Go on in.” She points with a pen to the door just to her left, and he smiles his thanks at her before walking toward it.

The loud, metallic sounds of a car garage and classic rock burst into his eardrums the second he opens the door, and he can’t help but cringe. He makes sure the door closes after him, and he nearly jumps when he turns around and finds someone standing right in front of him, like they just appeared.

He finds himself face-to-face with a guy maybe a little older than Dean and about the same height. Intensely dark brown eyes meet his own and the guy breaks out into a smile, his eyes trailing hot and obvious over Sam’s body. Sam blushes, clutching the bag in both hands now like a lifeline.

“Hey there, doll. You lost?”

Sam’s eyes flick up and the guy is still staring at him, really staring at him, like Sam is a hot pizza or something. He almost expects the guy to lick his lips. Oh, shit. Like that.

Sam swallows, turning an even deeper shade of pink.

“Hi. I’m. My name is Sam.” He looks behind the guy at the couple of cars in the garage, desperately trying to find Dean.

“Hi, Sam.”

“Hi.” Oh, god. Sam tucks his hair behind his ear, fidgeting like a schoolgirl. He clears his throat softly. “Um. My. Dean.”
The guy raises his eyebrows, full lips tugging into a smirk. “Your Dean?”

“Yeah.” It comes out like a sigh, a relieved sound. Then he realizes what he’d just agreed to. His eyes widen. “I mean, no! No. My. My brother, Dean. I. I mean. Dean is my brother.”

“Gorgeous family.”

Jesus, this guy is flirting the air right out of Sam’s body. He can’t help but laugh, soft and breathy.

“Thanks. Um.” He lifts the bag he’s holding like a peace offering. “I. I was just bringing Dean some lunch. He was running behind this morning, and--”

The guy grins at Sam, turns his head. “Hey, Winchester!”

“Yeah?” Dean’s grunt echoes in the room and Sam jerks his head to the right just in time to see Dean crawl out from under an old Buick. His dick twitches at just the sight, at Dean in coveralls. He loves Dean in coveralls. Dean raises his eyebrows at Sam as he wipes his hands on an already-dirty rag.

“Sam. What’s up?”

“Hi.” Sam gives Dean a weak smile and a stupid wave, feeling just as nervous in front of Dean as he is in front of this new guy. He glances back over to find the guy still staring at him. He’s trapped in a room with two of the most sexually magnetic men he’s ever met in his life. Christ, to be between them.

“I brought you lunch!” His voice cracks most attractively. He watches Dean look down, spot the bag, and then break into a smile.

“Awesome.”

Sam watches Dean come over and he holds out the bag for Dean to take, smiling in a helpless, stupid kind of way when Dean pokes around inside of it.

“A couple of BLTs and some Doritos and banana pudding. And a couple of Cokes, since. I didn’t know if you had anything to drink.” He pushes his now empty hands into his pockets, shoulders drawing in. He’s officially just as tall as Dean now, and he always wants to crouch down when they’re standing this close. It’s weird. It’s so weird not looking up at him anymore.

“Thanks, man. Hey, Sam, this is my boss, Dominic. He owns this place. This is my brother, Sam.”

Dean pulls out one of the Cokes and opens it one-handed, nodding between Sam and Dominic by way of introductions. Sam dares to look back over and Dominic is caught mid-stare at Sam’s mouth. He offers Sam his hand and Sam takes it, amazed at the guy’s grip, his long fingers.

Jesus.

“You can call me Dom.” His grin is huge, flirtatious and Sam’s cheeks burn all over again. Dom. Amazing.

“Hi, Dom.”

Dom is still shaking Sam’s hand, slow and squeezing gently and staring right at his face, right in front of Dean. Sam tries to tug his hand back away but Dom doesn’t let him.

“How in the world do I get a beautiful boy of my very own to bring me lunch?”” Dom bites his bottom lip, his eyes absolutely undressing Sam. Sam can feel it, feel it in a way he never has with any other person before. He shivers, not able to look away from the intensity of Dom’s staring.
Dean snorts, rolls his eyes. He sinks down into a chair against the wall where they’re all standing, starting to unwrap the paper towel from around one of the BLTs.

“Dom’s into dudes. Don’t mind him, Sam.”

Sam grins for that, for how easy and dismissive Dean is of it, for the way it makes Dom laugh.

“How old are you, Sam?”

“Eighteen.”

Dom lets out a sigh of relief, both hands pushing up across his face and into his short, black hair.

“Oh, thank, god. Thought you were about to break my heart.”

Sam laughs, short and nervous, glancing over at Dean a couple of times. Dean is watching them, mostly staring at Dom, the expression on his face a little wary, guarded. Sam finally has his hand back and shoves it back into his pocket.

“So, I, uh. I gotta go. Gonna go try and find the library.”

“Sam here’s a brain. He almost got a perfect score on the SAT.”

Dom nearly purrs, really. He steps closer to Sam, his hand twitching at his side like he wants to reach up and touch him. Sam finds himself leaning forward just a little, subconsciously welcoming it.

“Amazing,” Dom says in nearly a whisper, and it’s so warm that Sam feels it tingle along his spine. He can’t help but smile at Dom, maybe a little entranced by him, by his easy praise, by his unfaltering attention. “The library’s just a couple of blocks up, over on Boulder. Take a right and it’ll be on the right.”

“Thanks.” He clears his throat again when he hears how breathy his own voice is. He looks back over and finds Dean flat-out scowling at both of them, most of his sandwich forgotten on his lap. Sam catches his eyes and the warning in Dean’s is enough to snap Sam out of any daydreams he might be having. He reaches back, his hand lighting on the doorknob.

“Alright, so, um. I guess I’m gone. I’ll see you later, Dean.” Dean just grunts, his eyes on Dom not and not leaving. Sam looks up at Dom and finds him still staring. Hasn’t stopped since Sam came in the door. Sam shivers.

“Please tell me you’ll come back soon, Sam. Don’t make me come and serenade you at your window.” Dom takes a step closer to him and the scrape of a chair across the floor makes Sam jump. He looks up to see Dean standing and getting closer, sandwich clasped in his hand.

“I wouldn’t recommend that. My dad’s a perfect shot,” Dean warns, his tone light but Sam recognizes the threat in it. Dom laughs and Sam, not wanting to make Dom feel awkward, laughs too, just a little. He looks back and finds Dean watching him, all but shoving him out the door.

“B-bye.”

“Bye, sweet Sam.”

“Christ, Dom. Don’t embarrass yourself.” Dean shoves at Dom, maybe a little too hard but Dom’s a muscled, solid guy, too, and he doesn’t go too far. Dom laughs again, such a real, kind laugh. Sam finally tears his eyes away after Dom glances back at him, eyes glinting happily when he finds Sam
Sam all but runs from the shop, not stopping until he’s back on the sidewalk.

Sam still feels a warmth all through him, like Dom’s eyes are still on him, appreciating every single inch of Sam, even all the parts that Sam hates about himself.

It’s kind of an amazing feeling.

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Dad is gone by the time Sam leaves the library and moseys back to the house, and there aren’t any cars in the driveway, not the Impala or Linda’s red Honda Accord. Thank fuck.

The rain started up about ten minutes ago and officially started pouring the second Sam put his key into the lock of the front door. He shakes his hair out, water flying everywhere, as he steps into the kitchen. He peels his soaked shirt and shoes off, leaving him in a pair of Dean’s old jeans that hug him a little more than he’s comfortable with. But they’re Dean’s, so.

It’s kind of nice, being the only one home, in the middle of a late summer rain storm. This place is so nice compared to the usual shitholes they get. It’s nothing big or special, but there aren’t any leaks or holes kicked into walls or weird smells. It’s kind of awesome, actually.

Sam stops up the sink and squeezes some soap in, filling it with hot water so he can do the dishes that had piled up since last night.

He can’t help but think about Dom, about the heat in his eyes. Can’t help but wonder what Dom would do to him, if Sam gave him free reign. Dom is beautiful, really, really sexy in that dark, Italian sort of way. He looks like a statue in a museum, except his entire face lights up when he smiles. He knows he should feel at least a little creeped out by so much attention, but it hadn’t felt weird at all. Just. Genuine.

Sam hears another key in the front door and he turns his head just in time for the door to open to yell, “I don’t wanna hear about your sexcapades, Dad!”

He turns his head to grin at his father and his knees almost buckle when he sees Dean, hair a little damp, eyebrows raised in bemusement. Sam nearly groans when he sees Dom right behind him.

“Uh. Okay,” Dean starts, stepping into the house to let Dom in. He peels off his jacket and Sam can only stare at him, at the rain slicking up Dean’s neck. Jesus God Almighty. “I don’t think I wanna know why you were gonna say that to Dad. Do I?”

Sam pulls his hands from the soapy water, reaching over blindly to grab a towel to dry them off. He shakes his head at Dean, his face on fire. He glances over to find Dom just stopped in the doorway, a hand braced on the frame of it like he can’t hold himself up. Dean lets out a little breath of laughter and Sam can’t help but look back over at him.

“You always do dishes shirtless when I’m not home, kid?” Dean walks by him to get to the fridge, not failing to reach over and twist one of Sam’s nipples so perfectly that Sam whimpers, reaching up to rub at the skin that turned pink so quickly to match his cheeks. He wants to ask Dean to do that again, or at least give fair treatment to the other one. But Dom is in the kitchen and Dean is handing him a beer, and Sam is being a blushing, shirtless twink in his own kitchen. Great.

“N-no,” Sam finally answers, eyes lowered to stare at his abused nipple. Fuck. Well, he knows what he’s going to be thinking about tonight when he jerks off. “I got caught in the rain on the way back looking.
from the library. Just got home a few minutes ago.”

“Care to put a shirt on, then? Not all of us wanna see your scrawny ass in all its glory.” Dean leans against the counter and smirks at Sam whose heart sinks straight down to his stomach. Sam can feel both Dom and Dean’s eyes on him, and it would feel amazing if not for Dean’s words. Sam reaches up to cover up his chest, wrapping his arms around himself.

“Yeah, well I do,” Dom grins at him, stepping closer to Sam to pull his arms down away. “This is a dream come true. Comin’ home to find you in the kitchen, half-naked.”

“Dom, you need to get laid. I bet there’s a million gay bars in this city just waiting for you. Sam’s straight.” Dean pushes up off the counter and punches Dom’s arm in seeming affection, but Sam sees how hard Dean rears back to do it. Dom laughs as Dean retreats into the livingroom, the sound of the TV starting up.

Sam is left alone in the kitchen with Dom, and he looks up to find Dom’s eyes burning on his own, the question in them unmistakable: Are you seriously straight?

Sam blushes more, somehow, head ducking like he’s a preteen girl in front of her crush. He glances up through his lashes, his teeth catching on his bottom lip. Dom’s face lights up, his smile bigger than it ever has been before. Like that’s all the answer he needs.

“Here, man. Found your team playing on TV,” Dean calls from the livingroom, and Sam clears his throat.

“I’m gonna, um. Go put on a shirt.”

Dom reaches up to trail the back of his forefinger over Sam’s arm, letting it slide against the sensitive skin of his inner elbow. Sam draws in a deep breath, his eyes slipping closed to savor it.

“You have no idea how tempting you are. Do you?” Dom’s voice is soft, meant only for Sam. Sam can’t answer that because there’s no real way to, he only swallows hard as Dom’s fingers slip right over his waist.

“Dom, I swear to God, if you’re touchin’ my little brother, I will cut your dick off.” Dean is standing up now, heading back toward them, absolutely no humor on his face. Sam picks that moment to turn tail and run, closing the door behind him to his room.

He hears harsh, lowered voices outside in the kitchen and his heart is slamming double time against his ribs. He hurries to pull on a shirt, ignoring the fact that it’s his favorite old Zeppelin shirt of Dean’s, the one he’s been wearing since he was eleven. It’s way too small now, but he wears it stubbornly, loving the exact feel of the cotton on his skin. No other shirt feels like it.

He fixes his hair as much as he can by running his fingers through it, and takes a deep breath before heading back out.

It’s quiet except for the sounds of a baseball game coming from the television, and Dom has joined Dean on the couch. Sam leaves the dishes in their half-finished state and pulls a Dr. Pepper from the fridge before making his way into the livingroom.

Neither Dom or Dean looks at him as he crosses in front of them to get to the chair, and he feels only a little sad about it. He looks over at them after he gets settled in, Dean’s face a careful mask of neutrality, Dom’s a little more chided.

“Dom give you a ride because of the rain?” Sam tries to keep his voice light, oblivious. Like Dean
just didn’t threaten his boss with bodily harm for touching Sam.

“Yeah,” Dean grunts, taking a sip of his beer, not looking away from the TV. Sam licks his lips as he watches Dean do it, too. “Was gonna show him the car, but Dad’s not here.”

“Yeah, that’s why I left earlier. Linda was apparently coming by. I guess they took the party over to her place.” Sam wrinkles his nose and opens his can, giving Dean a few seconds to get it.

“Ew!” Dean sounds so much like Sam had earlier with Dad that Sam grins at him, and this time, Dean glances over, not smiling but he wrinkles his nose at Sam. Commiseration. He’ll take that, too.

Exactly. Which is why I said what I did when you all came in earlier.” Sam laughs a little, settling back in his seat. He can feel Dom looking at him from the corners of his eyes though he’s clearly trying not to. Somehow, that feels even hotter than all the blatant staring.

“Yeah, well. Dom here has decided to teach me about the exciting world of baseball.” Dean rolls his eyes at Sam but the smile that follows is sweet. Sam wants to crawl in Dean’s lap. “So, here we are.”

“You played baseball at that one school your freshmen year. You ‘member? You were an amazing pitcher.” Sam can’t keep the pride from his voice even as Dean’s cheeks color a little.

Dom looks over at Dean for the first time since Sam came in the room, eyebrows raised. “You didn’t tell me you played!”

“It was for like, five months! It’s not like we did anything important.”

“You guys won regionals that year. Mostly because of your arm.” Sam is grinning now, loving how uncomfortable Dean is with real praise, with reminders that he earnestly tried at something that wasn’t hunting or girls.

“We won because we had a banshee of a cheerleader in the crowd who scared the other teams away.” Dean smirks behind the lip of his bottle and Sam gives him the exasperated sound that Dean’s looking for, playing the little brother right to the letter.

“Hey! You liked me coming to those games!”

“You didn’t have to wear a cheerleader outfit!” Dean is almost laughing now, especially when he sees the horror on Sam’s face. Sam can see Dom shift on the couch, adjusting himself as covertly as he can. Hm. Interesting.

“Jerk,” Sam retorts finally, grinning when Dean’s eyes find his.

“Bitch.”

“God, you two are so adorable,” Dom finally says, glancing between Sam and Dean. Sam blushes, his heart maybe soaring a little bit. Because, God, he thinks they are, too.

“Do you not have any brothers?” Sam is turned more toward Dom and Dean than the game because, honestly, he couldn’t care less about it. Dom turns his attention to Sam all too readily, those eyes so dark and promising when they meet his own.

“Nah. I’ve got three sisters. My family’s Italian, and it would’ve been a lot bigger, but my parents got divorced when I was fourteen. Kind of stopped the party early, you know?”

“I don’t think I’d know what to do with sisters,” Sam replies truthfully. He knows it’s terrible, but he
never feels too bad when kids tell him their parents are divorced. Because his reply would be, yeah, well, my mom burned alive when I was still nursing, and I’ve only had about five real conversations with my dad in my whole life.

Dean keeps his eyes on the game but he’s very obviously listening to every single word.

“Sisters are amazing.” Dom’s voice is brimming with warmth as he leans forward to put his bottle on the coffee table and pull his wallet out of his backpocket. He fishes out a little picture from the depths of his nice leather wallet and passes the picture over to Sam.

He finds himself staring at three gorgeous girls--women, really--all with long dark hair, Dom’s Italian nose, and huge dark eyes. They’re all smiling, caught mid-laugh, it seems. There’s an older woman between two of the sisters, but they’re all hugging her, somehow. There are a few wrinkles around her eyes, but she’s still easily as beautiful as the girls. Her dark hair is in a horsetail-thick braid over one shoulder.

“My mama and Veronica, Isabella, and Catalina. My baby sisters. Veronica just had a baby. A little boy. Sergio.” Another picture gets pushed into Sam’s hands, this one of a fat, pink baby with a thick shock of dark hair. It just looks like a regular baby, but Dom is beaming proudly.

“They’re all beautiful,” Sam tells him, meeting his eyes to give him his warmest smile. Dom takes the pictures back to stare down at them, and Dean leans over to squint at the family photo. He lets out a low whistle.

“Damn. The one in the dress. Which one’s that?”

“Isabella. She’s nineteen.” Dom sounds a little hesitant to share this information with Dean, and he glances over at him before he puts his pictures and then his wallet away.

“Hey, you mind hooking me up?” Dean waggles his eyebrows at Dom, giving him his best little boy smile which fails miserably. Dean hasn’t had a genuine little boy smile since he was about six.

Dom looks over at Dean then, considering. “Sure. If you let me take Sam out.”

Dean scowls for that, his jaw clenching as he grips his beer. “Yeah, nevermind.”

He drains his beer and gets up immediately for a new one. Dom glances over at Sam, winking at him. He tips his head back to beckon Sam closer to him, and Sam leans over, helpless to do anything but obey. Dom’s mouth slides right over his ear.

“Meet me outside your place at midnight.”

They both lean back a literal second before Dean turns around, and Dom lifts his empty bottle to Dean to ask for a new one, too. Sam shifts and turns to face the TV for the first time since he sat down, the pink on his cheeks probably a permanent fixture after all this.

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He considers not going.

He sits on the end of his bed, shoes still untied. He thinks about how awkward it had been between him and Dean after Dom had left and before Dad got home.

They barely speak to each other anymore, barely know how to string together a few sentences to talk to each other. Sam feels, on so many levels, like it’s his own fault. That he’s driven Dean to this,
whatever it is. That he is the one who lost the connection that always seemed so unbreakable between them.

He listens to the faint sounds of cicadas outside, the sound of two guys laughing up the street from his open window.

Eight minutes until it’s thirty-two days.

He thinks about Dean in bed across the hall. The fact that Dean is home at all, that he’d gone to bed early. Dad in the room next to his, also in bed. Like they’re some kind of normal, domesticated fucking family. And here Sam is, the freak, the one about to sneak outside to get felt up by a guy seven years older than him.

He sighs. Leans over to tie his shoes.

Sneaking out is harder to do in a house of hunters. It takes Sam about ten minutes to get from his door to the front step, but he’d done it with hardly a single sound. He doesn’t have time to be proud because Dom is right there, a new black Mustang convertible pulled up beside their house, Dom himself like the physical embodiment of that car, leaning back against it, arms folded, waiting. Watching Sam. Sam shivers. Hesitates on the steps. Thinks about Dean, really thinks about him. Pictures him curled up in his bed, arms wrapped around his pillow, fingers around the handle of a knife hiding there. Imagines kissing up the backs of his thighs as he climbs into bed beside him.

Never. He’ll never have it. But he can at least have this.

He smiles at Dom and makes his way over to him, grateful for the darkness when he blushes at how Dom’s hand ghosts over his cheek.

“Didn’t know if you’d come.” Dom’s voice is soft, like maybe they could be overheard. It sends a thrill through Sam’s body. It’s hard to be rebellious in this weird family of his. Rebellious is how Sam likes books over guns, writing essays over research about monsters. And rebellious is now sneaking out to hook up with a guy.

He leans into Dom’s touch, doesn’t shy away though his knees shake, his cheeks burn. Dom smells so good, like something spicy and masculine. It makes Sam’s mouth water.

“Where are we going?” Sam is just as quiet, maybe a little timid. Dom’s hand slides down Sam’s neck and down his chest to rub over his side, his hip. He watches Dom shrug, feels the burn of his breath as he touches Sam.

“Where do you wanna go?”

It calms Sam a little, that Dom is giving him the choice. That he’s not expected to just spread out in this man’s bed. He licks his lips, tearing his eyes away from the cross gleaming around Dom’s neck to focus on the car they’re leaning up against.

“Why don’t you take me for a ride?”

He grins at the way Dom groans, the way he uses his grip on Sam to pull him closer so he can push his face into Sam’s neck. Sam can feel the thick line of his dick very near his own, and he takes a deep breath to force himself to stay calm.

“Don’t say shit like that to me, you little tease.”

Sam laughs, a little huff of a sound, and he looks up to meet Dom’s eyes in the light from the
streetlight, from the moon. Dom is grinning at him, biting his bottom lip as he gives Sam a squeeze.

“Come on, boy.” Dom punctuates the statement with a firm slap on Sam’s ass, one that makes Sam’s eyes fly open wide, his mouth part. Dom opens the passenger door for Sam, his mouth going right up against his ear when Sam starts to climb into the car. “Don’t think I’m not gonna spank you later until you beg me to stop either.”

Sam all but falls down into the car, a little breathless already, his vision swimming with the heady overwhelm of lust that seeps through him. He barely notices when the car roars to life and they ease down the street, all but announcing their rendezvous to the entire fucking neighborhood.

They’re quiet as they make their way out of Denver, and Sam takes the time to relax into the seat, into being next to someone in a car that isn’t Dean or his Dad. Dom surprises him by not groping him, not flirting with him, not ogling him from the driver’s seat with one eye on the road.

They leave Denver proper and they start into the mountains, the road rising and rising the more they drive, the curves breathtakingly blind, the roads narrow and empty. The stars explode into view away from the dampening lights of the city, bright rushes of the Milky Way ribboning through more stars than Sam can ever recall seeing before.

Dom just drives on, not showing off or driving too fast, just enjoying the journey, quiet and contemplative in his own way. There’s a pull-off after about an hour and Dom takes it, stopping the car almost at the edge of a cliff that overlooks the expanse of what has to be mountains beyond, but it’s too dark to really see anything.

Sam sees the distant smatter of lights of Denver and the unending stars above. Dom kills the engine and looks over at him. Sam’s breath quickens a little when he feels it.

“You ever been up here?” Dom’s speaking softly to him, like they’re in bed, like Sam is half asleep. Sam doesn’t look at him, isn’t brave enough yet. He just shakes his head, his fingers sliding along the door where the window is rolled down. His eyes flutter but don’t close when he feels Dom’s fingers slide through his hair, the tips of them dancing over his earlobe.

“Sam, do you know how beautiful you are? Do you know how gone I am for you already? God.”

He hears Dom unbuckle his seatbelt and slide closer to where Sam is sitting, mindful of the gearshift between them. He tips his head when he feels Dom’s mouth on his neck, lets him kiss just as much as he wants. It feels so good, unbelievably good, his stomach tightening with every slide of soft lips. He shifts in his seat, his dick already almost completely hard, and he gasps when he feels Dom’s fingers slide through his hair, the tips of them dancing over his earlobe.

“You ever sucked a dick before?”

The question brings him back to the moment, to thirty-two days before he leaves his family and to
this man who is halfway in love with him next to him. Sam turns his head for the first time since they stopped the car, looks up at Dom with what he knows is a submissive gaze.

“N-no,” he manages, the tremble running through his voice and all over his body. Dom smiles at him, so close and warm and they’re kissing before Sam knows it, a tongue writhing and alive in his mouth. He licks at it, opens his mouth wider so Dom can get as far in as he wants.

This.

This is so much better than kissing girls. This is harder and bigger and rougher. This is Sam feeling small and helpless and supplicating and a little afraid. This is bruises and being made to do things he never has.

He hears the sound of a button being undone, a zipper being worked down. He can smell Dom’s cock, the heat of it, before he sees it. Dom pulls back from kissing him and just looks down at Sam’s mouth, the edge of his thumb pressing in against his already-swollen bottom lip.

“Do only as much as you want. I won’t force you. Okay?”

Sam nods in agreement, already licking his lips. Dom lets him go and settles back in his seat, his dick sticking up hard from his fist, uncut, the tip glistening beneath his foreskin. Sam takes a deep breath and turns toward him, curling down in his seat, the angle awkward but it feels so good out here, so safe in the big, empty night at the tail end of summer.

He doesn’t lick like a virgin, doesn’t need to test this out. Not really. He’s thought about this since he knew what a dick was for, when he really realized what he wanted to do with Dean in bed at night. He wraps his lips around the soft head and lets his tongue start swirling.

He hears Dom suck in a deep breath, probably unprepared for Sam’s hunger. Sam moves Dom’s hand out of the way and holds Dom’s dick himself, his hand a tight fist that pulls down, the foreskin sliding away from the head and Sam finally gets his lips right up against the ridge, tongue licking and insistent at his slit.

“Shit, boy, God, do you know how to take dick. Not gonna last long in that mouth.”

Sam swears that Dom crosses himself and it makes Sam almost smile. He pulls off his dick and pushes the foreskin back up, watching it gather up at the top. He lifts his eyes to Dom and finds him watching, his eyes black in the utter lack of light, chest rising and falling fast. Sam slides his tongue out and lets it lick around all underneath that skin, tonguing hard and sucking on the foreskin when he can get his lips around it. Dom moans, loud and unbidden, hips jerking up as he pushes down on the back of Sam’s head, shoving his dick back into his mouth.

Sam gags and moans almost at the same time, trying to relax his throat while Dom fucks up into his mouth, nearly gagging every time the head of his dick hits the very back of his throat.

“Doin’ so good, boy. God, gonna make me come so good. Oh, sweet little Sammy, God.”

Sam whimpers for that, shifting around in his seat to get on his knees in it, making the angle a little bit better. He arches his back when he feels Dom’s big hand slide down his spine, moaning low around the dick in his mouth when Dom’s fingers push down the back of his pants and his underwear.

Sam shoves a hand between his own legs, rubbing at his dick just the way Dom was, trying so hard to focus on the dick in his mouth and not the fingers sliding down the crack of his ass, the blunt, calloused tips of them pushing over and against his hole like they own it.
He focuses on how hard Dom is, how strangely soft and vulnerable the skin in his mouth is, on the sweat-salt-earth taste of dick. Of a man. He makes sure to keep his teeth out of it, makes sure to use his tongue a lot. Dean always talks about what good head feels like, talks about the importance of tongue and no teeth.

He jerks when he feels the tip of a dry finger push into him, his hole clenching up on instinct but he wants it, fuck he wants it. He rips his own pants open with a shaking, rushed hand, reaching in to grab his own dick so he can jerk off as best as he can.

Dom is falling apart above him, sounds leaving his mouth like he’s dying, like Sam is taking him apart piece by piece. His hand is gripped in Sam’s hair, tight enough to be felt but not tight enough to hurt too bad. He’s guiding Sam to bob on his dick, guiding him into a good rhythm but not forcing him. Sam’s surprised by how deep he can take him, how quickly he’s gotten used to this invasion.

It feels hotter all of a sudden, the air around them thickening and intensifying, and Dom is gasping for air. The dick in Sam’s mouth jerks, hardens even more somehow and he has the presence of mind to jerk the base off as hard as he can, barely fighting the urge to gag as Dom finally forces his hips up, shoving his dick hard into Sam’s mouth as he starts to come.

It floods all of his senses, the taste of come. It’s just as weird as it always is when Sam tastes his own, that strange texture that he can’t really compare to anything else, but it’s so fucking hot. He swallows it down, mouthful after mouthful, his tongue working so hard that it hurts to bring Dom through his orgasm.

That finger shoves up harder inside of him, deep and questing and Sam gets in a few good squeezes on his dick before he’s coming, too, damp heat flooding his underwear. He breathes hard into Dom’s crotch, inhaling the heady scent of sex while he keeps suckling on his cock, the motion almost comforting as Sam soars and sinks for the next shaking seconds.

He doesn’t think he’s ever come so hard in his fucking life.

Dom eases Sam off his dick with a little hiss, pulling him up off of it and Sam follows blindly, doesn’t stop until they’re kissing again, Dom’s tongue lapping at his mouth. Sam sighs finally, lets himself be fed from, mouth open under Dom’s.

“Where’d you learn that? Hmm? Where’d you learn to be that good? God, I wanna keep you. Keep you for my own. God, Sam.” The words tumble out of Dom’s mouth between kisses, Dom’s finger curled inside of Sam, unmoving and strange and amazing.

They go still finally, their mouths tired, Sam’s tongue and jaw aching. Dom slips his finger out of Sam’s ass and brings it up to his mouth, moaning full-bodied as he sucks on it.

“Mm. Of course your ass tastes perfect. Fuck.”

Sam blushed, can’t help it. He sits back up and pushes his hair behind his ears, helplessly wondering what Dean’s doing, what he smells like right now, how heavy his warm body would be over Sam’s. He gasps out loud when he feels that hand questing again, pushing down into his pants and two spit-slicked fingers dig and shove into his ass, burning hot and pointed and Sam blinks over at Dom, wide-eyed.

“Gonna drive back with my fingers inside of you. So you’ll still feel me when you get home. You gonna shift for me, Sammy?”

Sam’s dick stirs at the thought, and he moves around in his seat, trying to find a way to get
comfortable with a hand under his ass. He nods, his cheeks hot. Dom smirks as he starts the car.

He makes Sam come on his hand two more times before they get back to the house.

The engine idles when Dom parks in the driveway, all of his attention turned to Sam. He strokes at Sam’s face with both hands, one sliding into his hair and the other one memorizing his face, it seems, fingertips tracing every line and shadow. Dom finally leans in and kisses him, sighs against his mouth. Sam’s heart flutters for the unfiltered adoration there.

“Thank you,” Dom whispers finally, smiling right against Sam’s lips. “You were amazing.”

Sam blushes for probably the millionth time that day, not really knowing what to say back, but it doesn’t seem to matter. Dom releases him, grinning as Sam unbuckles his seatbelt.

“Will I see you tomorrow night?”

Sam is already out of the car, about to close the door when Dom finally asks this. Sam turns around, takes in the sight of this successful, handsome grown man looking up at Sam like he’s the answer to every hard question he’s ever had. Sam can’t help but smile, eyes lowered as he nods. Dom leans over the seats like he can’t help it and kisses Sam one more time.

“Good. Sleep well, beautiful.”

“You, too,” Sam finally says, voice so soft it almost gets lost in the night. He can feel Dom’s eyes on him the entire way up to the front door, can hear the car’s engine the whole time. He opens the front door in tiny, slow movements, making sure not to let it creak. He steps in and closes the door behind him, turning the lock only after he makes sure the rest of the house is utterly silent.

“Where were you?”

Sam jumps at the sound of a voice behind him. He spins around and sees Dean in a chair at the small kitchen table, all the lights off. He can barely see Dean, can just make out his shadow, but he can feel the anger coming off of him in waves. Sam’s heart is beating so fast in his chest that he feels like he might faint.

“With. With a friend.” He’s a terrible liar, and with Dean, he’s a spectacularly terrible one.

“What friend?” The reply is almost immediate, and Dean stands up, not coming toward Sam yet but it’s only a matter of time. Sam stands right where he is, back nearly touching the front door, his legs shaking hard.

“Just. Just somebody I met today. At the library.” It’s a bold-faced lie, such a bad one that he can barely let it out. The whole house is so quiet, its collective breath held.

Then, outside, clear as day, the unmistakable sound of a Mustang engine pulls away from their house, the sound as damning as any truth Sam could confess right now. Dean takes a few steps toward him, everything about him menacing, a threat. He stops a few feet from Sam but Sam knows that Dean can see him in the light from the street. Can see his messed up hair, his swollen, slick mouth. The bruised sucked into his neck. Sam hopes with everything in him that Dean can’t see the absolute mess of the front of his pants, can’t smell the cock on his breath.

The air is so heavy between them, drooping with everything they’re not saying. They’re standing so still, facing each other, and Sam is practically begging Dean to call him on it. Because that’s why they’re here, isn’t it? That’s what Sam wants, ultimately, from this? He wants Dean to be angry, wants it to hurt. Wants Dean to ask himself why. Wants Dean to push and push Sam until he breaks,
tells Dean everything, sobs up every secret he’s kept since he was eleven years old. Wants to spill it from his throat like so much blood.

He wants Dean to be jealous. Jealous enough to act on it. It’s petty and cruel, but it’s only cruel if it works.

He imagines how this could be, if this all dissolved into the lust Sam can feel thrumming just under his skin. If the thing he feels isn’t just one-sided. If Dean shoved Sam up against the door so hard the locks rattled, if Sam could feel Dean’s dick like an angry, punishing thing against the come-slicked front of his own pants. If Dean claimed his mouth more thoroughly than Dom could ever dream. Because it’s Dean’s to claim.

“Go to bed, Sam.”

Dean sounds tired, drained. He turns his back on Sam and retreats to the kitchen. Sam closes his eyes, listens to the sound of a cabinet opening, a glass clinking with ice. Sam doesn’t realize that tears are spilling down his cheeks until he’s moving, walking down the hall with his head down.

He goes to his room and strips down, using his shirt to wipe himself relatively clean. He falls into bed, the covers at his feet from this morning, the curtain lifting from the breeze through the open window brushing over his naked body. He listens to the faint sounds of Dean moving at the other end of the house, hears him testing the locks at the front door, putting the chain on.

He hears him coming up the down the hall, hears him hesitate outside between their rooms.

Sam knows how fucked-up he is that he’s actually praying to God for his brother to come into his room, to make him pay for everything he did tonight. Everything they haven’t done over the years.

He lets out the breath he’d been holding when he hears Dean’s door open and softly close back, leaving the whole house silent.

Sam doesn’t even know why he believes in God anymore.

Thirty-two days.

Sam heads toward the garage the next afternoon, the two bags hanging off his arm heavy and loaded full. He knows what he’s doing, what he’s risking by even going, but he can’t help it. Sam was never the kid to sit by for too long and just watch. He had to get closer, poke at things, get to the root of them. He’d always asked too many questions, wanted to know too much for his own good.

He takes a deep breath before stepping into the shop, offering his best smile to the same woman who was here yesterday. Even though she’s on the phone, she beams at him, tipping her head to the door that he’d gone into last time. He takes it for the permission it is and steps up to it, waiting for a few beats to find any more courage he can muster before he opens up, stepping into the heart of the shop.

There are three cars in the garage, one up on a lift, and two more with the hoods open. There’s a man he doesn’t know under the lifted car, and two long bodies draped over the hoods of the other two.

He stays where he is for a few minutes, listening to Pink Floyd drifting lazily through the stale air. He watches the two bodies, knowing which one is Dean’s and which is Dom’s. When Dom lifts up
first, Sam sucks in a deep breath. Waits.

Dom wipes the sweat from his forehead off on his sleeve, leaving his face streaked with another swipe of dark smudge. He sees Sam then, hovering by the door, and Sam would swear that the room vibrates with the intensity of Dom’s smile.

They both glance over where Dean is still buried under the hood of a Dodge Intrepid, and Dom crosses the room quickly to get to Sam.

“Am I dreaming? God, look at you. Good enough to eat. Hi,” Dom breathes out the second he’s close enough to Sam, and Sam feels his face lifted by one firm hand and then Dom takes his mouth with his own. They kiss for a few beats, Dom’s tongue possessive in his mouth, but Sam pulls back with a shy smile.

“Sam?”

Sam jerks back, nearly falls on his ass on nothing but his own surprise at the sound of Dean’s voice. Sam cranes around Dom to see his brother who is sauntering up, working those coveralls with everything he’s worth. Sam watches him come through lowered lashes, licking the taste of Dom’s spit off his bottom lip.

Dean glares between them when he gets close, taking an extra step to sidle up next to Sam, making his territory clear to everyone involved. Sam looks up at him, gives him his most casual smile even though his chest is heaving just a little, for the rush of being here, being in a room with both of them again, being kissed by Dom, hiding from Dean, for the way Dean looks like he’s in the first five minutes of a gay porn with his dirty coveralls and his possessive stance. All of it, really.

“What are you doing here?” Dean doesn’t sound curious like he did yesterday, doesn’t even sound a little glad to see Sam. His eyes widen when he sees Dean squinting at his face. Sam reaches up self-consciously to rub at his lips, at his nose. Dean pulls a mostly clean rag out of his back pocket and wipes hard at Sam’s jaw. His fury is almost tangible now.

“Why was your face dirty?” Sam can only watch as Dean looks down at Dom’s hands, at the thick, black grease on them. Dom is watching Sam and only Sam, barely able to keep a smile from his lips. Dean nearly growls. “There a reason you’re here? And not fucking talking?”

“I just.” Sam mumbles down at the ground, feeling both of them so close, both tense, ready to pounce. He can’t help but lean towards Dean just a little bit. Because that’s where he’s always been, where he’s always belonged, really. He licks his lips. “Just brought you guys some lunch. Figured it was about time, and I was bored, so.”

The beat of silence is only a few seconds, but it’s so heavy that Sam nearly runs away, leaves both of them with the food and all that anger and testosterone.

Dom reaches up and ruffles his hair, affectionate and punctuated with a laugh. Sam keeps his eyes down and thrills a little to watch Dean’s hands ball up into fists.

“You mean for both of us? For me, too? Hmm?” Dom’s voice has a certain command to it, a certain quality that makes Sam lift his head to meet his eyes. His nod has Dom beaming at him, hand resting on Sam’s cheek now. “Such a good boy.”

Dean steps between them, arm coming up to shove Dom’s hand away from Sam’s face. He’s facing Sam now, Dom at his back, and his pupils are narrowed down to tiny black dots, the green almost too intense to be real. Dean grabs the bags from Sam’s hand and takes a step back, running into Dom
and nearly causing Dom to fall in his rush to step back.

“Thanks,” Dean says, his voice clipped, his anger barely controlled. He stares right into Sam’s eyes and Sam can’t help but stare right back. “You should go. We’re busy.”

“Nah, we can take time to eat, Dean. Your brother sure is a workaholic, Sammy. Great worker.” Dom tries another tactic, moves to stand beside Dean, a hand going on Dean’s shoulder to squeeze, lazy and companionable. Dean doesn’t look away from Sam, and Sam feels the irrational need to wrap his arms around Dean and just stay there.

“Dean is good at everything he does,” Sam replies, giving Dean a little smile that he means with all of his heart.

“I’ll tell you what.” Dom takes a step back, pointing at the bag in Dean’s hand. “Why don’t you two go outside and eat. Take as long as you want, Dean. I’ll eat when you get back. How’s that sound?”

Dean is quiet, the rise and fall of his chest consistent, worryingly normal. Sam knows that he’s trying to keep it under control, to calm down. Dom may be more muscular than Dean, but Dean could take him out with a single punch whether Dom knows it or not.

“I got you some blackberry cobbler from that diner you like,” Sam says, his voice just soft enough for Dean to hear. He regrets this suddenly, putting Dean in this position. Making him angry like this on purpose.

“Yeah, alright,” Dean grunts finally, finally. He unzips his coveralls and tugs them off his arms, tying the sleeves around his waist so they won’t drag. He’s left in just a tight white t-shirt, his arms tense and solid and so fucking sexy that Sam’s stomach churns. He doesn’t even glance back at Dom, just keeps his eyes on Dean, following him to the front of the garage and the door off to the side that leads out into the parking lot.

There’s a rickety old picnic table off to the side of the gravel parking lot, one with weeds growing up around it and a lot of graffiti carved into wood with knives and Sharpies. Dean straddles one of the benches and Sam takes the one across from him, the one facing away from the garage.

Dean pulls out all the different things in the bag, and Sam separates them out, putting some aside for Dom without saying so.

“It’s just, um. I just made some spaghetti. And put some of that garlic bread we bought in the oven. And the cobbler.” Sam sits back, feeling a little meek here just with Dean, his hands in his lap. Dean pulls it all out, digs out the paper towel and the fork, the beer that Sam had brought for him. Sam feels Dean look at all of it and then up at him.

“Thanks,” Dean says, his voice ultra low and rough. Sam just nods, one quick movement and Dean pulls the plastic wrap from the plate and digs in. He gets a couple big mouthfuls in, tomato sauce lining his lips and Sam is pinching and pulling at his scar to avoid watching him. Dean squints at him, taking a long pull of his beer.

“You not eatin’?”

Sam glances up then, watches Dean tear off a piece of garlic bread with his teeth and he pushes his hands down hard on his dick. Licks his lips.

“No, it’s. I made it for you guys. I’m good.”

Dean glares then, sucking in a long, deep breath that has Sam tensing.
“Why’d you make him somethin’?”

Sam shrugs, gnawing brutally on his bottom lip, not flinching when he breaks skin. Dean’s eyes are burning holes into him, and he has to force himself not to hide from it.

“No reason. Just felt bad leaving him out, is all. I thought you guys were friends.” Sam glances up, meeting Dean’s eyes with a little bit of a challenge. Dean watches Sam, narrows his eyes at him for such a long moment that Sam almost breaks, almost apologizes. Dean looks away suddenly, back down at his plate as he twists more spaghetti up onto his fork.

“He’s my boss,” Dean says finally, his jaw clenched hard as he swirls more and more noodles around. “If he wasn’t, his blood would be splattered on the concrete in there.”

Sam blinks, trying his very best to ignore the hot rush of blood that spreads through his entire body for that, for the grit in Dean’s voice as he says them. Dean’s eyes are on him again, daring him to voice his next words. He feels the heat of Dean’s gaze slide down his neck, fix on what is most definitely a hickey on his skin now, a pretty pink-purple that stands out against the collar of his grey t-shirt. Sam lifts a hand finally, fingers sliding up over his own neck to rub at the bruise, hiding it from Dean’s eyes even though it’s too late.

“Wh-why?” It takes so long for Sam to say that he’s almost forgotten why he needs to say it in the first place, but it’s the exact right and wrong thing to say, exactly what Dean had been expecting. Sam jumps as Dean’s metal fork clatters against his plate, and he leans back on instinct when Dean leans forward, voice so low that Sam can barely hear it over the rush of cars from the street.

“You let him touch you again, you go out with him again, I swear to God, I’ll break his fucking face.”

They’re probably a few inches apart now, Dean leaning so far forward in his seat that it has to be uncomfortable. Sam is practically panting now, pupils blown, body trembling a little in lustful fear. He stands up then, gathers up Dom’s food into the bag but leaves it on the table, hoping Dean will bring it in to him. He tugs fitfully on the bottom of his shirt, not meeting Dean’s eyes again.

“I’m, um. I’m gonna go. I’ll.” He glances back to the garage, sees Dom move right by the glass window on the door. He licks at the tender bite on the inside of his lip. “I’ll see you when you get home.”

He wants to say ‘why, why do you care so much?’. He wants to say ‘are you mad that somebody else marked your territory?’ He wants to climb across the bench and let Dean suck on the broken skin inside his mouth. Wants Dean to crush the bones in his wrists holding him down.

He walks away instead, heading back down the sidewalk as quick as he can, hands in his pockets, head down, feeling twelve years old all over again, from Dean’s absolute control over him to his almost completely hard dick at the violence in Dean’s voice.

By the time he gets to the front door of their achingly normal house, Sam is trembling. He doesn’t know why, doesn’t know how it started, but it’s there. He pushes the key into the door and unlocks it, shoving both hands into his pockets as soon as he steps inside.

He tries to assess this rationally. Maybe he’s just upset that Dean’s upset. Maybe he’s angry at Dean for being so stupidly controlling. Maybe he’s a little fucking horny and pissed that Dom couldn’t take the edge off. But it’s weird, this shake that is most prominent in his hands but he feels it all through
his arms and down his back.

He feels a little empty, like. Like he used to feel when he stopped smoking, stopped putting cigarettes out on his own skin. Like he felt right before he was about to eat, when he’d been so good, hadn’t touched a bite of food in so long. How he still feels when he forces himself not to come, when he beats his own insanely high records of days without an orgasm.

It’s a weird, withdrawal tremble.

Dean.

Dean is the worst fucking drug in the world. The absolute worst thing to get addicted to, but it’s been his longest addiction. Never before, in all his years though, has he had such a physical reaction to walking away from him.

“Sam, are you stoned?”

Sam blinks himself back to the here and now, where he’s hovering in place in the living room, hands clenched in fists in his pockets. He looks up and finds Dad sitting at the small, round kitchen table in a pair of basketball shorts and a ratty t-shirt, papers spread out all over the surface in front of him. Sam nearly sighs when he sees the journal open beside Dad’s right elbow, his pen poised right over it like he had been mid-thought. His eyebrows are raised at Sam and Sam can only blink back.

“No?” He feels confused, like maybe that’s not the right answer. Because he does feel weird, but he knows his dad doesn’t really give a shit. Just wants him to stop lurking like a creeper in the living room.

Dad rolls his eyes, stretching one hairy leg under the table to push out the chair across from him. “Here, sit down. Think I’ve found somethin’ up in Idaho.”

“Dad,” Sam says warningly, not taking a single step toward his father. “You can’t hunt for six more weeks. You know that. You had to have your gallbladder removed. While you were being stitched up from almost having your stomach ripped open by a werewolf.”

“Eh,” Dad waves Sam off, so dismissive, curling up around his journal as he keeps writing. “I feel fine.”

“Dad, we got this house! Dean has a job! You can’t just move us right now. You promised.”

“No.” Sam knows he sounds like a petulant child, but he doesn’t care right now. He crosses his arms over his chest and glares at his dad, making sure his feet are as firmly planted as possible. He shakes even more when Dad turns his eyes on him again, he almost falters under the weight of Dad’s anger but he doesn’t. He meets his eyes head-on.

“Boy,” Dad starts, his voice low, Marine-broad in its command. Sam sucks in a sharp breath through his nose but doesn’t move. “I’m only askin’ one more time--”

“You didn’t even ask the first time! You never ask! You just bark at me and expect me to jump. Well, guess what, Dad? I’m not this time! If you want to be an idiot and just get yourself hurt even more, you’re gonna do it by yourself.”

Sam uproots himself from where he’s been standing since he first heard Dad’s voice, making to head
for the hallway through the kitchen, but Dad’s up before Sam can even step on the tiled kitchen floor.

He feels Dad invade his personal space, feels his breath hot on his face. He looks up into his eyes that are dark, bloodshot, bright with anger. Sam glares right back at him with every ounce of brevity in his body.

“Go. Get. Your computer. Or I’ll get it for you. You don’t talk back to me, Samuel Winchester. I’m not your brother. I’m not just gonna take your shit and kiss your ass to make you smile at me again. When I tell you to fuckin’ do something.” He shoves Sam hard, making him fall over the pushed out chair, the wooden back of it slamming into his ribs. “DO IT.”

Sam sits where he is on the floor, stunned, the breath knocked out of him. He forces himself to recover quickly, clambering to stand back up as he walks backwards towards the hallway and his room. Dad is advancing on him the entire time, eyebrows raised, daring Sam to defy him.

“Fuck you!”

Sam doesn’t wait around to see Dad’s expression, his reaction to it. He just turns and bolts, using his long legs with a terror he’s never felt, not even running from things that will really kill him. He reaches his door and rips it open, slipping into the room but he’s not fast enough.

Dad is right behind him, a bear of a man, especially when he’s angry. And right now he is shaking with fury. He muscles his way into the door that Sam is trying so desperately to close, pushing Sam out of the way to get in the room. Sam falls back against his dresser, straightening up almost immediately. He sees what Dad is going for and he gasps, rushing at him to grab hold of Dad’s forearm just when he snags Sam’s laptop bag.

“No! You can’t! It’s! It’s mine! Bobby and Dean got it for me! It’s mine!” He’s frantic now with the thought of his favorite possession being taken, his connection to the outside world being stolen, his journalistic ramblings in a file on his desktop about his stupid fucking brother being seen. He digs his nails into Dad’s bare forearm, and he barely has time to blink before he feels a hard slap on his face, Dad’s wedding ring catching Sam’s cheekbone perfectly.

Pain explodes across Sam’s face, the shock of it hurting almost more than the actual backhanded slap itself. He falls back onto the bed and Dad shoves the computer bag onto his shoulder, turning to Sam with a red face, his breath shooting out in short, harsh pants.

“I don’t know what the fuck has gotten into you, but this ends here. Now. You will not treat me like I’m your brother, or your boyfriend, or your fucking study buddy. You ain’t gonna bully me like you bully everybody else, Sam. I don’t give a fuck about your issues. I’m done babyin’ you. You want to be treated like an adult, you damn well better act like one.”

Sam catches the sob before it hits the air, he holds it in his throat until he feels like he’s going to explode. There are tears spilling helplessly from his eyes, his right eye already starting to swell up. He refuses to touch it, to lick his wounds with his Dad still in here, still staring at him, waiting for him to say anything else.

Dad straightens up then, heads back for the door. Sam can tell he’s hovering on the edge of feeling bad, of apologizing. When Dad looks back over at him, his jaw still clenched, Sam knows he didn’t feel bad for too long.

“You’re stayin’ in here for the rest of the day unless you decide to come back out here and help me with this hunt. Don’t you even think about callin’ Dean to cry to him either. He’s at work, getting a
fucking break from your bullshit. Leave him alone.”

The door slams shut and it’s as good as locked. Sam knows better than to try and sneak around his very awake, very angry father. He knows better than to try and use his window. He knows he can’t do a single fucking thing.

He hiccups a sob then, finally reaching up to touch his cheek. The pain bursts bright and shocking under his trembling fingertips, and he just pushes harder, making the sharp ache more acute, so much that he feels light-headed. He falls back on the bed, daydreaming briefly about calling Dean, about sobbing to him, telling him what just happened.

He knows Dean would drop everything, would come home and at least say something stern to their dad if not outright argue with him. Dad and Dean never argue anymore, not that they ever really did. They’re a united front against the enemy Sam has become, that he’s turned himself into. Dean’s just the good cop sometimes.

Sam sinks down into his pillow, letting his tears soak into the pillowcase. He feels weak with anger, with how much of a fucking pussy he is when it comes to his dad. It’s like living with a tyrant, really. Sam can defy him, can stand up for himself, can say whatever he wants. But it’s all futile. Just hopeless, at the end of the day. Sam will be crushed right back down to size, bullied back into place. There’s no resistance here. No compromising with John Winchester.

“Thirty-two days,” Sam whispers to the room, the tremble of his body all but gone now, all the fight leaving as he closes his eyes.

--

He wakes up to an arctic cold against his cheek, the feeling so unmistakable and sharp that he gasps before he even opens his eyes. He jerks on the bed, the covers still kicked down at the foot, his eyes flying open but unseeing.

It’s mostly dark in the room, the air stale with time and the lingering heat of summer. There’s a heavy shadow beside him, the source of the bite of cold on his face.

“Sh-sh, it’s okay, man. ‘S just me.”

Dean.

Sam sinks back into the bed so far it feels like he’s drowning. He sighs, the bones in his body turning to liquid. This. It can’t even be a dream. Sam doesn’t even have the courage to dream this sweet.

He’s quiet for a long while, just letting Dean sit there, a plastic bag of frozen corn dogs to his cheek. The whole house is still, no movement at all but the low hum of the air conditioner outside his window. He hopes the tears slipping down his cheeks go unnoticed in the failing light.

“Where’s Dad?” Sam’s voice is raspy, thick with affection and consolation. The air in the room shivers as Dean draws in a breath, and Sam lets his eyes slip closed again so he can feel Dean’s anger towards their father all that much more.


Sam’s cheeks flush, even the slightly swollen one under the corn dogs. He licks his lips, the sound sticky and dry.

“Bet I sound like the bad guy in his version.”
Dean huffs, a sound that passes for a laugh in their family, and Sam finds himself leaning toward Dean’s warm body.

“Nah, you just sound like your normal, pain in the ass self.” He lifts the bag from Sam’s cheek and leans down to squint at his face, at the cut left there right on the high line of his cheekbone by the silver band on Dad’s ring finger.

Sam forces his breathing to stay even, to stay consistent. He doesn’t hold his breath when Dean is close because he wants to smell him, wants to pull every single scent into his body and mix it all back up in his head until it’s synonymous with Dean. Grease, sweat, beer, the sweet synthetic smell of car paint, a little bit of garlic and tomatoes left over from lunch. Sam wants to lick him clean.

“Not too bad,” Dean reports after an unnecessarily long inspection. The corn dogs come back, a sorry replacement for Dean’s nearness. Sam takes what he can get.

“He wanted to go on a hunt,” Sam reveals finally, the words leaving him on a heavy sigh. Dean stays right where he is, stays quiet, and Sam keeps talking. “Wanted me to help him. But he’s, Dean, you know he’s not up for it. It’s not time for him to go back out.”

“Stubborn bastard,” Dean agrees.

“So I said no. And we.” Sam shrugs, the whole thing still too fresh to talk about with any rationality. “He shoved me a couple of times. T-took my computer. Slapped me when I tried to get it back.”

He feels like a little kid, a tattletale, like when Dean would honk the horn at unsuspecting old people when they’d wait for Dad in grocery store parking lots, hunkered down low in the car so nobody’d see them. Sam was too little to find fun in it, always just worried about old people and their jumpy, fragile hearts, and he’d tell Dad the second he’d come back, arms weighted down with bags of groceries. Back before Sam realized that Dean was his partner in crime, that it was them against all the rest of ‘em. He was too little. He didn’t understand yet. He understands now.

Even if he’s learned too late and it feels like Dean has decided to join Dad’s team nowadays.

“Got your computer back.” Dean’s voice is low and even, and Sam has to open his eyes to see his face. Dean’s nodding over toward Sam’s closet, and sure enough, his laptop bag is leaning against the closed closet door, like it never left. Sam deflects a little in relief. “And I called Bobby, told him about the job up in Idaho. He’s heading out there himself in the morning.”

Sam waits a beat, sorts all those words out.

“So. Dad’s not goin’ on the job?”

“Nah. He’s over at Linda’s house. She made dinner or some shit.” Dean rolls his eyes and it’s plain as day to Sam, even in the blued darkness. It makes him smile.

“Thanks.” Sam closes his eyes again, so content here, with just this. Why did he never realize it, before it was too late? Why did he never realize that this, just this, just them, was always enough? He doesn’t need sex, he doesn’t need valentines or songs dedicated to him on the radio or gasping declarations of love. He’s only ever needed this. And now it’s too late. Or it’s almost too late. Thirty-two days and it’d be too late.

When Dean’s hand finds his hair, Sam’s nose and eyes burn with tears and he feels like a little boy, like that little boy who didn’t understand. His chin trembles with an unquantified amount of emotion, so much pain bubbling up to the surface when he’s tried so hard for so long to push it down, just push hard enough and it has to give up eventually. Except here it is, and this room is too small to
handle even the surface of it.

“Dean, what happened to us? To you and me? Why can’t it be like it was? When. When everyday was like this. When.” He sucks in a sharp breath, and the tears come without invitation. “When y-you could touch me and touch me and you never wanted to leave. When I was the only thing you saw. When.”

It hurts. It’s too much and his words are stupidly tiny, incapable of even a shadow of what’s inside of him. It comes up in a little hitching sob, a pathetic sound from a newly grown man. He reaches up for Dean then with both hands, fingers sinking into sweat-damp cotton and he pulls, begs Dean down to him.

The bag of corn dogs slip from Dean’s hand as he follows Sam’s tug, the sound of it hitting the ground a momentary thing in the big, sweeping gasp of what is happening between them. Sam tips his head up and he opens his eyes and he sees Dean, sees how Dean is looking at him, sees how lost he is, how lost he feels, sees the rabbit-fast rise and fall of Dean’s chest.

Dean’s hands are on him, spreading expansive and owning over Sam’s chest and the tremble of his stomach, sliding around his waist to hold onto him. Sam’s eyes flutter closed again when he feels Dean’s mouth close into a shaking kiss on his forehead, right in the middle of his brow.

Sam lets out a whimper, a trapped, scared animal of a sound and his hands tighten on Dean’s shirt, keeping him right here, right where he is, keeping him.

“Sammy.” It’s a dirge of a noise, a low, earth-deep drag that pricks goosebumps over Sam’s entire body. Dean’s mouth is right over his now, right here, not quite touching but hovering, the smell of him so thick and consuming that Sam feels like he’s going to pass out. He knows now, right now, what Dean will taste like, what the inside of his mouth will feel like under Sam’s lick, the exact, silken slip of Dean’s tongue, the lush warmth of his lips. He knows.

A phone rings.

And rings.

The paper-thin space between their mouths shivers. They don’t move.

Another ring, insistent and shattering.

“Shit,” Dean mutters, and Sam can feel the featherkiss of Dean’s eyelashes on his cheeks.

Sam’s entire world shifts when Dean pulls back, when he stands up again, hands frantically digging the pockets of his coveralls. Sam can only lay there and watch, helpless to stop any of this, to bring any of the last minute back, to keep Dean right back against him. And he knows without a doubt, with all the intuition of a survivalist who believes in everything, that it’s lost.

Whatever it was, whatever had hovered pregnant and breath-held between them, is gone now.

And Sam won’t ever get it back.

“And Sam won’t ever get it back.

“Yeah?” Dean’s found his phone, has it pushed against his ear. He’s already almost near Sam’s open door, his back to the bed, to his little brother, to their ruinous almost. “Yeah, sure. I can do that. Alright, see you then.”

Sam hears the phone snap closed and his eyes follow suit. Dean is still there, unmoving in the doorway. Not looking back.
“Uh,” Dean starts after a perfectly awkward beat. “That was, uh. That was Dom. He’s setting me up with his sister. Isabella, the one in the yellow dress from the picture?”

Sam can’t move, can’t even turn away, can’t hide from the words pelting him like fists. He’s motionless on the bed, lips still pursed for his brother’s kiss, tears clinging to his lashes like they already know how this is going to end.

“Anyway. We’re meeting down at the diner in half an hour. So, uh. I gotta go shower. I smell like shit.” Another pause, and Sam knows this one is a killer. It hurts Dean, too. Sam can hear it in the way he sucks in a breath, ragged and barely used. Sam waits it out, waits for the death blow.

“Keep ice on that. I’ll be home tonight.”

Sam can hear Dean’s fingers sliding along the wood of the doorframe, can hear by the slight change of volume that he says the last two words over his shoulder, his eyes on Sam.

Sam doesn’t move. Can’t move.

Dean sighs.

“Bye, Sam.”

They don’t say goodbye to each other. They never have.

Dean closes the door behind him.

Forty-five minutes later, Sam’s phone rings. He ignores it.

It rings again. He turns it off and stares right back up at the ceiling, the sun setting outside, and it’s already almost completely dark in his room. The corn dogs are thawing out on the floor, forgotten by everyone. Sam is stuck, on masochistic pause.

Dean.

He hasn’t gotten up, hasn’t turned, hasn’t moved. He’s afraid if he does, he’ll forget. He’ll lose the sweet secret of that moment, that single breath between them. It was never supposed to happen anyway, so he’s not exactly disappointed. But the pain coursing through his body, the one so complete that it’s practically numbed him, well. He knows it’s more than heartbreak. It’s closer to despair than he’s ever come before.

There’s a knock at the front door. The sound of a doorbell chiming in the hallway. He doesn’t move.

“Sam? It’s me, Dom. Please answer the door?” It’s muffled, but the house is small, the front door not so far away that Sam can’t hear him clearly.

He sighs, accepts defeat. He closes his eyes and scrubs his hands over his face, pushing so hard that bright sparks burst into his blind darkness. He opens his eyes, blinks the colors away, and climbs out of bed.

He opens the front door and doesn’t even pretend to smile when Dom grins at him.
“Hey, were you sleeping? I tried to call you, but--” Dom stops, the smile leaving his face. He takes a step closer to Sam, eyes narrowing on Sam’s swollen cheek, his slightly squinted eye. His voice drops lower, full of an anger that Sam has never heard from him before. “Did Dean do this?”

Sam’s eyes fly open wide, mouth dropping open. “Wh--no! God, no. Dean.” Sam stops, just saying the name sending a dull ache down his arms and all through his chest. He sighs. “Dean would never hurt me.” It’s a lie, of course. But emotional pain is clearly not what they’re talking about here.

“Then who? Who did it?” Dom steps right up against him, big hand coming to rest on his cheek. Sam sighs, deflates a little, tries so hard not to lean into the comfort.

“I’m fine. Promise.”

Dom wraps his arms around Sam, pulling him in close.

“Grab some stuff. You’re staying with me tonight.”

Sam wants to protest, to argue. To say no, my brother would be worried. No, Dean and I have plans. But he remembers where Dean is, out with Dom’s sister, that pretty girl in the picture with inky, dark lashes and a rosy pink mouth. He pulls out of Dom’s embrace slowly, looking up to meet his eyes just for a second.

“Give me five minutes.”

--

Dom’s condo is only about ten minutes away from their house, and Sam’s eyebrows go up the second he steps into it. It’s all dark wood and leather, gorgeous silver crucifixes on the walls and pictures of saints and smiling people next to carefully placed ambient lights and around the amazing stereo system in the corner. There’s a huge television bookended by shelves and shelves of tapes and DVDs.

Dom drops his keys into a bowl on the coffee table and looks around, obviously a little nervous about having Sam here.

“You want anything to drink? I’ve got--”

“I’m good,” Sam interrupts with a slight smile. He walks over to the movie collection because he’s too anxious to just sit, and he smiles when he sees a surprisingly even mix of action movies and romantic comedies.

A slow song starts up on the stereo behind him, and he has to hold back a sigh. He turns to see Dom adjusting the stereo with a little remote, and he can’t help but laugh.

“I don’t need mood music.”

Dom whips around, sheepish, caught. He sets the little controller down but doesn’t turn the music off. He shrugs as he gets closer to Sam.

“Well, maybe I do.” He’s staring at Sam like Sam’s going to start spouting sonnets any minute now, and Sam can’t help but flush under the direct sunlight of so much attention. Dom reaches for the hem of Sam’s t-shirt, and Sam doesn’t stop him when he tugs it up and over his head.

“God, help me,” Dom murmurs, fingers twitching over his chest again like they had in the car that night, subconsciously crossing himself. Sam looks down at himself, body long from his most recent
growth spurt and tight because of Dad’s relentless training, but he’s nothing special. Absolutely nothing special. He looks up at Dom, about to say just that out loud, when Dom dips down and sucks one of Sam’s little nipples into his mouth, just draws it right in tongue-first and sucks like it’s gonna feed him.

Sam gasps, hands reaching up to curl around Dom’s head, fingers sliding through the velvety shaved hair at the back, letting his eyes fall closed. Dom’s breathing is loud and hot across Sam’s skin, and Sam can’t help how he surges up, body arching when Dom’s hands push down his back to grip his ass, palms flat and possessive on each cheek.

Dom pulls back with a pop off of Sam’s nipple, both of them panting as they stare at it, seeing how hard and raw and red it is. Dom dives back in, teeth sinking in this time as he starts to flat-out chew on it.

“Fuck!” Sam shakes and pulls him in even harder, the pain so overwhelming that he almost pushes him away but he focuses on it, like he does all the pain he usually inflicts on himself, and he moans. God, yes. Hurt. This. This is what he needs.

“Can I taste your ass, Sam? Hmm? Will you let me? Let me get my tongue in there, boy.” Dom shoves his hands down into Sam’s jeans, past his underwear, and grips him again, skin-on-skin. Sam feels his ass spread open under those strong hands, feels himself being lifted up onto Dom’s body with just that grip. He can barely nod, but he does, and Dom lifts Sam up completely, then, holds him like he weighs absolutely nothing and carries him into what Sam assumes is his bedroom.

The bed is huge, draped in dark blankets and pillows and there’s a single, low light from the bedside table that throws Sam in soft, sweet colors and makes him think of loves scenes in movies. Dom throws him down on the bed, lets Sam hit hard and bounce on the mattress. Dom strips then, shirt ripped over his head to reveal an anatomy lesson of muscles and tattoos scrawled in black on his arms and his pecs. Sam catches the sight of the Virgin Mary on his skin and smiles when the next thing he sees Dom’s dick slapping up against his six-pack stomach.

Dom reaches out and flips Sam over onto his hands and knees, pulling his ass up and reaching around to undo Sam’s jeans, ripping them down off his ass to reveal it to himself and the quiet room. Sam stays where he is, eyelashes fluttering, chest heaving, listening to the sounds of Dom panting above him, the sticky slip-slip-slip of Dom stroking his dick as he stares at Sam’s ass.

Sam shifts on the bed, trapped by his jeans that are just tugged down to his thighs, gasping when he feels those hands on him again, prying his ass open and then, fuck. He arches hard, eyes slamming closed when he feels the wide, wet lick of a tongue running from the seam of his balls all the way up to his tailbone.

Dom growls then, right against Sam’s twitching hole, and Sam can’t help but cry out when both of Dom’s hands come down in an iron-handed slap on each of his cheeks. “Gonna eat you out, boy. God, I’m gonna get my tongue so far up in you.”

Sam can only grip the expensive sheets under him, goosebumps zinging all over his body when Dom slaps his ass again, over and over and over while he purses his lips right over Sam’s hole and starts to suck and tongue at it. It goes on for what feels like hours and Sam is lost it it, drowning in the suck-suck-lick-fuck of Dom’s tongue and mouth, his dick dripping shamelessly all over the bed.

Dom flips him over then, fast and feral, ripping Sam’s jeans off along with his shoes and his socks, as an afterthought. He’s kneeling on the bed as he turns Sam almost onto his side and spreads his legs, fitting himself between Sam’s thighs, strong hands on him to hold him up so Dom can get at his hole again from this new angle, one of Sam’s legs lifted and held in the air by Dom’s grip on his
ankle, the other one stretched out over the length of the bed.

Sam practically screams when Dom’s teeth graze and gnaw at the skin between his ass and his balls, jerking hard in Dom’s unyielding grasp and Dom groans, low and warning.

“You like that? Hmm? Like it when it hurts?” Dom bites down this time, just the tiniest bit of the skin of Sam’s perineum caught in his teeth and Sam sobs, actual tears slipping from his eyes. That mouth moves up to suck on his balls, tongue heavy and rolling when two magically lubed fingers push up inside of his now-relaxed ass, both of them curling to nudge at Sam’s prostate.

Sam’s head is spinning, all of this happening so fast and so sudden, and it’s so fucking good, so completely opposite of the devastation he was feeling not even two hours ago, left in his bed alone with the ghost of Dean’s mouth over his. Dom’s not he wants and he knows it, but it feels good, too good to stop.

The fingers stop, pull out, and Sam is left feeling empty and open, his legs released and so he collapses back on the bed, chest heaving, eyes closed. He forces them open and sees Dom staring down at him, at the twenty-eight scars in the shape and color of full moons on Sam’s thighs, in two long lines, like soldiers.

He closes his eyes again, sighs.

“Sam?” Dom’s voice is nothing like the one he’s been using since they stepped into this place. It’s quiet and concerned and Sam feels the sudden and undeniable need to run. He opens his eyes again, makes himself meet Dom’s. He gives him a shaky smile and a little shrug.

“I was a troubled teen,” Sam says, self-deprecation laced through the words, through his smile. Dom just stares at him and then looks back at the scars, both of his hands coming to light on the outermost two and following the two rows all the way across the tops of his legs, stopping when he reaches Sam’s inner thighs.

“Cigarettes?” Dom sinks down onto the bed, his head near Sam’s legs. Sam lifts up onto his elbows so he can watch Dom touch the scars, his fingers tendering over them like he can make them disappear. Sam nods in response, doesn’t say anything for a long moment.

“I haven’t done it in a long time,” he offers, not sure what else to say. Dom searches his eyes, traps Sam there, doesn’t let him look away. Sam’s cheeks flush, his heart slamming around in his bones. He can never explain this, not to anybody. He sighs again when he feels Dom’s mouth close into a kiss on the top one on the outside of his right leg. Dom kisses each one, starting with the outside of the top row and working his way in. Sam closes his eyes as Dom starts in on the second row, mouth once again on the outside to work his way in. He kisses the last one on the inside, the one close to Sam’s balls. He kisses at those, too, lifts up to lick at the underside of Sam’s dick before he’s continuing to his left leg, taking his time to kiss every single scar there, too.

He pries Sam’s legs apart when he’s done, sinks down in between them, his hands running up and down Sam’s legs, over his hips and his ribs and his arms. He kisses him full on the mouth, a strange taste filling Sam’s senses and he blushes hard when he realizes that he’s tasting himself. His ass. Oh, Jesus.

He pulls away to kiss at Dom’s neck, overwhelmed by what he just tasted and the lustful shame it shot through him. He feels Dom’s dick bumping up against his ass where Dom is rutting against him, and Dom kisses across Sam’s face to suck on his earlobe.
“Can I fuck you, beautiful boy? Will you let me inside of you for a little while? Share this beautiful body with me?” It’s all sweet, so sweet, too much blind devotion for Sam to feel comfortable. And he certainly doesn’t feel worthy. He nods again because how can he not? How can he say no to this, to this man who is nothing but goodness, but kindness? He might never get a chance like this again. May not ever know what it’s like to be loved this thoroughly.

“God. Sam. Thank you. Thank you, Sam.” Dom is kissing at his mouth, fast, tongue-dipping kisses as Dom stretches, reaches over for the drawer of his nightstand, the handle rattling as he fumbles for what Sam knows is going to be a condom.

His heart skips.

He hears the snick of a bottle of lube, the one that Dom apparently used on him earlier, and he looks up to watch Dom smooth the condom over his thick, Italian dick, watches him slick it up even more with lube. He feels blunt fingers against his ass again, slipping with even more lube as they shove up inside of him, spreading the slick out to ease the way for Dom’s dick.

“Fingers don’t matter as much as lube,” Dom says quietly, in between pants and thrusts of his fingers. “It doesn’t matter if they only use two fingers on you, just make sure they are dripping with lube before they get inside of you. And don’t ever hesitate to ask them to get more in the middle of it. God, and don’t let them in without a condom. I don’t care who they are or how much they say they love you.”

Dom is on top of him now, pressing down hard on Sam’s body and stealing his breath in a kiss. Sam feels Dom’s fingers leave him again, feels the bump of his knuckles against his balls as Dom grips himself in his fist, positions himself to push in.

Sam starts to shake all over, a strange fear seizing him when he feels the head of Dom’s cock pry him open. It’s a wet, slippery sound, gross and ungodly hot at the same time. The pressure of his dick forcing its way inside is massive, bigger than anything Sam’s ever felt or imagined. It’s so odd and so unbelievably intimate and a sharp pinch of pain makes Sam gasp when Dom pushes another inch or two inside.

“Wait,” Sam gasps, his eyes flying open, wide and blinking and unseeing. He feels Dom’s breath burning on his face where he’s gasping, feels the tense tremble of Dom’s body on top of his where he’s trying his best not to move. Sam can’t help it, he feels the muscles in his ass clench up, tighten up too much, and Dom groans.

“God, don’t do that. Fuck, so tight, boy. Open up for me. Just breathe and open up for me. Let me in.” Dom starts to push a little more, feeding Sam more of his dick and that fear, that rabbit-prey fear courses through Sam’s body and he feels so young suddenly, like this shouldn’t be happening to him. He’s too young. He’s not old enough for this, to be feeling this. And he needs Dean. He wants Dean.

“Stop,” he whispers, the sound followed by a pitiful-sounding cry. A tear slides down his cheek and his chin is trembling, and his whole body is tensing now, trying to reject Dom out of him, off of him, just please please please stop.

Dom pauses over him, in him, his dick so unbelievably hard in Sam’s body and the whole thing isn’t even inside yet. There’s a second where Sam thinks he’s not going to listen, where he’s going to ignore Sam and just keep going, going to fuck him until he can’t say anything else, but, finally, he listens.

Dom pulling out hurts in a whole different way, almost more than going in, and Sam gasps when
he’s empty again. He turns immediately on his side, legs pulled up tight to his body, eyes closed hard as he tries to breathe normally.

“Shh. Sh, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you. Are you okay? Sammy, talk to me. Talk to me, boy. Please. I’m sorry.” Dom is sitting beside him, naked and hard and looking ridiculous with a condom still hanging off his dick, but Sam can’t even look at him. Dom’s hand slides up into his hair, petting him slow and soothing, and Sam lets out a childish sob that he muffles against his hands.

“I’m in love with somebody else and I just can’t,” he finally lets out in a rush, a tremble setting out over his body and he feels cold suddenly, feels so, so young. He’s mortified by his own inexperience, his own stupid failings. By his admission.

He hears Dom sigh, feels him sink down into the bed and curl up behind Sam, draping an arm over his body. He presses his lips to the nape of Sam’s neck and Sam sniffs.

“It’s. I can’t ever have him, and I know that. Nothing’s ever going to happen between me and him but I. I can’t help it.”

He feels weak now that he’s said it out loud. The room is completely quiet except for the embarrassing sounds of his own crying and Dom’s rhythmic, slow hand stroking over his arm.

“It’s okay, Sam,” Dom says right up against his ear, his voice soft, full of compassion. “That’s not your fault. I’m not mad. I mean, my dick hurts, but.”

They both laugh, and it eases Sam’s chest just a little.

“I’m just. I’m just glad I didn’t hurt you. I didn’t. Right?” Dom sounds so scared, almost as scared as Sam was. Sam makes sure to shake his head, turning onto his back so he can meet Dom’s eyes.

“No, you. It wasn’t you. You didn’t hurt me. I just. I just can’t do this. I thought I could. I’ve been trying to pretend that it’s what I want, but.” He looks away, closes his eyes when Dom starts to push Sam’s hair back off his face. “I’m sorry. For leading you on.”

“Sam, you just being alive is leading me on. I’m already pretty much in love with you, and you didn’t even have to put out.” Dom is grinning when Sam looks at him again. There’s a little hurt in his eyes but he’s smiling through it and Sam feels a flutter of affection for him right in the center of his chest.

They’re quiet again, and Dom lifts Sam up, holding him until he can wrestle the covers free from beneath them. He pulls them up over their bodies and Sam snuggles up, resting his cheek on Dom’s chest, comforted by the warmth, by Dom’s presence.

“This guy,” Dom starts after a long beat of silence, of no movement, “is he the reason you hurt yourself?”

Sam hesitates, chews on the inside of his bottom lip. There’s no reason to lie, not about this, not now. He nods.

“Does he know? How you feel about him?”

Sam almost laughs. He thinks about that afternoon, about Dean touching him, about the electricity buzzing between them. About Dean’s phone ringing.

“I don’t know. He can be pretty stupid sometimes.”
Dom goes quiet. Sam waits him out, eye falling closed again. He almost falls asleep when Dom starts petting his sweaty hair again, but Dom’s deep voice pulls him back to reality again.

“Well, he is stupid. If he doesn’t see how incredible you are.”

“It’s not his fault if.” Sam swallows. “If he’s not gay.”

Dom laughs, a rueful sound. He climbs out of bed, tugging the condom off and tossing it into the wastebasket next to the armchair in the room. He opens a drawer and pulls a pair of briefs out, tugging them up on his body before he returns to the bed. He leans down and fishes Sam’s underwear out of the tangle of his jeans and hands them over. Sam blushes and takes them, pulling them on under the covers. Dom settles back in against him, pulling Sam against his body again. Sam goes gratefully.

“Yeah, straight boys are pretty much the bane of my existence. I fell in love with one in high school. It was brutal.”

Sam smiles for that, turning it over in his mind. “I don’t. I don’t even know if I’m gay. I mean. I’m in love with--with this guy. Almost to the point where I don’t even see anybody else. You know?”

“That’s some kinda love,” Dom says softly, and Sam almost apologizes again. He bites his lip to keep from saying it. “It’s okay if you’re not sure. You don’t ever have to be sure. Or be a definite anything. Just. Love who you love and sleep with who you wanna sleep with, and don’t ever let anybody give you shit about any of it.”

Sam wants so badly to tell him, to talk about Dean. He almost wants to sabotage all of this, to destroy the adoration Dom seems to have for him by telling him he’s violently in love with his brother. But he can’t. He can’t, even though he has absolutely nothing to lose by doing so.

“I’ve gotta tell you though,” Dom continues, a little bit of tease in his tone. “You are pretty damn submissive, whatever you are.”

Sam blushes, a heat flooding his body.

“Yeah?”

“Oh, yeah.” Dom’s voice is gruff, and Sam tenses a little beside him, afraid to go down this road with a man who so clearly still wants him. “You love being manhandled and pushed around, love spreading your legs and just taking it.”

Sam shakes his head a tiny bit, not brave enough to deny it, but so thoroughly ashamed of the truth in it.

“It’s not a bad thing, Sam. And it doesn’t mean you’re weak, or that you can’t take care of yourself or something. It’s beautiful, really. And really, really, really fucking hot to toppy assholes like me.”

Sam looks up and finds Dom grinning at him. Sam smiles shyly in return, pushing himself to sit up beside Dom, his legs folded Indian-style in front of him, shoulders slouched.

“A girl fingered me once. A few years ago. She kinda said the same thing to me.”

Dom licks his lips and Sam lowers his eyes, avoiding Dom’s gaze.

“Girlfriend?”
Sam looks up for that, slanted eyes glinting in the low light.

“Dean’s girlfriend.”

Dom beams at him, letting out a laugh that almost fills the entire room. Sam smirks, his cheeks hot.

“Heartbreaker.”

The smile fades from Sam’s face. He moves closer to Dom, reaching up to touch his cheek. “I’m sorry. I never wanted to hurt you. You’ve only ever been wonderful to me.”

Dom covers Sam’s hand with his own, his smile sad but still valiantly there. “It’s okay. I forgive you. You’re still so young, Sam. You have plenty of time to figure everything out. Don’t be so hard on yourself. And don’t be afraid to put yourself out there sometimes. I mean. Yeah, you could get hurt. But you could also get hurt by never saying anything. You know?”

Sam tucks his hand back in his lap, the tips of his fingers sliding over his scars. “Yeah, I know.”

They sit facing each other, Dom watching Sam and Sam struggling through his own thoughts. Dom leans over and kisses the top of Sam’s head before he climbs from the bed and disappears, coming back with two cold bottles of water. He passes one over and Sam smiles his thanks, opening it up and drinking down half of it before he lowers it again.

“I’m leaving for college in thirty-one days.”

Dom raises his eyebrows for that. “Where are you going?”

“Stanford.” He’s never said it out loud, not really. Bobby already knew, and he hasn’t breathed a word of it to anybody else. It feels so good, just to give the word life. Dom just blinks at him, his eyes huge.

“Wow, Sam. That’s. That is amazing. Wow. I guess Dean was right. You are a brain, huh?”

Sam shakes his head, dismissive and modest, but he’s smiling.

“I, um. I haven’t told Dean. Or my dad.”

Dom tips his head to the side, eyebrows drawing up. “Why not? That’s amazing. That’s such a huge accomplishment. They’d be proud of you. Right?”

Sam sighs, reaching up to push a hand into his hair. He twists the cap on and off his water bottle.

“My family’s weird. They wouldn’t really, um. React like most people’s families.”

Dom stares at him, probably trying to figure out that riddle but he finally just sighs.

“Well. You know them better than I do. But. I do know Dean a little bit, and I know that he thinks the absolute world of you. He’s more proud of you than anybody I’ve ever seen. I know that he’d support you, Sam. He would.”

Tears blur in Sam’s eyes and he shakes his head, a violent, controlled movement back and forth and he feels his throat lock up tight.

“I. I-I can’t. I can’t talk about him.”

There’s a shift in Dom’s body language then, just a slight movement, but Sam’s observant. He
knows that Dom’s either figured it out or he’s caught on that something’s not being said, just by the set of his shoulders, the way he’s holding his mouth. Sam doesn’t dare look up at him.

“Listen, Sam. I’m not here to tell you what to do, but I do want to be your friend. Can we do that? Even when you’re at Stanford? I’ll give you all my numbers and make sure you have my address. Just in case you need somebody to talk to. And you can tell me anything. Okay? I won’t ever judge you. Promise.”

Sam’s eyes snap up then, wide and surprised. It’s the very last thing he’d expected Dom to say.

“Yeah. Yeah, of course.”

“What do you say we order some Thai food and find something you haven’t seen from my awesome movie collection, hm?” Dom leans over and presses a kiss to Sam’s forehead, right where Dean had earlier. It makes Sam panic, makes Dean’s kiss feel negated, erased. He holds the stupid emotion back, keeps it tucked up tight so he can smile at Dom, nod before climbing out of the big bed.

Sam ends up spending the night and most of Sunday with Dom, either lounging around in his bed in pajamas or watching movies on his truly impressive TV screen. Dom grills steaks for lunch and they eat in companionable quiet, Sam lost in his mind and Dom watching Sam through all of it, probably caring way too much about him.

He gets Dom to drive him home around six, and they spend fifteen bold minutes in the car, mouths attached in lazy, sweet kisses. Sam takes them, takes the affection, and savors it for once. They detach, and Sam climbs from the car, a wistful smile tugging on his lips as he digs around for his key, listening to Dom drive away.

The door opens before he even gets the key out of his bag.

Dean is in front of Sam, fury evident in the grip he has on the doorframe, in how tense his entire body is, in the brilliant shine of his eyes as they zero in on Sam. Sam looks up at him, meets those eyes head-on, letting Dean see whatever is there. Dean grits his teeth and reaches for the front of Sam’s shirt, pulling him bodily into the house with the grip.

Sam rips himself away from Dean, reaching up to run his hand over the stretched-out collar of his t-shirt.

“What the fuck, Dean?”

“Where were you?!?” It’s practically screamed, almost a preternatural sound, one that seems to echo in every crevice of the house, that makes everything darken and shrink and quiver. Sam cowers under the strength in Dean’s voice, sinking back against the wall, his bag dropping from his shoulder down to the floor.

Dean slams the door closed, locking it and turning on his brother. Sam flinches when he feels Dean’s eyes on him again, and he nearly gasps when he sees the tears burning bright in Dean’s eyes.
"You can’t--you can’t just run away like that. You can’t just leave like that. You can’t leave your phone and not leave a fucking note, you can’t just. You.” Dean is gasping, almost hyperventilating, the tears spilling down his cheeks and he crowds up against Sam, all the heat and fear and anger in him surrounding Sam in a terrifying, profound darkness. Sam curls in on himself, lowering his eyes when he can feel empathetic tears start to crowd in his own eyes.

Dean shoves him hard, making him bounce off the wall, the cheap, Big Lots pictures there vibrating. Sam closes his eyes as Dean keeps pushing him, his thick fingers leaving bruises on Sam’s chest.

“Where were you? Goddamnit, Sam, tell me where the fuck you were.”

“You know,” Sam replies, his voice so soft, so timid in the face of this. Dean’s hands are gripping his arms now, digging in so hard Sam swears he can feel the creak and bend of his bones. Tears spilled from his closed eyes and Dean growls, the heat of it puffing against Sam’s face.

“You were with him. You were with him all night? All fucking day? You were at his house? Is that it?”

Sam nods, gasping when Dean’s hands tighten on him. It hurts so bad and it’s making his body sing, all those terrible, fucked-up parts of Sam that crave this kind of violence sparking with every tightened flex of Dean’s fingers around his biceps.

“I told you, Sam. I fucking told you. He was never supposed to touch you. I told him not to put his fucking hands on you. I told you not to see him!” One of the hands leaves suddenly and Sam’s eyes fly open when he hears a sickening crunch on the wall right beside his head. He hears the wall give way under skin and bone, feels the vibrations of it rattling in his skull.

He pushes at Dean then, shoving as hard as he has the strength to just to get some space, to get Dean off of him so he can breathe. He glares at his brother, all those rules and ultimatums coming back to him, swirling around in his mind.

“Why the fuck does it matter to you? Huh? Why do you care so fucking much? Weren’t you with his sister last night?” He takes a step toward Dean and that last question makes Dean react, makes him take a step back. Makes him glance away from Sam for a single second in guilt. Sam pounces on it.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought. You fucked her, didn’t you? Probably brought her back here. Didn’t you!?”

“Sam, this isn’t about me! This isn’t fucking about me!”

Sam turns then and stomps toward the hallway, toward the bedrooms, heading right for Dean’s room. He steps inside just as Dean catches up with him, just as he can feel his brother’s hands grabbing at his shoulders, trying to pull him back.

Sam steps inside, taking in the sight of the messed up sheets, the tissues on the ground, the three condom wrappers on the nightstand. Empty. He makes a show of inhaling, drawing in the deepest breath his lungs can hold and he smells it. Sweat and pussy and come. He turns to Dean, his eyes accusing, painfully triumphant. He raises his eyebrows.

“I can smell her in here, Dean. You didn’t give a shit where I was. You weren’t thinking about me at all. You never do. You were just pissed that I didn’t follow your fucking orders.”

“Don’t you dare tell me what I feel. Don’t you ever assume you fucking know what I’m thinkin’ about. You hear me?” Dean crowds him again, and it’s as much of an admission as Sam’s ever heard from him. He edges back against his brother, pushing until they’re chest-to-chest, neither of them
daring to give the other an inch.

“Was she good? Was she worth it? Was she worth running out of my room last night?” Sam’s heart leaps into his throat once he realizes what he’s said. He can’t believe it. Can’t believe he actually said that to Dean. Actually gave voice to whatever it was that nearly happened between them. His stomach lurches and he feels a sudden and dire need to throw up. Dean’s eyes are wide, huge as they stare at him, like he can’t believe it either. Like he’s been caught.

“Did you let him fuck you?”

Sam huffs, rolling his eyes. He shoves at Dean again, pushing him so he can get back to the door, heading back to his own room. “Fuck you, Dean.”

Bile burns at the back of his throat, and he can’t stop swallowing, can’t calm now consuming need to empty his stomach. He steps into his room, looking around with wild eyes. Dean is right behind him.

“Answer me, goddamnit.” Dean sounds so much like Dad right now that Sam actually gags, a hand coming up to cover his mouth. He swallows it back down, shuddering at the taste of steak and stomach acid caught in his throat.

“Yeah!” He spins around, finding himself staring right into Dean’s eyes, the lie tripping effortlessly off his tongue. “Yeah, I did. I let him fuck me. A few times, actually.”

Dean falters a little then, clearly not expecting an actual answer. He reaches out blindly for the doorframe, trying to hold himself up. He opens and closes his mouth a few times, no words actually making it out for a long moment. He looks like he’s been shot, been punched in the stomach, had his heart ripped out of his chest. Sam thinks, somewhere in the very darkest part of his mind, that Dean’s never looked more beautiful to him.

“It was amazing,” Sam continues, a fucking verbal train wreck, the words just spilling out of his stupid goddamn mouth and he can’t seem to control them, not anymore. “Nobody has ever looked at me like he does. Touched me like he does. He cares about me, really cares about me. Nobody has ever treated me like that. He made it so good, too. I never knew it could be that good.”

They stand there, inches from each other, neither of them meeting the other’s eyes, both of them curled like they’ve been hit. This is ripping them apart, and it’s long overdue. Sam knows it. This has been festering and now it’s gushing, infected and ruinous and changing them forever.

“I’m going to kill him,” Dean says in a surprisingly soft voice, the tears making his eyes almost glisten in the failing light. Sam just stares at him, his chin trembling.

“It was my decision, Dean. My fucking choice. If you’re just being a homophobic dick, then that’s your problem.”

Dean lifts his face, his mouth falling open. He stares at Sam like he can’t believe Sam just said that. Sam raises his eyebrows at him, defiant, challenging. Dean shakes his head, lifting a hand to rub over his mouth.

“Jesus Christ, Sam. Jesus Christ.”

“Is that what it is? It just sickens you, doesn’t it? I just make you so fucking sick. I’m disgusting and you’re ashamed that you’re even related to me.” It hurts, actually, saying it all to Dean. It feels so true, too close to what Sam’s actually terrified of.

“It’s amazing. You know that? We’ve lived with each other all our lives, and you can still stand here
and say shit like this to me. And you believe it.”

“Well, maybe I don’t know you. Maybe I haven’t known you for awhile now. And you sure don’t know me anymore. You don’t know me at all.” He feels like such a brat, such a childish little brat, like he should be sing-songing it all, his hands on his hips, a smirk on his face.

Dean’s eyebrows fly up, his eyes vivid green, pupils blown. He huffs out a breath, a tiny one, like it’s all he can manage.

“Yeah, Sam? Is that what you fucking think? Think you’re so mysterious? That I haven’t figured shit out about you myself over the years when you got too good to talk to me? You think I don’t know that you write poems? Really good poems, man. Amazing ones. You think I don’t know about that scar on your wrist?”

Sam goes still suddenly, his stomach lurching. His hand twitches with the need to touch the scar, to feel it, rub at it. He doesn’t. Because Dean is watching, because Dean is still talking.

“Or that you feel ugly? Even though you’re not? That you can’t eat stroganoff anymore because of that one time we got it in Raleigh and it made you sick? That you listen to The Smashing Pumpkins when you’re sad? That you miss me sleeping in bed with you at night?” Dean’s voice trembles then, sending a shock of pain through both of them. Sam tries to swallow but the lump in his throat is too big, too heavy. He sucks in a quick breath then, refusing to let out any of the sounds that want to escape.

“Ye-yeah, but. But you don’t know what I want most in the world. And you don’t know how fucking much I hate myself. All the time.”

“Why, Sam? God, just fucking tell me--”

“You don’t know what keeps me up at night, Dean. You don’t know what makes me do this.” He lifts up his arm, a shaking finger landing on his moon scar, jagged nail digging at it compulsively, the panic in his chest building up and up until he finally just can’t hold it in anymore.

“I bet you don’t know that I’m leaving for Stanford in a month!”

It explodes out of him, a poison so complete that it sucks all the air out of the room, leaves Sam panting and staring at Dean like a boy possessed, like someone else said that using Sam’s body, Sam’s voice.

Nothing could prepare him for the look on Dean’s face. No amount of imagining or dreaming or worst case scenarios could have made him ready to be on the receiving end of such stunned heartbreak. Dean sinks down right where he is, the sound of his knees hitting the carpet, his back hitting the wall like gunshots in Sam’s ears.

“No,” Dean whispers, his hands shaking, pressing hard into the carpet, nails digging in.

“Yeah. Yes, I am. I got in, got a full scholarship. I have a dorm, a roommate, got a list of classes to pick from. Thirty days from today. And I did it all by myself. I did it! Me! Your stupid, useless little brother.”

He’s so proud of himself that he could burst, so full of youthful bravado, so full of the future and his place in it that he’s nearly smiling, nearly beaming. Dean looks boneless on the ground, like he maybe isn’t even alive anymore.

“No. You. You can’t. You can’t go. You’re not going. You’re not.” Dean shakes his head more
vehemently with each word, his voice rising and rising, panic making every syllable more urgent than the last.

“Watch me. I even have a bus ticket! And my own money. And there’s nothing you can do to stop me. Not anymore. Not you, not Dad. I don’t need you guys anymore. I’m going to go have a real life, a fucking normal life, and you can’t fuck it up anymore. Both of you.” He wants to shut himself up, wants to bite his own tongue right off, but he can’t stop talking, can’t stop saying it, all of it.

“Sam, you can’t leave.” Dean sounds so lost, so broken that Sam can’t even look at him. He can deal with anger, with violence, with the temper he’s so used to from Dean. But this. He never once expected this. Doesn’t even know how to begin to handle it. Dean sounds like he’s seconds away from begging, from crawling in front of Sam on his knees.

“I am,” he replies cruelly, managing to keep most of the tremble out of his voice. “I am and you can’t stop me.”

“I-I won’t let you.”

“What are you gonna do, Dean? How exactly are you going to stop me?”

“Why are you doing this? Huh? What are you tryin’ to prove, Sam? That you’re better than us? That you’re smarter than us? Is that it?” Dean is up on his feet, walking toward Sam with a renewed anger, and it startles Sam so much that he steps back, bumping into his dresser.

“God, Dean. Why do you think this is about you? Why can’t this just be for me? About me? For once?”

“Sam, it’s always been about you! Everything! All anybody ever cares about is you. Like you’re some fucking golden child. Everybody notices you! Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Dean, I’ve been invisible my whole fucking life. I’ve always just been your little brother. I’ve always felt like I have to be better than everybody, smarter than everybody else just to get your attention.” He’s shaking, caught between the dresser and Dean’s immovable body, and this hurts so much more than he thought it would. Tears tumble shamefully down his face.

“Do you know,” Sam says softly, his voice wavering, and he can’t look up at Dean’s eyes, can’t see the judgement there while he speaks. “That you’ve always been the one person who gave a shit about me? Who cared if I did well in school, that I made a good grade or got an award. You’re the one who came to my games and my stupid plays. You’re the one who made sure I did my homework, who paid for my fucking SAT tests. You were. I only ever wanted to make you proud. Not Dad. You. I just wanted you to think I was special. That I was. Was worth your attention. Worth anything you wanted to. To.”

He sucks in a hiccupsing sob, shaking his head furiously. He can’t. He can’t say anymore. He’s already said too fucking much, more than he’s said to Dean in years, ever.

“I do think that, Sam. Godfuckingdamnit. I do! I think you’re fucking amazing! You’re brilliant and the most. Most. Sam, I’ve never cared about anybody the way that I care about you. I don’t give a fuck about anybody the way I do you.” Dean’s fist comes down in a sharp slam on the dresser behind Sam, the change on the top of it rattling.

“Then be happy for me! Be proud of me!”

“How can I be happy that you’re leaving?! That I’m never gonna fucking see you again?” Dean turns then, prowling the room, stalking from corner to corner like a caged animal.
“Are you an idiot? Why wouldn’t you see me again? You travel the entire country in six months, Dean. You can’t come see me every once in awhile?”

“Because I know. I know you, Sam. I know that you’re just waiting to get out. To get away from us. That once you do, you’re never coming back. Why would you? Why would you ever want to come back?” The last words are softer, like they aren’t for Sam, like Dean is talking to himself.

“Stop trying to make me feel guilty! It’s already been decided, Dean! It’s already happening! Stop being like this!”

There’s a movement at the front of the house, the sound of a key turning in a lock, the sound of the front door opening. Sam and Dean freeze, staring at each other, Sam’s eyes wide with fear, and Dean’s with desperation.

“Boys?”

They both jerk to life, both of them turning to head for the door, hands turning into claws as they shove each other out of the way. Dean gets out into the kitchen first, into the livingroom where Dad is standing, looking relaxed and happy, in a t-shirt and jeans. The frown that overtakes his face when he sees his boys will haunt Sam for years.

“What’s—”

“Sam’s leaving. He got into Stanford and he’s leaving.” Dean rushes over to his Dad, looking frantic to have someone on his side in this, to not be alone in this sinking feeling. Sam stops, his mouth open, eyes unblinking as he stares at Dean. Dad and Dean don’t move a muscle, both of their eyes boring into Sam. Dad looks just as shocked as Dean had, but there’s pure anger where Dean had immediately settled into hurt.

“No, he’s not,” Dad says simply, walking straight through the livingroom like he didn’t just have the rug pulled out from under him, making sure to slam his shoulder into Sam’s as he passes. Sam stumbles back into the wall, his heart like a fist slamming over and over in his chest, adrenaline making him shake all over.

“Yes, he is,” he manages to say, his voice not strong enough anymore to lift very far. Dean’s right where he was before, seeming to be stuck in place, watching this play out in front of him, helpless to stop any of it. Sam almost, in a far-off place in his mind, feels sorry for him.

“No, you’re not, Sam. You aren’t running off to some stupid school by yourself. You’re not gonna go play Joe College while me and your brother are fighting for our lives, for your life.” Dad’s back out of his room, and he’s never seemed scarier to Sam than he is right now. Sam leans back on the wall, using it to keep himself standing. He’s caught between his brother and his dad and hasn’t it always been like this? Isn’t this just the final act of something they’ve been doing their whole lives?

“I’m eighteen, Dad. You can’t stop me. It’s already all decided. I have a dorm, I have a--”

“I don’t care. I don’t give a flying fuck what you have, Sam. Good for you. You have something new to hold over our heads. I don’t care. You’re staying right here and that’s final. We’re not talking about this anymore.” Dad opens the freezer and then the fridge, not actually looking in either of them. Sam leans back on the wall, using it to keep himself standing. He’s caught between his brother and his dad and hasn’t it always been like this? Isn’t this just the final act of something they’ve been doing their whole lives?

“I’m leaving in thirty days. From today.” Sam’s anger is coming back, much more so than it had with Dean. Dad actually thinks he can stop him. Actually thinks that he has any say in this at all.
“You’re not going anywhere. End of discussion. Dean, order us a pizza.” Dad pulls one of the kitchen chairs out and sinks down into it, dragging his journal across the table so he can flip through the pages, all of it just for show, just to exert that much more control. Sam knows it, knows his dad like he wrote the fucking book on him.

Dean hasn’t moved a muscle, is looking between Sam and their dad like he’s watching a tennis match, like this fight is going to decide his fate. Sam looks over at him, his eyes huge and pleading, stupidly begging Dean to help him out here. Dean glances away from him, jaw tensing, and goes to find the phone number for Pizza Hut. Sam barks out a laugh that disturbs the honey-thick silence that’s settled around them.

“Dad, I’m going. I don’t actually give a shit what you say about it. You can’t control me anymore. I’m leaving. You’re just going to have to accept it or--”

Dad is up and across the room and holding Sam up by his collar before Sam can even think of how to end his sentence. Dad slams him back against the wall, and Sam’s head collides with a stud in the wall. Stars explode in Sam’s closed eyes and Dean comes to life then, hovering worriedly beside them. But he still doesn’t say a fucking word.

“Or what, Sammy? Hm? Come on, little boy. Talk back. Feel like a big, bad man. C’mon.” Dad rears back, his face twisted in an ugly sneer, hands clutched into fists at his sides. Waiting. Ready. Sam is reeling, dizzy from the enormity of this, the nightmare of it. Nothing is happening the way he wanted, the way he pictured. He wanted to sit them down, to talk about this. To maybe write a letter, explaining as best and honestly as he could. He wanted their support, their pride in him. Instead, Dad is tensed to punch him, and Dean can’t even meet his eyes.

Sam realizes that he hasn’t really stopped crying since he was dragged in through the front door.

“Stop it, Dad.” It’s a plea and a warning, and he lifts his hands to push at his dad’s chest, to try and get some space to move, to do anything.

“You think you’re leaving in thirty days? Really?” Dad laughs, a mean, cruel sound, and he looks over at Dean to share his amusement with someone. Dean has his hands in his pockets, his eyes down, face drawn, pale. Sam’s eyes catch on him, on his brother, and soft sound gets stuck in his throat. He loves him. That boy over there. He needs him. Needs Dean. Needs Dean’s love and support right now. Now, more than ever. And Dean won’t even look at him.

“Or what, Sam? Hm? Come on, little boy. Talk back. Feel like a big, bad man. C’mon.” Dad rears back, his face twisted in an ugly sneer, hands clutched into fists at his sides. Waiting. Ready. Sam is reeling, dizzy from the enormity of this, the nightmare of it. Nothing is happening the way he wanted, the way he pictured. He wanted to sit them down, to talk about this. To maybe write a letter, explaining as best and honestly as he could. He wanted their support, their pride in him. Instead, Dad is tensed to punch him, and Dean can’t even meet his eyes.

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“You seriously think I’m gonna let you stay here while you just wait to leave? You’re abandoning your family, Sam.”

“No, I’m not!” Another sob bubbles up, finds life, and Sam clutches his stomach, overwhelmed with nausea and feeling so, so alone.

“Well, you’re not,” Dad continues, like hadn’t even heard him. “You are not staying here, using me until you can escape to your perfect little life. I may be inferior, Sam, but I’m not your bitch. You have two choices. You pack up your shit and you leave tonight, or you stay.”

Dad steps back, spreading his arms, like some benevolent dictator giving so generously to his subjects. He raises his eyebrows at Sam, fully expecting him to grovel, to give in, completely expecting to get what he wants.

Sam watches Dean look up in horror, all the color draining from his face because he knows Sam. He knows. He knows exactly what’s about to happen, down to the last word.
Sam smirks at their father, drawing up all of the courage he has left in reservation to stand up straight, ignoring the tears still slipping down his red cheeks.

“Alright, then.”

He turns and heads straight for his room, mind racing with what the fuck am I going to do now? and where am I going to stay? and I’m never going to see Dean again, not after tonight.

He pulls his duffel out on his bed and opens his drawers, stuffing all his clothes back in the bag. He pulls on a long-sleeved shirt and his hoodie over his t-shirt, working entirely on automatic now. Grabs the notebook tucked under his mattress, collects the CDs on the nightstand. Tucks his gun into the back of his pants. Double-checks he has his wallet. Finds his phone and his charger. He pulls his duffel and his laptop bag up onto his shoulder and turns around to find Dean standing there, visibly shaking in the doorway.

“Tell me, Sam. Tell me what’s hurting you. Tell me what you need. Tell me what I can do. Just tell me and I’ll do it. I’ll do anything. Just please don’t leave. Sammy, please don’t leave.”

Sam almost stops. He almost tells him, almost says something. He looks up and meets Dean’s eyes, every single thing in the world stopping around them, freezing like nothing else matters. Sam feels the pull toward Dean, he feels it so completely and so intensely that he knows it’s not just him. That it can’t just be him. He’s not alone in this. It’s not his fault. He was born with this love for Dean, he’s always known it, always had it. And he can picture just collapsing into Dean, falling against him, letting Dean’s arms wrap around him like they always have. He can imagine Dean giving him what he needs. Or Sam at least pretending that Dean feels the same way about him. He can so easily imagine pretending just that for the rest of his life. Playing house until Dean goes out, finds another girl in another town.

And Dad will always be there. The hunts will always be there. That won’t ever change, won’t ever go away, no matter how much Sam wants it to. He swallows, takes a deep breath. Says the worst thing that has ever come out of his mouth.

“I don’t need you anymore, Dean.”

He looks away, lowers his eyes, and shoulders past him.

“Sammy,” Dean whispers, long, beautiful fingers trailing over Sam’s back. Sam keeps going, steps into the kitchen. Dad’s still at the table, calmly reading the paper, a pen in his hand. He doesn’t look up when Sam comes in.

“Bye, Dad.”

Dad lifts his eyes, staring at Sam through his lashes, his face carefully neutral. Sam knows that means he’s about five seconds from freaking out.

He continues through the kitchen to the livingroom, the silence behind him like a tidal wave, deadly and rushing at him faster than he can run.

His hand lights on the doorknob.

“If you walk out that door, Sam, don’t you ever come back.” Each word is said carefully, heavy with promise. Sam pauses, turns around. He feels like he’s out of his body, hovering over this melodramatic scene, the image of it all forever burning in his mind: the sun setting outside, the rain that has started up oh-so appropriately, Dad now on his feet, staring his youngest son down, and Dean.
Dean with his arms wrapped around himself, looking so small, so tragically lost, standing on the threshold between the kitchen and the living room. Caught between them, his family, like he always is. He looks up, his eyes meeting Sam’s, and so much passes between them in that second, so many emotions, so many words and thoughts and memories that Sam is nearly knocked over with the force of it.

He looks at his Dad last, glances over to just barely catch his eyes, letting his dad see his determination, all of the stubbornness that he possesses, and he looks away.

He opens the door, letting in the almost deafening sound of the rain falling, letting in the gorgeous swirl of colors from the setting sun. He steps outside and pulls the door closed after him, and he doesn’t let another tear fall.

He walks to Dom’s, soaking wet and shivering by the time he gets there. He knows it’s pathetic, that he’s pathetic, but he truly has nowhere else to go. Not here.

Dom takes him in, throws his clothes in the dryer, and has to be restrained from going after Dean and Dad.

It’s midnight by the time they get to the bus station over on 19th Street, and the rain hasn’t let up at all. They’re sitting in the car, the rain pelting down from overhead, and it’s dark all around them.

Sam is watching his hands, amazed at how steady they are. Dom is flexing his own hands on the steering wheel, his jaw twitching. Sam knows that it means he’s thinking, that he’s organizing his thoughts, trying to come up with an argument against this. He knows because it’s what Dom’s been doing for nearly two hours now. Rinse, lather, repeat.

“Sam, you can just stay with me. You don’t. You don’t have to hop on a bus and go somewhere else. Just stay with me for a month, and I’ll drive you up to Palo Alto myself.”

Dom’s already said it three times, and Sam can’t help the smile that ghosts his lips.

“I’m gonna go up to South Dakota. I’ll just stay with Bobby. I promise it’s okay. He’s like family. Nothing bad’s gonna happen to me.”

“At least let me drive you to Sioux Falls,” Dom says, turning to look at Sam, the desperation pulling at his lovely features, making him look pained. Sam can’t meet his eyes, just keeps digging at his cuticles. He shakes his head, a slow back and forth.

“I need.” He takes a deep breath, one that fills his lungs and makes him close his eyes to savor it. He exhales and it’s almost as loud as the rain. “I just. I need some time by myself. To think about this. To…”

To put the shattered parts of my heart back together. To try and forget that look on Dean’s face. To try and remember Dad’s voice as anything but cruel. To start learning how to be alone.

“I just need this.” He turns to Dom, his own face just as pleading as the one he’s looking at. He hates the tears stinging at his eyes once again. “Please. Just. Help me?”

Dom sighs, slumping down in his seat. He scrubs a hand over his face and leans over then, quick and
decided, and kisses Sam on the mouth. It’s a surprisingly soft thing, just a tiny taste of tongue and then he’s gone.

“C’mon. Let’s get your ticket.”

Twenty minutes later, he has a ticket and only forty-five minutes to wait for the bus. It’s a nineteen-hour trip, one that Sam isn’t physically or emotionally prepared for. But he’ll get through it. He has to.

Dom sits with him, not holding his hand but sitting close, their knees touching as they wait. They don’t talk.

Sam feels panic welling up in his chest, tightening in an iron band across his lungs, but he pushes it down. Ignores it. Accepts it. He feels blissfully blank otherwise, the thoughts in his mind so huge, so grossly bloated, that he can’t even focus on a single one of them.

He feels the pull of Dean, feels him even though he’s across town. He wants to call him, to get Dom to drive him back home, wants Dean to hold him down in a bed, any bed, and ride this panic out with him. To calm him, like he’s always been able to do before, when Sam’s let him.

“Bus 604 with destinations in Cheyenne, Buffalo, Rapid City, and Sioux Falls is now boarding at Gate Five.”

Sam’s hands start to shake where they’re clutching his knees. He stares down at them just as a few other people around them start to get up, gather their things, hug and kiss their families goodbye.

Dom stands up, reaching down to help Sam up along beside him. He hands Sam his bags before sliding both hands up to grip Sam’s shoulders, squeezing them with a little smile.

“You’re gonna be okay. This is going to be so good for you. Something you’re doing for yourself. You’ve earned it. Just be proud of what you’ve done and jump right in. You’re gonna be amazing.”

Sam meets his eyes, forcing himself to smile. He’s so grateful for Dom, for his support and his presence and his words. They don’t strike Sam as real, they don’t hit him in the same way they would if they’d come from Dean. He knows that nobody will ever touch that place in him that Dean does. And Sam doesn’t ever want them to.

“Thanks, Dom. For everything.” He lets Dom pull him into a hug, lets himself sink into the comfort of his strong arms. He almost smells like Dean, so, so close. He squeezes Dom just once and then lets go, adjusting the strap on his shoulder. “I’ll call you when I get to Bobby’s.”

“You better.” Dom grins at him, reaching into his pocket suddenly and pulling out a folded slip of paper. A check. He pushes it into the pocket of Sam’s hoodie, taking a step back before Sam can refuse it. “Just. Take it, Sam. And take care of yourself.”

“Dom, you don’t. You don’t have to--”

“It’s okay. Just keep in touch. Alright?”

Sam nods, not able to reply because the woman over the speaker is echoing her earlier call. He takes a step back toward the gate, giving Dom a nod and a smile.

“See ya.”

Dom’s eyes are bright, and Sam realizes that there are tears in them. Tears for him. Tears that Sam’s
never earned.

“Bye, beautiful boy.”

Sam turns away then, a lump in his throat that he can’t get rid of. He passes his ticket off to the bored guy at the door, taking it back and passing his duffel off to the attendant standing beside the bus. He clutches his laptop bag and takes a deep breath before climbing the steps onto the bus, searching out an empty seat towards the back.

He finds one, keeping his computer settled in his lap, holding it like a kid holds a stuffed animal. Like a big brother holds the little one. A handful of people get on after him, all of them tucking into seats by themselves, keeping their heads down. Sam stares sightlessly out the window, his head resting against the cool glass.

The bus starts up and pulls out without ceremony. He can see a few people waving, blowing kisses, smiling as the bus leaves.

None of them are there for him.

He wonders when he’ll see them again. When he’ll see Dean. If Dean will try to find him. It’s exactly what he wants. Just what he wants Dean to do. He wants him to turn up at the dorms, bright and beautiful and valiant as any knight or prince charming. He wants Dean to stay with him, wants to tell Dean exactly how he feels in the safety of night, when it’s dark and they’re close and there’s no one else but them, forever and ever.

He wonders if Dean will ever forgive him. Forgive him for leaving. For what he said. For wanting this in the first place.

He wonders what Dean’s doing, right now. At one in the morning when it’s pouring rain, when his family’s been ripped apart again. He wonders if this is going to erase anything Dean remembers about the day before. Them in the heat of Sam’s room, their mouths so close that Sam knows the texture of Dean’s lips on his own. Almost.

“Almost,” Sam whispers to the window, to the rain streaking the glass. They’re rambling down the highway now, the whole bus dark, every second taking him further away from his brother.

It doesn’t feel like a good idea anymore. It doesn’t feel brave. It doesn’t even feel real. It doesn’t feel like he’s even really here. Because he can’t look over and see Dean, see him in profile, in shadow, in secret. Can’t get his smile, can’t meet his eyes, can’t read his thoughts from here.

And nothing will ever be the same again. Sam had made damn sure of that. Made sure to burn it all down before he’d left, hadn’t he? Made sure he had nothing to come back to. Nobody that would want him back.

He starts to realize that he doesn’t even feel like he’s down here, in his own body anymore. He feels a little above it, like he’s looking down, watching himself. Watching all of this. He feels hollow, almost unreal. He closes his eyes, expecting it to go away, to fade back.

It doesn’t.

--

Dean’s moved from beer to whiskey.

He comes out of his room after he’s poured himself three fingers and emptied it into his throat, tears
streaking his cheeks still, still, still.

“I’m gon’ find him,” he announces to the house, to where his dad is sleeping on the couch, the TV low and playing Leno. “He’s too little t’be out there by h’mself. He needs me.”

He sniffs suddenly, fresh tears blurring his eyes. “Don’he? Don’he, Dad? He still needs me.”

Dad doesn’t stir.

Dean’s sob is embarrassingly loud and about two hours too late. The house is dark and lonely, all but empty without Sam. Dad’s hardly ever here, even when he’s physically in the room. It’s been that way Dean’s whole life. It’s why he and Sam had grown up and grown together, stitched themselves up tight to each other.

It’s why Dean feels like he’s been ripped open, why he feels like he’s bleeding. He runs an absent hand up under his shirt, along his belly and his ribs, checking for blood, for guts. Nothing.

Rehearsed laughter from the television. Leno’s nasally, know-it-all voice. The rain keeps going, and it feels personal now. Mocking. Cars drive by outside. Dean stands on shaking legs in the middle of the kitchen, and he realizes that the world just absorbed Sam, that he just went outside and got swallowed up by it. That everything’s just going on like it always has, ignorant of how completely altered Dean feels.

This isn’t like losing a brother to college. Or to war. Or even having a kid move out, as a parent. This is deeper than that, bigger. Bone-deep. Soul-deep. This isn’t a distance that he can ever have with Sam and survive.

He stumbles out of the kitchen and back into the hallway. He makes his way unthinkingly into Sam’s room instead of his own. The empty room.

He collapses down on the bed, and the smell of Sam, whatever that is, huffs up at him out of the sheets, completely surrounding him.

Dean cries, like a child, into the pillow.

He shoulda said something. He shoulda stood up to Dad, should’ve argued with him, protected Sam. Supported him. Made sure Sam knew that he wasn’t alone. That he was Dean’s and that Dean still loves him. Loves him and loves him and loves him in a way that doesn’t leave room for air, or for bodies, or for anything.

But it’s too late and it doesn’t matter now because Sam’s gone.

He feels it like a feather in the back of his thoughts, that still, warm moment he’d had with Sam in this room, on this bed. That moment that surged up so powerful between them that neither of them could deny it anymore. That Dean couldn’t deny it anymore.

His stomach trembles at the thought of it. At the thought of the death-grip he had on his control to keep from doing anything hungry and violent and just taking. This was Sam. He couldn’t just take him. He’s not a no-name, faceless girl there for one purpose. He’s Sam. And Sam is forever, is beyond forever.

He should have kissed him. Shouldn’t have answered the phone. Should have kissed him. And Sam would still be here.

He wonders if Sam’s okay. If he’s out there, in that endless rain. If he’s somewhere dry. If he got to
Dom’s.

Dean grits his teeth.

Dom had his boy. He had him. He touched him. And Dean’s seen the way Dom looks at Sam. He can only imagine how he touched him. How he just owned Sam’s body. How much Sam had loved it.

Dean exhales, and the heat of it on the cotton pillow warms his face. He forces himself not to dig his hips into the mattress at the thought of it all.

Sam is his. Doesn’t he get that? Doesn’t he fucking know that by now? Sam isn’t allowed to be given to some guy, for some meaty, hungry guy to get his fucking paws all over.

Even somewhere in his drunken, lizard brain, Dean knows he’s a caveman asshole.

And it doesn’t matter anymore, does it? Not Dom, not what Dean thinks, or wants. Because Sam’s not here. And he’s not here forever. He’s just gone. There’s nothing to come back to. And that’s what separates them from other families, what separates Sam from other guys heading off to college.

All those guys have homes to go back to. On holidays, on breaks. They’ve never had a home. So where’s he gonna go? Come find them at whatever decrepit motel they’re at? Join them on a hunt on his fucking spring break?

No. It’s why he fucking left in the first place.

Of course, that’s not the only thing that makes them different from other families.

Dean knows this, how he’s feeling, isn’t how regular brothers feel when their brother goes away to college. This ain’t a normal reaction. This feeling that he’s had his skeleton ripped out through his mouth.

He and Sam aren’t built for this, for this kind of distance apart. Are they? He feels it whenever they’re in different parts of town, when he and Dad are in another city and they’ve left Sam somewhere. When they’re on a hunt, and Sam is somewhere that he just can’t see. And if he’s being perfectly fucking honest, he feels it sometimes when they’re just a wall apart. In different beds in the dead of night.

He used to feel it even when he was pressed up chest to knee against Sam, Sammy’s little feet tangled up in his ankles. Even when he could feel Sam’s heart beating through his little bird-winged shoulders, the echo of it right against his own heart. He would feel the need to be closer, to have Sam closer.

Used to dream about them layin’ in bed, face to face, staring down into Sam’s eyes while their bodies melted together, all patient and slow. Skin giving way, bones melting into each other, organs making way for their counterparts in the other body. It never hurt, was never horrifying. It just felt right. Just finally, finally felt right.

Never felt just right until they shared skin. And Dean would wake up, calm and warm.

He and Sam aren’t meant to be brothers that just go away when the time comes, go find careers and wives and mortgages. They aren’t meant for weekly phone calls and visits on holidays and only a passing knowledge of each other’s hearts.

He needs to know what Sam had for breakfast, what song he has stuck in his head, what he dreamt
the night before, whether there’s a pitstop Sam wants to make between this town and the next, some
historic building he just needs to see, some cemetery with a famous grave. He needs to look out for
Sam, to hear him singing to himself under his breath in the shower, to always know what his skin
smells like. They aren’t meant to be apart.

But now they are.

And what is Dean supposed to do, now?
Dean,
I’ve sent this letter to Bobby because I know if anybody can find you and get this letter to you, it’d be him. My address is at the bottom of the page here and on the envelope. Please write back to me, okay? I just want to make sure you get this.

It’s almost your birthday. Two days away. It’s harder for me to deal with alone than Christmas. Stupid, huh? You never acted like you cared about your birthday, but I could tell that you did, at least a little bit. It was always when you had a good birthday, or when something happened that surprised you. It’s why I loved to give you presents. To see you happy when you didn’t expect to be. I hope you have a good one, Dean.

It’s been five months since I’ve seen you. Can you believe that? I remember when I tried to stay the night at Timmy Anderson’s house in the third grade and I cried when it was time to go to bed because I couldn’t see you. I was so afraid that something would happen to you and I wouldn’t know until it was too late. Timmy’s parents talked me into staying, but I had nightmares about you and Dad leaving in the middle of the night without me. I feel brave enough now, with all this distance between us, to admit that I still have those nightmares. Even though I was the one who left.

There’s a chance that you won’t read this. That you’re too mad at me to even get to the end of this.

School’s going well. I thought finals last semester were going to kill me, so I’m determined to do better this semester. To study harder and to be better prepared. It’s the most challenging thing I’ve ever done, but it’s so rewarding. It’s kind of stupid, but I feel like I understand you more now. I know that hunting makes you feel like this, makes you feel good, like you’re really doing something, sinking your teeth into something that you care about. I’ll give you a second to roll your eyes before I keep talking.

There. You done? =)

I don’t really have a lot of friends here yet. I have a roommate, Andrew, and a couple of guys that I hang out with, but no one that I really talk to. I kind of feel alone, for the first time in my whole life. I’ve always had you, never had to explain myself to you, really. You always just understood. You were the only person that has always been there the whole time. I can’t even relax around my friends and just let myself say whatever I want. I always have to hide some part of myself, but I guess I always have. It’s making me realize that I haven’t stopped censoring myself since I was very young, no matter who I talk to or what the situation is. Some part of me is always hidden, kept separate. Kept safe, maybe. Even when I was with you.

But it’s always been my fault and not yours. There’s no way you could have ever known.

It feels weird writing to you. It feels too formal, like I’m reading from a script, or giving a speech. Or writing a letter that’s going to end up in a book someday or something. I’m sorry if I sound weird. I’m sorry if I sound too proper.

I’m not even drunk enough to be writing this letter.
Basically, I just feel kind of alone. A different kind of alone than I’ve ever felt before. And sometimes when I can’t sleep, I think about you and worry that maybe you feel alone like that, too. That it’s my fault, and you didn’t have a choice in any of this. I just made the decision for us both. Sometimes I can still hear you like you were that last day I saw you. I can see your face so clearly and I hate myself for making you feel like that, or look like that.

I’m sorry, Dean. Please understand that none of this was about you. I had to get away from Dad. I had to get away from him, and you will never leave him alone. Do you see how impossible it all was? I couldn’t stay and you couldn’t leave. And here we are. Or here I am, and there you are. And I’m sorry.

Happy birthday, big brother.

Sam

A reply from Dean comes nearly a month later in the form of a postcard. It has a terribly inaccurate drawing of a Native American woman in a war bonnet on the front, complete with the words “Greetings from Okmulgee, Oklahoma! Glass Center of the Southwest” beside her.

The postcard reveals no return address, no further details. There is no message on it. Nothing except Sam’s name and address, a stamp, and a postmark. It had taken three days to get here. God knows where Dean is now.

It’s just a postcard, a flimsy piece of paper without a single word of communication. But it’s here, in Sam’s sweaty fingers, and it says enough.

Sam smiles for the first time in days.

He doesn’t really touch it much anymore. The scar. It hides like a secret under long sleeves, under flannel and hoodies and blankets. Sam doesn’t press his fingertips to it much, doesn’t dig bitten-down nails in anymore. He’s aware of it, especially when he’s feeling nervous or anxious or alone. Right before a test or on a night spent by himself when the air is starting to smell warm again from the open window. Or when he’s out on a Friday night, surrounded by people he doesn’t know.

Like tonight.

Dean hasn’t replied to his letter. It’s been three months and nine days. Plenty of time to scrounge up a pen. Empty postcards are great only for a certain amount of time, then it feels personal. Like maybe Dean doesn’t really have anything to say to him. Hasn’t forgiven him for leaving yet.

And it hurts more than Sam ever would have guessed that the one person he thought would forgive his every fuck-up, his every cruel word or mood or directionless moment of anger, isn’t talking to him.

Loneliness creeps in on him at random times. Sitting in the library, in the middle of the attentive silence of studying and learning. Hanging out at Philz Coffee on a Wednesday night, listening to his friends talk about TV shows and celebrities and politics and each other. When he comes out of the shower and pads back into his room every night and finds himself without the familiar glow of Dean’s television, without Dad’s chainsaw-snoring, without the smell of fried foods and whatever
smart-ass remark Dean has saved up for him while he was in the bathroom.

Sitting on a couch, watching people be social and young and fucking normal and he feels like the nerd in all the John Hughes movies, like the wallflower that Dean’s always thought he was anyway. It’s Friday night so Sam wonders what Dean’s up to. Where he could be. Who he’s with.

He watches a few people across the room play a videogame for awhile, can’t really see what’s going on in it, but it’s something to focus on. He wants to pull the hood on his hoodie up over his head and burrow into the couch. Wants to go home and pile on blankets until the air is thick and soupy and hard to breathe in.

He stands up instead and heads to the kitchen, in search of something stronger than the beer everybody else seems to be content with. He’s craving whiskey in the flavor of Dean’s mouth and he shoulders his way through people in his search for it.

The kitchen is cluttered with people and red cups and empty beer cans, and Sam doesn’t look directly at any of it. He starts rooting around in the cabinets like he owns the place, only realizing as an afterthought that he doesn’t remember who does.

He finds half a bottle of bourbon, the label mostly peeled off, the cap a bit dusty, right next to a box of Cap’n Crunch and stacks of beef Ramen. He unearths the bottle and swirls it around, finding the liquid inside as dangerous and innocent-looking as it would if it was brand new.

It’ll do.

He forgoes a cup and heads back out of the kitchen on his way to the couch that he’s claimed as his own, only to bump smack into Brady. Brady whose eyes are bright with cocaine and narrowed down to sharp, black dots. He’s sweating and his smile is beatific and trembling and when he snakes an arm around Sam’s shoulders, Sam can barely hold in a shudder.

“Hey, man, where the fuck have you been? Got somebody I want to introduce you to. Think she can fuck the emo right outta you, what do you say?”

Sam’s eyes are dancing over the crowd in the old livingroom, a sea of black and brown and blonde with dots of orange, buzzing with girl laughs and guy hollers and sweat and the sour stink of beer and Jimmy Eat World playing from the shitty corner stereo. He closes his eyes and dreams himself far away, maybe into the Ozarks deep in Arkansas, camped out with Dean on the look-out for something unmistakably evil. Maybe on a beach outside of Corpus Christi, tucked away from any locals or tourists, water reaching for him and leaving him in a cosmic rhythm, tickling his toes with seafoam and salt and the forever of the ocean.

Maybe wherever Dean is right now, even if it’s a dive bar, even if it’s between some girl’s legs, even if it’s arguing with Dad who is red and reckless with the same kind of liquor sloshing around in Sam’s sweaty grip. There. Yes, there.

He slides from under Brady’s grip after what feels like hours but it’s only a few seconds, the smile on his face more of a grimace.

“What in the mood just yet, man. Gimme like an hour and I’ll see what I can do.” With that Sam disappears from Brady’s eyes, ducks into the crowd and stays low to get back to the couch. He has no intentions of meeting anybody new tonight, not getting anything fucked out of him or into him.

The couch is still empty and the dust clings to Sam’s hand when he pries the bottle open. The bourbon tears fire down his throat and into his empty belly, making his eyes sting and his entire body
clench up, starting to reject the cheap poison Sam is forcing into it.

He sinks down low into the cushions and closes his eyes again and forces himself to relax, to focus. The liquor starts to swim around immediately, zapping through his blood and sinking in warm behind his trembling eyelids, making him feel lazy and loose. He takes another drink and follows it with a smaller one, and he finally sighs. Gone. He’s gone. Finally.

There’s a weight beside him on the couch, a slight shift and he tenses, pushes himself tighter into the corner to get away from it. He keeps his eyes closed tight, a stubborn child. Can’t make me open ‘em.

“Um. Hello?” It’s a new voice, a female one, a hesitant one. Good. Hesitate all you want. Sam doesn’t move, doesn’t so much as change the rhythm of his breathing. She’ll go away. They always do.

Then the weirdest thing happens. He feels a phantom tickle in his left nostril, like a feather passing just barely into his nose, just enough to make him jerk and drive him absolutely insane. The sneeze that explodes out of him is gigantic and startles at least a dozen people nearby, but Sam’s already too tipsy to care.

He glares over at the intruder with everything he’s worth, watches as she puts her guilty hand down from where it had been at Sam’s face. She’s gorgeous, like stupidly gorgeous, but he doesn’t really care, in general and right now. Her eyes are blue like cartoon eyes and her hair is in sitcom blonde curls all around her face. She’s watching him expectantly, perfectly groomed eyebrows raised, like he’s supposed to be giving an answer to a question.

He dislikes her immediately.

“What?”

“Brady told me to come over here and introduce myself since you’re too shy.”

Sam smirks down at his hands, at his glassy, bourbon-filled friend, not looking over at her again because he knows how genuinely sweet girls warm his heart. How they sneak right in and before he knows it, he’s on top of one of them in a bed with their legs on his shoulders and his latexed dick plowing into their soaked, pink pussy. He can’t help but shift on the couch at the thought. He dares a glance over at her.

“I’m not shy. Just not in the best mood tonight.”

She’s quiet next to him for a few beats, and it makes Sam nervous. Like he’s being examined, like she’s actually paying attention to him. Or cares, or something.

“Having a problem in a class?” Her voice is deeper than a girl as pretty as her usually likes it to be, or so Sam has gathered over the years. It’s deep in a way that sounds like confidence, like intelligence, like she has strong opinions and doesn’t mind sharing them. His ragged thumbnail finds the scar and scratches at the raised curve of it.


“Girl problems?”

Sam can’t help but snort and he looks away from her, eyes finding the bookcase to his right.

“No. Definitely not girl problems.”
His wildly swimmy eyes dart over spines and titles, looking for something interesting but new to him. She doesn’t answer for a long minute.

“Boy problems?”

He freezes for that, for how dangerously close she is to hitting the mark. And it scares the shit out of him. He doesn’t say anything, just lets his finger bump over a few more books before he sees one he’s never heard of before, one that just looks like a random horror novel and it’ll have to do for now. He plucks it free and stands up, the entire world swimming around him like he’s in the bottom of the sea.

“Wait! I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to pry. I’m Jessica, by the way.” The girl stands up and she’s tall, impressively so, close enough to be almost eye-to-eye with him. Her eyes are sky-colored and piercing him, invading him, knowing him without even having to ask permission first, without needing a single word from him. “Brady just thought that we would be good friends.”

“Sam.” It’s the only word he offers, the only goodbye he has for this girl right now. He takes a sharp right and finds himself outside, the night as perfect and soft as all early spring nights are in Northern California are. But this is Sam’s first spring here, so he’s just learning.

The backyard of this decommissioned frat house is grown up wild, too wild for such a quaint town. He makes his way through it, the grass tall and whipping at his calves as he wades through. He finds an old bench swing out under the giant Coast Live Oak that dominates most of the sky with its ancient limbs and he sinks down on the swing. It whines and groans but holds his weight, and he turns until his back is against one arm, legs in a long, lazy sprawl over the seat.

The bottle of bourbon settles in between his legs and he cracks the book open, bypassing the reviews and acknowledgements and settles into the story: Drawing Blood by Poppy Z. Brite.

He’s out there for nearly two hours, the bottle empty and he’s probably quite drunk now but he’s utterly lost in the story in front of him, in the pain and history of Trevor and Zach and their journeys to get to each other. It’s gory and sentimental and cruel and romantic and like nothing Sam’s read in a long time.

He’s at the part where Zach and Trevor are about to meet, where Zach sees Trevor standing in the doorway of a kudzu-drowned house haunted by Trevor’s dead family, holding a hammer, when a shadow appears in front of Sam and sucks up all the light from the moon and the streetlight that Sam’s been reading by.

He closes his eyes to calm down, like he always does when someone needlessly interrupts him while he’s reading. Clearly if someone is reading, they are lost in a world that you are not apart of and they want to stay there, thanks so much. He finally looks up and sees none other than Jessica, the perfect girl from earlier, Brady’s cure-all.

He goes back to Trevor and Zach.

Jessica finally sighs and shifts in front of him, probably putting her hands on her hips or crossing her arms under her perfect tits.

“Seriously? Brady said you were a nice guy. If I’d known I was chasing a moody jerk all night, I wouldn’t have bothered.”

Sam shrugs, eyes paused on the words but he doesn’t look up. “Well. Now you know.”

Not another word for what feels like too long. Sam keeps his eyes on the shadowy pages, waiting
her out. She crouches down into his line of vision, the pale, honeysuckle smell of her perfume drifting over him pleasantly. He tips his eyes up to look at her through his lashes.

“Look, I don’t know what’s wrong or why you shut yourself off from people, but. I’m here to talk. You know. If you ever wanted.” She sounds like she knows she shouldn’t be saying it, like she’s going against her better judgement by doing so. Like she can hear her mom’s voice in the back of her head, saying to avoid guys exactly like Sam. They’re too much trouble.

He’s shocked by her words, by how nice she’s been even though Sam has barely looked at her the entire time they’ve been interacting. He tightens his grip on the love-worn paperback, nails digging half moons into its yellowing pages.

“I just. I just want to be left alone tonight. I just need to be left alone. Okay? Please?” His words are a little sloppy, a little slurred thanks to the bourbon but he gets them out and they’re as nice as he can manage on a night like this. And he’s too drunk to realize how much they really just sound like pleading. He doesn’t meet her eyes even then, just curls in even tighter on himself, shoulders drawing in like a little boy.

“Oh.” It’s a whisper and a concession and Sam sags back in the seat with relief when he hears it. She reaches out and rests a hand on his kneecap, on the bony knob of it through faded denim. He watches her stand up, watches her turn and leave without looking back. He watches her open the door and get swallowed back up into the raging party and close the door behind her, muffling all those rowdy sounds and leaving Sam alone again with his oak tree and his book and the moon and himself.

He rubs his thumb obsessively round and around his scar and tumbles back into the story in front of him.

He finishes the book before dawn, eyes barely open by the last few pages. He’s floating away by the end, imagining Dean’s hands in his hair, stroking it back while he reads to Sam in that leather-polished voice of his, that voice right against Sam’s ear, telling him a love story of blood and tears and electrifying connection and Birdland and Sam falls asleep and floats away with it all, dreaming his way into being okay again, just for a little while.

May 2002

D-

Are you excited that it’s finally getting warm? I know how much you hate the cold and the snow. It’s still chilly here, but I can finally go out in just a jacket without freezing my balls off.

It’s weird to spend so much time in one place. Like, the other day I realized that I had dust. Like a TON of dust. So I spent a couple of hours last weekend cleaning my side of the dorm. And I found a sock under my bed, a book that was all bent up from being stuck, and a pair of girls underwear.
(No, they weren’t MINE. But yes, I do know how they got there. Ahem.)

It was just a little weird, you know? Like, just being somewhere long enough to misplace stuff and have dust. I don’t know. I know we spent some time in a few places, but this is different. I have a regular seat in the cafeteria. Weird shit, man.

So the story about the girl. My dorm mate, Andrew, who I think I mentioned in my last letter? He broke up with his girlfriend on Valentine’s Day. (Ironic, right?) Well, he comes up to me sometime last month and informs me that April (girlfriend) is interested in me and how did I feel about taking her out?

... WHAT?!

But she’s cute, you know? And she was always nice to me, so I figure what the hell, why not? So I say yes, and I take her out for Lebanese (that’s food, Dean, not another name for a lesbian) and we go back to my dorm. And. Well, yeah.

The panties.

It was too awkward to go out with somebody who dated my closest friend for so long, so we kind of ended it after a few dates. It was okay, I guess, just strange. Yes, I passed up perfectly good, free sex to keep a friendship with a guy.

I know how gay that makes me sound, but you already know I’m a little gay anyway. So there!

(Yes, I may be a little stoned right now. Otherwise I’m pretty sure I’d never say I was gay in any fashion at all, even on a piece of paper that will be leaving me tomorrow morning.)

You should go to the beach. I’m going with a few friends when school gets out. I was too tired during spring break. I just kind of slept for a week. It was lame. But we’re heading down to Santa Cruz to stay for about a week. My beach experiences have been limited to chasing sea monsters, possible mermaids, and getting stung by jellyfish over in South Carolina with you and Dad back in ‘96. I remember you getting sunburned and complaining about your freckles.

I like your freckles. And your hands.

I should shut up now before you definitely never talk to me again.

I miss you. Write something on the next postcard.

-Sam

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Sam-
Look at me, Ma! I learned to write!

No, you’re not dreaming. I’m writing you a real letter. Or maybe it’ll be a note. Who the fuck knows. The cable is spotty in this shithole, so this might end up being a fucking novel by the end of it all.

Man you ramble when you’re high don’t you? I know we only got stoned together a few times, but I don’t remember you being so chatty. Maybe that’s just cause I was stoned too. Huh.

Not surprised that girl wanted in your pants. You’re huge but you’ve got puppy dog eyes and that stupid laugh. Bet she was thinking of you every time she wound up under her boyfriend. Hope she
made it good for you when you had her.

Was it your first time? I’ve been sitting here thinking for half a fucking hour and I swear I can’t remember you ever being with a girl before. Not full-stop, flatout sex anyway. Sammy tell me it wasn’t your first time.

I know you were with that Dom guy. But I’m assuming he was the one doing the fucking.

Did you know I broke his nose and probably shattered his cheekbone? Yeah, true story. Do you miss me now?

He didn’t give me my last paycheck if it makes you feel any better.

Can’t go to the beach, man. Dad almost got himself killed last week in Birmingham. Witch hunt gone bad. Me and Dad versus a coven of seriously fucked up witches. I just got a couple of broken ribs and lost a tooth. Dad just got out of the hospital two days ago. And you know how much that man hates hospitals. Anyway he’s fine now. Well, he’s alive.

So yeah, no beach. I’m stuck in Dicksuck, Montana with nothing to fucking do. Makes me wish I could just leave and come hang out with you for a little bit. Embarrass you in front of all your genius friends because you have an uneducated dick of a brother who doesn’t know Proust from Sartre. I’d highlight shit for you in your books and help with your homework like I always have and eat all your food and probably break a few hearts. It’s what I do, right?

I’ll be nice and leave you alone. Have a good summer, Sammy. Have fun at the beach. I hope I don’t need to tell you that I miss you.

Dean

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“This is Dom, how can I help you?”

Sam smiles at the sound of Dom’s professional voice. The receptionist had been so sweet and accommodating of Sam when he’d asked for Dom, almost like she knows who he is. Like she remembers him. Sam wouldn’t put it past Dom to have told her. He’s accepted the fact that Dom’s in love with him.

“Yes, hi. I was looking for somebody to give me a full body tune-up.”

There’s a pause and then a tiny huff of laughter. Dom’s voice drops lower in Sam’s ear and Sam has to hold back a shiver. “Don’t you say that to me and expect me to be respectful and friendly, you sexy little shit.”

Sam laughs, a grin spreading from ear to ear. He settles back on his bed and sighs.

“How’s it going?”

“It’s going. Super busy around here because it’s warming up and people are looking to get the hell out of town. How about with you? How’s school?”

“Finals are this week. Haven’t slept in about three days.”

“Boy, you better. And you better be eating. Don’t make me have food sent to your room again.”

Sam smirks, letting his eyes slip closed. His hand rubs at his empty stomach, distantly savoring that
clawing, hungry feeling like he used to when he was young and desperate and alone. He hates how good it still feels.

“I’m going to do both here in a few hours. Scouts’ honor.”

Dom laughs, the smirk evident in his voice.

“Like you were ever a Boy Scout, beautiful.”

“The sentiment is still there.”

“Why are you calling, babe? Don’t get me wrong, I want to talk to you every day for the rest of my life, ‘til death do us part. But you usually don’t call while I’m at work.”

Sam tenses, fingers paused right over his navel. He opens his eyes and stares at the ceiling.

“I got a letter from my brother today.”

Another pause on Dom’s end.

“Is he okay?”

Sam smiles.

“Yeah, Dom, he’s fine. He just.” Sam squirms on the bed, trying to avoid the spring that digs into the middle of his back. “He told me that. That, um.”

“That he broke my nose?” There’s still a smile on Dom’s voice but it’s a little shorter.

“...Yeah.”

“Yeah. He was waiting for me when I got home the day after I took you to the bus station. He asked me if we had sex. I told him no and he punched me. About five times.”

“Oh.”

“Oh?”

Sam sighs and turns then, curling up on his side, the phone tucked against his pillow.

“I might’ve told him that we did.”

The pause is surprised this time.

“Why did you do that?”

“I don’t know,” Sam finally admits, his voice small. He feels young, like he’s back in a car with Dad and Dean, choking on his secrets.

“You wanted to make him jealous.”

And there it is, a statement not a question. The truth. And it’s a bigger truth than it seems, and they both know it. Sam is so quiet that the sound of it starts ringing in his ears. He can’t hear anything over the sound of his own heart pounding. Here it is.

“Yeah,” he whispers.
Dom hums, a tiny, thoughtful sound.

“Does he know?”

Sam wants to ask what, does he know what, but he understands. Does Dean know that Sam’s in love with him? Well, isn’t that the million dollar question?

“Doubt it.”

“Well,” Dom finally sighs after a long moment. “At least you definitely made him jealous. I had to wear one of those face masks for a month.”

“Dom, I’m so sorry.”

He can practically see Dom’s smile, small and sad, see his big shoulder lift in a shrug.

“Not your fault. He made that decision. And we’re okay, aren’t we?”

“Yeah,” Sam is quick to reply, nodding so fast that it makes his head hurt. “We are. You’re.”

He swallows, afraid to say it because it feels a little like a betrayal to Dean.

“You’re my best friend.”

“I’m always here for you, Sam. No matter what.”

“Thank you.”

“Alright, beautiful thing. I’ve gotta get back to work. Call me after finals and let me know how it went, okay?”

“I will. I promise.”

“Take care of yourself. And call me if you need anything. Anything, Sam, you hear me?”

Sam smiles. His chest hurts.

“I do.”

“Bye, doll.”

“Bye.”

It’s three days after Halloween and Dean is on an official ‘fuck hunting’ tirade that has lasted since Halloween night when little girl dressed like The Little Mermaid had died in his arms, her blood all over his hands. He’d washed up back at the motel and stared at his reflection for so long that he might have gone to sleep standing up, right there.

Hadn’t talked to anybody in whole three days that followed except minimal grunts at the cashier at the spirits store down the road. Tonight he’s showered if not shaved and he’s ready to go out and drink in a seedy fucking bar so at least the early stages of his alcoholism will have some company.
Fucking “One Bourbon, One Scotch, and One Beer” is playing when he walks in and it’s so cliché, so fucking cheesy that he almost walks right back out. But he sees the sign written on white posterboard behind the bar, one that declares beer on draft is $2.00 and then he’s in love again, striding right up to the bar with purpose and his credit card already out.

Two hours later, he’s had as many beers as he’s got fingers with a few shots thrown in, and he’s leaning on the sticky bar, eyes dancing heavily all around him. He’s totally cool, totally fine, he just needs a minute to relax down into his drunkenness and he’ll be good.

“Buy you another, bud?”

The voice comes from Dean’s right and he swings his head that way, seeing a couple of really kind of attractive guys about his age with messy college boy hair and big smiles. The two guys meld into one when Dean’s eyes uncross and Dean just grins at him.

“I don’ drink Bud.”

The guy snorts at the joke and sinks down onto the stool right next to Dean, lifting his hand to get the bartender’s attention.

“Two Miller Genuine Drafts.”

Dean mumbles his thanks and wraps his hand around his current glass that is empty and smudged with greasy fingerprints.

“I’m Luke, by the way.” The guy isn’t looking at Dean, isn’t trying to pick him up but Dean’s spidey sense tells him that Luke probably likes the way Dean looks. And Dean can’t help it. He just looks that way.

“Dean.” He nods to the bartender who wearily passes him another sloshing glass of beer and he and Luke lift their drinks in a lazy salute before taking identical drinks. Dean puts his down and licks his mouth, staring down at his hand that feels so goddamn heavy on the bartop.

“How many have you had tonight, Dean?”

Dean shrugs, his eyes fluttering closed around the way his head is swimming. It feels good, makes him feel a little out of control and reckless and it’s the first time in days that he hasn’t closed his eyes and seen a little girl in a carrot orange princess wig with blood trickling out from beneath it.

Well, fuck.

He downs half his glass and sets it down with a bit of force, rubbing a tired hand over his eyes.

“Dunno. Baker’s dozen, I guess.”

Luke whistles low under his breath, taking another couple of drinks of his own as he sorts through his thoughts. Dean just stares off, not caring if Luke talks again or not. Goes through Halloween night again, trying to figure out the details, what he could have altered to get to her a little earlier. Just five minutes. Just five minutes and--

“Break up with somebody?”

Dean frowns at the interruption and looks over to find Luke still there, tan and white teeth and pretty, wild curls and all his attention on Dean. Dean almost smirks for his youth, his curiosity.
“Nah.”

Luke nods, taking the answer and he shifts around on his seat, clearly uncomfortable with Dean’s lack of interest in a conversation.

“Family shit?”

“Watched somebody die,” Dean replies a little too quickly, like it’s been on the tip of his tongue for days, like he’s just been waiting to say it. And maybe he has. Luke sits back and draws a sharp breath, concern written all over his pretty face.


“I’m an EMT.” It’s as good a lie as any, and it answers almost all the questions on its own. He watches Luke visibly relax a little next to him, and he gulps down the last of his beer. “Little girl. Dressed up like that mermaid, yanno?”

“Ariel,” Luke supplies, his voice soft with what sounds like genuine sympathy. “Wow, I’m. I know it’s stupid to say, but I really am sorry. That she’s gone. That you had to see that.”

Another shrug, and Dean can’t even lift his hand to signal for another beer. Probably a sign he should stop. He catches the barback’s eye and nods and it gets his point across just fine. “Comes with the job. Just kinda hard to bounce back from this one.”

Luke’s palm is warm on Dean’s shoulder, and his hand is big enough to almost span to his shoulder blade.

“If you wanna talk about it. I mean, I know you don’t know me from Adam, but hey. I’m here and you’re here. So, if you need somebody to listen.” Luke finishes his own beer and waves for another one just when Dean’s replacement arrives.

“I’ll be fine.” Dean tenses just for the thought of spilling his guts to a stranger in a bar, no matter how drunk he is. “I see shit like that everyday practically. Just somethin’ about kids though, man. Can’t shake ‘em.”

Luke nods, head down as he rubs his hands over his denim-covered thighs. “I know what you mean. My mom got remarried a couple years back, and the guy has a girl who’s eleven. I just worry about her a lot. More than I ever did Zac.”

“Zac?” Dean figures he owes this guy a little two-sided conversation, to listen to him yammer on for a minute. A girl walks by behind Luke in a short denim skirt, her hips working in a tight figure eight, her long, fake eyelashes fluttering as she smirks at Dean. Dean just watches her, expressionless, and takes another healthy drink of his beer. Couldn’t get it up for her to ride tonight even if he wanted to.

“My kid brother. A few years younger than me.” Luke trails off after that, a frown overtaking his face. Dean waits him out, lost in thoughts of his own kid brother, of long hands and dimples and a mind that could span universes. “We were just never close, I guess. Never really had a lot in common, you know?”

No, Dean didn’t know. Couldn’t even fathom it. Is annoyed just thinking about somebody else feeling that way about their brother. He frowns down into the golden amber of his glass, words sloshing around in his beer-addled brain that won’t find their way out and he knows it.

“Doesn’t mean you two couldn’t be close.”
“Yeah, I guess, but.” Luke sighs, scratches a hand through his wild hair. Dean wants to pull on it hard, to grip the back of his head and just yank. “I mean, I was always into music, you know? Always in bands in middle school and high school. Traveled around Michigan, doing shows on the weekends. Zac just stayed in his room with his video games. All he ever wanted to talk about. Wanted me to play ‘em with him all the time, and it was just boring after awhile, you know?”

Dean tried to imagine, tried to make his brain work enough to do so. Tried to imagine geek-boy Sammy being a video game nerd, excited about new games coming out and leveling up or whatever. Wanting Dean to play with him, hours next to each other on Sam’s bed, shoulders pressed up tight while they conquered pixelated worlds together. And it sounds amazing. Better than fixing cars, than hunts, than being deep inside of some chick.

He finds himself shaking his head, giving a surprised little laugh before he empties some more beer into his throat. “Man, he wanted to spend time with you. I mean. That’s amazin’, y’know? Most lil’ brothers just. I mean, I got this kid brother, too. Four years younger’n me, y’ know? Practically raised him, took care of his smart ass, all that. We couldn’t be more different, but we weren’t even really. Not really. S’like. S’like we had rooms in the same house, just the walls were painted diff’rent colors. Decorated different. Same house though, man. Same fucking house.”

Luke snorts, a bit incredulous and probably not actually understanding a single fucking thing Dean is trying to say, but he doesn’t laugh at him.

“You two still close?”

Dean goes quiet at that, dead quiet. Deader than a dead little girl quiet. He finishes his beer and waves the bartender over, asking for his tab this time instead of a beer.

“Sammy’s in school now. Got himself into Stanford.”

Luke pays for his beers at the same time and he hurries to gulp down the one he’s working on but Dean doesn’t care. Doesn’t notice.

“That’s good, right? I mean, you can still talk to him.”

Dean smirks this time, looks over to lock eyes with Luke, an eyebrow raised.

“You don’t know my family. Listen.” He puts his stolen card back into his wallet and stands up, adjusting the collar of his jacket. “Gonna go pour myself to bed. Call your fuckin’ brother, man. Let him talk about video games or weird furry porn or how he makes his own recycled candles, it don’t fuckin’ matter. Just let him talk and be grateful he has anythin’ to say to you at all.”

He doesn’t wait for a response, doesn’t look over to see the surprise on Luke’s Abercrombie model face. He just walks back through the bar with as much dignity and aim as he can, staggering only a little because he’s had some practice with this. Comes with the genes, practically, right along with his cocksure smile and the strut of his hips and his perfect aim.

He’s in the parking lot, fingering his keys for the one to the car when he feels a hand on his shoulder, feels it grip and spin him around and he just goes with it, helpless and way too plastered to do anything else. He’s slammed back against the Impala and finds himself face-to-face with Luke for all of five seconds before Luke is smashing his mouth to Dean’s, licking his way in to taste Dean’s sour tongue.

Dean just stays there, letting this guy kiss him, realizing that it’s his first kiss with a dude and he can’t even feel his own mouth to kiss back. Luke finally gets his fill and pulls back, breathless and fat-
mouthed and staring hard at Dean.

“Let me suck your dick.”

Dean snorts and slumps back against the car, scrubbing his hands over his face, numb fingers against a numb mouth.

“It’ll only break your heart, man. I ain’t gettin’ it up for nobody tonight.”

“Just let me taste it, then.” It’s a trembling whisper against Dean’s mouth and then Luke is gone, on his knees in the damp, practically empty lot. Dean just sighs and closes his eyes, body swaying as his pants are undone and jerked down just enough to pop his dick free.

He feels how soft it is in Luke’s palm but the sensation is nice, almost comforting. He feels Luke suck it up into his mouth, not even caring how limp he is. Luke moans and holds onto Dean’s hips and sucks on his drunk-soft dick like it’s a tit, like it’s something good and nourishing and just what he’s been craving.

Dean lets him do his thing for a minute, his own eyes closed and Sam’s right behind his eyelids, looking pretty and submissive like he did sometimes, in the most random, alarming moments. Like he’d bare his neck for Dean, roll over and show his belly and let Dean in, claws and all, to do whatever he wanted. Like he’d live on his knees for Dean, if that’s what Dean wanted. Like he’d do what Luke’s doing right now, just be a cockwarmer for him, just make him feel as good as he can when he’s drunk enough to pass out.

He wouldn’t be this drunk if Sam was here and he knows it.

He’s petting Luke’s hair, playing pretend as he strokes those thick curls back, hips working out of instinct but not really getting much done, like a neutered dog humping. He finally pulls back and his dick slips free from Luke’s mouth, dripping with spit and sucked red but still limp, drooping down against his balls. Luke kisses all over those, too, tonguing them and sucking them into his mouth one at a time.

Dean grunts, shifts, a little over-sensitized, too much when he knows he’s not even gonna come and he’s about five minutes from passing out. He manages to nudge Luke away and Luke stands up again, his mouth shiny and suck-pink with spit. Dean shoves his dick back in his pants and gets the zipper done up but not the button, fumbling once again with his keys.

“Call your brother.” He turns his back to Luke and it’s the last thing spoken between them. He finally gets the car unlocked and sinks down into the cradle of the vinyl seat, letting his car take away all the strangeness of the night. He manages to hit the lock on the door before he passes out, sprawled out on the long of the bench seat just as the rain picks up again outside and his dreams are crowded with Sam’s warm, patient mouth nursing from his dick, sucking come out of him without Dean even needing to orgasm.

May 2003

It’s a year before Sam has any communication with Dean again. He’s started a notebook full of
letters he’s written to Dean but hasn’t sent, can’t send, will never, ever send. Sentimental letters, angry ones, heartbroken ones, raunchy ones, sappy ones. He never throws them away. He just turns to the next page and scratches out a new one.

It’s something a psych major friend had suggested. Writing letters to the people that he has issues with. Even if he never sends them.

There are fifty-six letters to Dean. He hasn’t even entertained the idea of writing one to Dad yet.

Two days after his twentieth birthday, he’s shuffling down the hall to his dorm room. It’s after midnight and he can barely keep his eyes open. He unlocks the door, pausing mid-twist of the key to yawn, his nose scrunching up, eyes watering. He takes a step forward and trips over something on the ground just in front of the door that he’d been too stupid to see before.

It’s a padded manila envelope, fat with something soft inside. Sam stares down at it like it’s going to explode. He looks into the room, sees Andrew’s naked back where he’s asleep in his bed. There’s light coming from outside the window, rain falling in quiet patters on the glass. Looks back down.

There’s no writing on it, no address, no stamps. It could just as easily be Andrew’s, but he knows it’s not.

He knows it’s for him.

He snatches it up and hurries into the room, making sure to pull the door closed behind him.

“Andrew.” His voice is shaky, unsure. He leans over and shakes Andrew’s body, hand sprawled out big on his back. Andrew startles awake, but Sam’s too frantic to care.

“What? Dude, what.” Andrew stops, rubs his face. He blinks blurry eyes around the tiny room, a little blind without the glasses folded up on the nightstand. “What’re you doin’?”

Sam thrusts the package in front of him, close enough so that Andrew can definitely see it, glasses or not. His jaw is tense and his eyes are narrowed almost accusingly, but mostly he’s just scared.

“Where did this come from?”

Andrew blinks at Sam, blinks down at the yellow package. Raises his eyebrows.

“Um,” he offers, frowning when he meets Sam’s eyes again. “I don’t fucking know? How’s that?”

“It was outside. It was outside the door when I got here just now.”

“Okay.” Andrew is annoyed now, and awake. He sits up in bed, his blanket falling down around his lap. Sam stands up straight. “And you’re waking me up why?”

“When did you get here?” Sam is gripping the envelope in a tight fist and practically runs from the room.

He makes it back down to the lobby and outside, only pausing when he’s in the parking lot. The rain is picking up now, falling warm and sweet all over him, ever-growing hair sticking to his forehead, water clinging to his eyelashes. Soaking his shirt.
He doesn’t notice. He studies the parking lot with a hunter’s eye, searches for tiny movements in the dark, for anything out of place from his photographic memory. Nothing. Nothing different. Nothing weird.

He looks down at the sidewalk, searching for footprints, for any hint of Dean. He has no idea what, really. His chest is heaving now, a quick, shuddering movement as he accepts that he’s alone. That Dean’s not here. That even if he had been, he’s not now.

Sam looks down at the package in his hand. It’s a tawny brown now, soaked with rain.

Disappointment washes over him so fast and so strong that he nearly collapses with it.

He stays where he is for so long that the rain slows down, tapering off into a lazy, tender drizzle. He’s drenched from head to toe, and his mind is trying to reason through this, to find a way to hang onto this feeling. This fleeting, addictive thought of maybe Dean is here.

He makes his way back inside, standing in the lobby, dripping all over the maroon industrial carpet. He walks over to the couch beneath the bulletin board and sinks down on it. He cradles the envelope in his hands, in his lap. Spreads his hands over it and tries to absorb Dean through the soggy paper.

He digs his fingers in and rips the package open from the middle.

It’s a t-shirt.

He unfolds it and finds a book wrapped up in it. Middlesex by Jeffrey Eugenides. There’s a piece of paper sticking out a few pages from the front. He snags it, stares at it, opens it up.

S-

I know this is late. I’m sorry. I got caught up and couldn’t get away fast enough. Figured driving it up would be quicker than mailing it. Some smart looking chick at the bookstore told me to get this book for you. She said it’s her favorite. I told her about how smart you were and where you were going to school and she asked for your phone number. I said no. Sorry. I know I’m an asshole. But I hope you like it. I was going to read it myself but I never got the chance.

Shirt’s yours. You left it in the bathroom back in Denver a year and a half ago so I kind of kept it. It doesn’t smell like you anymore though.

Send it back when it does.

Hope it was a good one,

D

Sam reads the note four times and tucks it back into the book before setting it aside. He’ll start it tonight.

The shirt is butter soft in his hands and spotted with time-worn holes. It’s just a black shirt, nothing special, the tag in it so faded that Sam can’t even tell what brand it is. He wouldn’t even have known it was his shirt if Dean hadn’t told him. But Dean had known it was his, had kept it. He brings it up to his nose, eyes falling closed. The lobby is so silent it thrums. He inhales.

Dean.

He’s flooded with the immediate, undeniable fact of Dean. It’s not a particular smell, nothing he could pen down in a shitty, lovesick poem about leather and whiskey and sunshine. Nothing so exact. It’s just Dean, just the smell Sam has known his entire life as home, as constance and comfort
and sanctuary and strength. It’s still warm, like Dean had pulled it off in the car and wrapped it around the book while it still rained outside. He doesn’t notice that he’s crying, doesn’t have the presence of mind to be aware of anything outside of black dyed cotton, soft from generic detergent and years on his body, on Dean’s body.

It’s a smell that Sam had known but not been able to evoke, not in all these months. But it’s all back now, all of those emotions that he normally keeps just beneath his bones, running low under his blood now bursting up out of him in bright, muffled sobs. He aches like he’s ancient, he folds in on himself like he can’t stand the weight of being upright anymore. He curls on the couch, on his side, the book shoved into the cushions beside his feet.

He’s smothering himself in the shirt, the thought of breathing anything else impossible.

In a book, in a music video, maybe, Dean would appear right now. He’d step into the lobby from out of the rain, his cheeks flushed with running, with a love that he just can’t ignore anymore. He’d look around and his eyes would find Sam and see how much Sam needs him, how much Sam loves him loves him loves him. The music would swell and flutter and Dean would come to him, touch him with warm fingers and they would crash together, melt and sigh and clutch and it would be perfect, so perfect. It would be everything Sam has suffered for over the past nine years. It would make all of it, every second, worth it.

The front door stays closed, and the rain stops. Sam falls asleep right there, curled up as small as he can be anymore, lulled to sleep by the smell of the shirt in his hands and the rhythm of his own gasping breaths.

He’s just been waiting.

That’s all this is, Sam being gone. Dean just feels like he’s constantly waiting for something, for something to change, for something to happen. Like, any second, Sam’s going to walk through the door or call or come out of the bathroom, damp with his pajamas on. Waiting is kind of a fucked-up, hopeful emotion, because it sorta implies that he feels like Sam is actually going to come back.

It hadn’t taken long for Dean to realize that they aren’t really a family anymore, him’n Dad. They’re more like war buddies, or like a loveless, emotionally abusive marriage or something. They talk but they don’t talk about anything, they spend hours upon hours together in the car with neither of them saying a word. Not that weird awkward quiet when there are things to say, but just sort of blank, fathomless quiet. The kind that feels like falling after awhile. It’s kind of insane to be lonely sitting next to somebody almost twenty-four hours a day, but Dean is.

Sam is what made them a family. Sam is what gave them, him and Dad both, someone to think about, to focus on outside of themselves. Sam gave Dean a purpose, a reason for getting up in the morning that was simple and honest. And Sam being there gave Dad a reason to harp on Dean, let him get some of his pent-up anger out when Dean screwed this or that up.

Now they both live in their own minds, scarily self-sufficient and quiet. They sleep in the car, more
often than not. And they definitely don’t linger anywhere anymore. Sam had been in school back then, so they had a reason to stay put, to sink tentative roots in somewhere. Dean starts to slowly realize that he’s always wanted a home, always craved it. Always indulged so much when they stayed anywhere. And he misses it. Misses the boy who made them a family and who gave them a reason to have a home at all.

--

Last month, Dad bought a truck off some guy he still knows in Lawrence, parked it in the lot at the motel and walked into the room, tossing the keys to the Impala at Dean with absolutely no ceremony. And that’s how Dean got Baby.

They travel apart now, taking to cases on opposite ends of the country, cell phone conversations keeping them in contact, giving Dean some direction when he feels completely lost as to what to do next. This isolation is more pronounced, more definitive now, but at least it’s self-imposed. The car has never felt so big or so empty.

--

There’s a misunderstanding during a hunt in Cleveland, and Dean winds up getting shot by a man with a possessed daughter. Thankfully the dad’s a piss-poor shot, so it just hits Dean’s arm, sinks right down into the meat of it and bleeds like a bitch. He knocks the guy out, drenches Emily Rose in holy water and finishes the exorcism through gritted teeth, his hand clutched around his bicep, blood seeping out between his fingers.

Needless to say, he bleeds all over the upholstery in the fucking car.

He gets patched up at the hospital downtown to avoid bleeding out, but he’s back on the road before dawn, the painkillers wearing off rapidly, leaving him with a pain so vivid that it takes his breath away. If he can just get to Sioux Falls, just get to Bobby’s, he can hide out and lick his wounds and get better. And hopefully be miles away from anybody who wants to fill him with bullets while he does.

I-80 West is a road he’s been on so many times he could possibly drive it in his sleep. It’s freezing this late in December, just two days before Christmas, and the heat is acting up in the car. Dean just tugs his jacket tighter around him and keeps going. The sun is pulling down, setting in a moody bed of clouds and pushing colors up into the sky, stubbornly ignoring the threats of snow coming in on the radio. It’ll be a couple feet easy here in southern Minnesota by morning.

He stops for gas when he’s on E in Albert Lea, grabbing a couple of Mountain Dews and corndogs before heading to the register. He dumps it all on the counter and pulls his wallet out of his backpocket, wincing at the sharp pinch of the bullet hole in his arm.

“Twenty-five on pump four,” he gruffs, not looking up at the bored teenager ringing him up. He hands his card over and slumps against the counter, sighing as he scratches at his three-day old beard.

“Uh, it says it’s declined,” the kid informs him, passing the card back over, eyebrows raised expectantly.

Dean just blinks at him.

“Declined?”

“Uh, yeah.” Tired eyes look from the credit card reader and back at Dean. “Got another one?”
Dean looks back in his empty wallet before quickly pocketing it. “No, no, I, uh.” He clears his throat and starts digging through his pockets, finding a five dollar bill which is a tiny relief.

“Just give me the drinks and corn dogs, I guess.”

The kid looks dubious.

“But don’t you need gas?”

Dean levels him with an unamused stare.

“Yeah. You gonna pay for it, Beavis?”

The kid glares at Dean, punches a few buttons on the register, and snatches the five from his hand. He all but throws Dean’s change at him and Dean grabs the dogs and the drinks and stomps back out to the car.

Well, fuck.

He sits in the car, eating and drinking his first meal of the day. He calls Bobby after the first corndog. Gets the answering machine.

This is Singer. Won’t be home until Christmas Eve. Helpin’ Santa load his sleigh. Dean rolls his eyes.

Hangs up.

“Fuck!”

Calls Dad. No answer. Leaves a message. Eats the second corn dog dejectedly. He pulls back onto the road with a weird sort of determination even though the sun has set and the snow has just started to fall.

The car sputters out her last breath right outside of Blue Earth, and Dean can’t help but sigh. He eases her onto the side of the road and kills the engine, the world falling utterly silent around him.

It’s truly night by now, and the moon is waning but still mostly full, revealing the expanse of snow-covered land and trees all around the interstate. Bobby won’t be home until tomorrow, and Dad’s not answering. Dean’s hurt with no money and no gas. There’s nothing to do but wait.

Sure, he could abandon the car and trek back to Blue Earth, try to find somebody with enough holiday spirit to let the bearded, bloodied guy with the haunted eyes sleep on their couch for the night. But he’s not an idiot. Well, he’s realistic, anyway.

He calls Bobby back to leave a message.

“Bobby, I’m outta gas and stuck on the side of the road west of Blue Earth. Card got declined and it’s snowin’. I just. I could really use some help here, man. Call me as soon as you get this.”

He climbs out of the car to piss, the door creaking closed behind him. He does his thing, zips up, and almost turns to get back in the car before something out in the nearby field catches his eye. No way.

He looks down where he’s standing. Mile marker 116. This is it.
He looks back up and squints, his breath leaving his body in ghost white puffs. That’s it, no doubt about it. In spite of it all, in spite of everything, Dean smiles.

Sam’s tree.

It’s stupid. Really stupid. Sam had fallen in love with some random old tree on the way to Bobby’s one day when they were younger. Sam had been maybe eight, and he’d pushed his soft nose against the glass in the backseat and gasped.

“Look! Dean, lookit!”

He’d pointed and Dean had turned from his station in the passenger seat next to Dad, tired and not in the mood to play any kind of road games at the moment.

“What? Scraggly ass trees?”

“That tree!” Sam had been adamant and so Dean had taken the time to actually look. They went by it quickly, but Dean had seen one that was different than all the others, one that was dead and caught mid-fall by a tree just beside it. It was old and sad and leaning and Sam’s face was bright with happiness. Dean had looked from the tree back to his little brother, eyebrows lifting.

“Sammy, you’re so damn weird.” He’d reached back and scrubbed a hand through Sam’s hair to soften his words, and Sam had just given him a snaggle-toothed grin and settled back into his nest of blankets in the back seat, dog-eared copy of *THE BFG* cradled in his warm little hands.

And every time they’d driven I-80 going to Bobby’s, Sam would spot the tree without fail. He’d point and sigh and smile, like it was an old friend. Dean found himself looking forward to seeing it, just to see that much unbridled happiness on Sam’s face.

Sam’d been asleep once and missed it. He cried the whole next day until Bobby, tired of hearing about it, had bundled ten-year-old Sam into his old Chevelle and driven to Blue Earth and back, just so Sam could see it.

Sam’s tree.

There it is. A little more sunken than Dean remembers it being, but it’s snow-covered, given a bright white outline that makes it unmistakable in the moonlight and the streetlight.

And here he is.

He looks back at the car, staring at it suspiciously. This feels like a trick, like a plan or something. Like the car’d run out of gas right here on purpose, to get Dean to see this, to feel this. To miss Sam something awful, even more than usual. On the day before Christmas Eve.

Dean gives the tree one last look before climbing back in the car.

He gathers towels and shirts from the backseat and fashions himself a pillow. He stretches out on the bench seat, the vinyl squeaking and grunting under his movements. The moon is crystal clear up there, left alone by the snow clouds. The snow is falling harder and smaller, settling in to stay.

His arm is throbbing now, the pain washing over him so much that he lets out a whimper when he finally turns over onto his side to try and sleep. There’s a fine shimmer of sweat on his forehead, on his upper lip even though it’s cold enough in the car that he can see his breath.

He aches for comfort, for any comfort at all. For a blanket, soft and well-washed and tucked around
him. For a pain pill to take the edge off the pain and let him fall into a deep sleep. For someone to answer the phone, to offer him help. For a hand in his hair, for a voice to fill in the mawing silence, for warmth against his skin.

He aches for Sam.

The sleep he falls into is comfortless and tense and fitful, only stopping with sound of his phone ringing a couple of hours before dawn.

Bobby finds him, miracle of miracles, gives him a hundred bucks cash and a couple of gallons of gas. He passes him a credit card with a quirked eyebrow, telling him to only use it when he absolutely has to.

He almost follows Bobby back to Sioux Falls but just as he starts to climb back in the car, the sky brightening to a lighter blue with the hint of sunrise, he stops.

“Bobby!”

Bobby turns back around from where he’d been heading to his own car, his eyes tired, beard scruffy. He raises his eyebrows at Dean.

“I’m, uh. I’ve got somewhere I’ve gotta go. I’ll head back to your place around New Years, okay?”

Bobby just stares at him for a minute before lifting his shoulder in a shrug. “Whatever you say, boy. Just don’t get yourself shot again between now and then.”

Dean manages a smile and a wave before he gets back in his car, blowing out a breath of relief when she starts up.

--

It takes over twenty-four hours to get to Palo Alto, and Dean doesn’t know how he does it without sleeping. Maybe it’s the thought of Sam, of seeing his face, hearing his laugh over how stupid Dean is for getting shot during a pretty easy hunt. Whatever it is, it works.

He pulls into Palo Alto around 7:30 on Christmas morning, right when the sun is starting to rise. He’s weak with not having eaten a decent meal in a few days and exhaustion and the fucking ache in his arm, but he’s finally here. He makes his way to campus and to the dorms where Sam had been living last year. He knows Sam’s roommate has a red Civic, but he doesn’t see it. There are maybe five cars in the entire parking lot, only a few less than he’d seen on the streets. The entire town is deserted this early in the morning on the holiday break, and Dean’s a little grateful for it.

His hands are shaking by the time he parks, his face pale, gaunt. He shuts the car off and stares up at the dorms, feeling for all the world like he’s looking for a needle in a haystack.

Sleep takes him before he has a single other thought.

--

Sam kind of hates Christmas mornings. There’s always a thrum of anticipation in the air, like something magic could have happened overnight, a sensation beat into him by hours upon hours of Christmas movies. But it never happens, not ever. Not anymore.

He stays in bed, the covers pooled around his waist, and he closes his eyes and pretends.
Pretends he’s a kid again, maybe twelve, maybe up in that cabin with Dean in Indiana. Trapped by winter with his brother with nothing to do. He realizes now that it’s probably the happiest he’s ever been, not sharing Dean’s attention with anybody else, no chance of it. And the snow had been so beautiful, such a sure-fire way to get them to stop moving.

His stale-aired, empty dorm room looks and feels nothing like that cabin when he opens his eyes. He sighs into the quiet, forcing himself to shove his covers away, to get up. Maybe he can just read today, nap in between chapters.

Fucking Christmas.

He stretches, arms high over his head, back arching before he slumps back down into his natural stance. He steps up to the tiny window between the beds, looking out just in case a freak accident happened and it snowed. Or even rained. Something besides sunshine and slightly cool air that doesn’t signify winter *at all*.

Nothing. Not even a fucking cloud. The sun is well on it’s way up from the horizon, shining merrily like it has no idea that it’s just fucking everything up. Sam glares at it.

He starts to turn away from the window, contemplating breakfast and where he can find it when something catches his eye and he stops. Completely shuts down.

No.

He’s frozen in place, facing his bed, head down as his chest heaves softly. He can’t look again, can’t. Doesn’t want to be wrong. Doesn’t want it to not be true. He closes his eyes, jaw tensing, willing himself to stop entertaining even the idea that he just saw the Impala, just get over it now now now, before it completely rips you apart.

“Stop,” he whispers to himself, a plea.

But his steel-trap of a memory shuffles back up, provides him with a photograph of what he’d only glimpsed. There it is, lower left hand corner, almost out of his line of vision. Black Chevy Impala. Sixty-seven, Coke bottle style body. It’s unmistakable.

He almost falls in his hurry to twist back around, to throw himself at the window, hands catching on the windowsill. He stares with a frightening intensity out his window, craning his neck to see out to the left, several rooms away.

He sees a pale figure in the drivers seat, like he’s slumped over and resting his head against the wheel. In the quiet of the morning, he swears he can hear the sound of his own heart shattering.

Dean.

--

Dean’s head snaps up at the sound of an insistent pounding next to his left ear. He blinks around like a blind baby rat, a little dizzy from keeping his head on the wheel while he slept and *goddamnit*, his neck is killing him.

“Dean!”

It sounds like the voice is underwater, or like he’s underwater and the voice is yelling at him from the surface. Whatever. The pounding starts up again, giving Dean an excellent guide as to where the voice is actually coming from, and he ends up just staring when he looks to his left.
Sammy is beating on the window so hard that if Dean felt anything but relief, he’d be warning him to cool it, but. Sam’s inexplicably shirtless, his hair longer than Dean’s ever seen it and it’s sticking up all over the damn place and there are tears streaking his cheeks and he looks just about as frantic as the feeling that’s building up in Dean’s chest so fast that he can’t draw a breath.

“Sam.” It seems impossible. It seems impossible even though Dean was the one who brought himself here in the first place. Maybe he’s dead. Maybe the wound was actually worse than he thought and he’d died over the course of the night, and this is his first stop in Heaven.

Sam would be his first stop in Heaven.

“Open the door!”

God, Sam is seriously brilliant. Yes.

Dean tugs the lock on the door up and before he can even pull his hand away, Sam is ripping the door open and reaching in for him, so much bigger than Dean remembers him being and he’s dragging Dean against himself, clutching him in his arms, his rank morning breath gasping against Dean’s face and he’s sniffling like a little kid and--

“Ow, ow, Sammy, wait, please. God, just hold on, fuck.”

Sam pulls back, tears leaving streaks on his face, and his eyebrows drawn together in concern.

“What? Dean, are you okay? What’s wrong?”

“Got shot,” he manages through gritted teeth, a hand coming up to cradle his bicep. He closes his eyes and sags back against the car. “Just stings a little.”

“Jesus. God, okay, c’mon. My room’s right over there.” Dean doesn’t look where Sam is pointing, just follows the careful hands on his body and lets himself be led away from the car. He walks and walks and goes up and through and around and there’s a door opening and then he’s being pushed down onto a bed.

He stays sitting up which is hard, but he’s rewarded when Sam oh-so carefully helps him pull his jacket off. He grinds his teeth together so hard he’s afraid they’re gonna shatter but he manages not to make any sounds. He’s sweating again and out of breath and he looks up to see Sam standing over him, hovering like a worried mother.

“I want to get your shirt off, Dean. I need to see it.”

He could tell him that it’s just on his arm, that he doesn’t need his shirt off, but the shirt’s filthy by now, bloody and sticking to his body, and he suddenly can’t be out of it fast enough. He helps Sam twist and tug it until it’s off and he falls back on the bed then, letting out a groan as he trembles there.

He closes his eyes when he feels Sam’s long, gentle fingers dance around the wound, around the irritated stitches. Sam hisses in sympathy, hand now stroking over Dean’s arm.

“You have any painkillers?”

Dean shakes his head, trying to will a smile onto his face but he’s sure it just comes off as a grimace.

“Nah. I scrammed as soon as they patched me up.”

“Okay. Look, hold on just a minute, okay? Let me see what I can find.”
Dean’s sure he nods but he doesn’t say anything. He relaxes back into the bed and cracks an eye open when he feels a nudge at his foot. Sam is standing over him with a banana and a granola energy bar thing and a bottle of water. Dean blinks at him.

“Eat,” Sam orders, leaning over to set the items beside Dean on the bed. “I know it’s not ideal, but you need to eat something. We’ll get some real food later.”

Dean grabs the bottle of water and works at twisting it open, not even pretending that he’s gonna eat the rabbit food. He tips it back and spills a little water on his neck but he drinks down a healthy amount of it, enough to meet Sam’s approval because he smiles while Dean gulps.

“Just rest for a minute,” Sam says, his voice soothing, low. Dean feels a hand sliding through his greasy hair, and he feels the sting of tears behind his closed eyes. This. This is exactly everything he wanted.

--

Sam wants to wake him up, but he can’t bring himself to yet. He’s scrounged up a first aid kit and some painkillers from the RA’s room (he may be a civilian now but he still knows how to pick a damn lock), and he wants Dean to be awake before he starts poking at him.

Dean looks so ragged and thin, but it’s probably just the lack of sun on his skin and the whiskery, mountain man beard on Dean’s face. It’s actually disturbingly attractive on him, but it’s unfamiliar and reminds Sam a little too much of Dad. He’s still so, so beautiful, freckles very evident on his sickly pale skin, his eyebrows drawn together in pain even while he sleeps.

Sam can’t get over it. Him.

His breath hitches, and he makes sure to keep it quiet even though he knows he can’t stop the tears from sliding down his face. This is too much, it’s too perfect. It’s so good it hurts, having Dean right here. Dean came to him. Trusted him when he was hurt. He looks older, more gaunt, chased, somehow. Sam stands up and roots the box of salt from under his bed and lines the door and the window, just to be sure.

“Dean,” he tries, his voice so soft, too soft, probably revealing every single bit of love coursing through his body right now. Dean doesn’t respond, doesn’t move. He’s got a few new scars on his body, and he’s leaner than before, but his stomach is still tight, nipples dusky and pink, a faint, golden trail of hair leading from his belly button down into his jeans. Sam stares at that hair, at the way it seems to glimmer a little in the sun from the window. He wants to touch it, to rub it with his fingers before pushing his hand down into his jeans and finding what the happy trail leads to. He wants to lick at it, kiss it until Dean makes him stop.

“Dean.” He sounds more pleading now, because, well, he is. Having Dean awake will at least distract him from all of his illegal thoughts, give him something else to focus on. He runs the backs of fingers over Dean’s forearm, watching in fascination as his nipples tighten even more, as goosebumps fly along after his hand. Sam licks his lips, chews on the bottom one.

He looks up to see Dean watching him, his eyes sleepy but clear, seeing. Sam flushes deeply and looks away again, clears his throat.

“Hey. Sorry. I, um.” He leans over then and grabs up the ziplock bag of first-aid stuff, complete with a contraband little baggie of painkillers. “I’m gonna clean that, okay?”

Dean nods, eyes still on Sam, still watching him. Sam doesn’t dare look back up. He focuses instead
on Dean’s arm, leaning in close to inspect the wound, to frown at the stitches. They look ever so slightly pinched, and Sam wants to call and yell at the probably tired nurse who did them.

“It doesn’t look infected, just a little irritated.” He’s still speaking softly, like Dean’s dozing, but he doesn’t want to break the quiet spell that’s fallen over the room since Dean drifted off. He grabs the washcloth he has in a bowl of warm water and squeezes the excess out, bringing it newborn-careful to Dean’s arm, his body tensing when Dean’s does.

“I need to shower. And to fuckin’ shave,” Dean says, his voice sounding scratchy, bruised. He scritches at his beard, and Sam can’t help but look up, smirk at the wrinkle of Dean’s nose, at how annoyed he is at being so hairy.

“I don’t know. I think it looks pretty good.” He tries to keep his voice light, inconsequential, but his eyes linger a little longer than they need to before he goes back to business. Dean grunts, an annoyed sound, and Sam feels giddy. Almost starstruck. Dean’s here. Under his hands. Dean.

“Been driving since yesterday morning.” These words are a little softer, almost like Dean’s not sure he wants Sam to hear them. Sam’s heart skips but he stays on task, drying his arm a little and pouring some hydrogen peroxide onto a cotton pad and pressing it to the wound. Dean arches up off the bed then, growling soft in his throat. Sam maybe shivers.

“Well? Why didn’t you stop?”

Dean goes quiet, eyes trained on some spot behind Sam’s head while Sam works. He dabs a little petroleum jelly on before he starts to wrap it in gauze. Dean still hasn’t answered by the time Sam tacks on some medical tape and pronounces Dean done, so Sam lets it go. He knows how Dean works. Knows that he’ll answer him in his own time.

He cleans up his mess and Dean grunts as he shifts around on the bed. Sam jumps into action then, digging around for the pain pill.

“Here, take this. I don’t know what it is exactly, but it’s from when a kid almost chopped his finger off cutting limes for margaritas on Cinco de Mayo.” He drops the pill in Dean’s hand and watches as he smirks and then swallows it down dry.

“You maybe wanna help me out of my boots? I don’t think I could sit up right now if Yasmine Bleeth walked in naked.” Dean tries to lift one of his legs but Sam is down there before he can move anymore, untying and loosening both of them before pulling his shoes off, taking his socks off as an afterthought. He barely touches Dean’s foot and Dean is hissing, his body tightening up and Sam looks up in alarm.

“Sorry, it’s just, uh. Been driving, you know? I feel like I got hit by a fucking Mack truck.”

Sam nods, stares down at the feet draped across his lap. He makes a brave, selfless decision. “Hey, get your jeans off? It’ll be more comfortable. I can find you some pjs, if you want.”

He’s afraid Dean’s gonna call him on it, going to tease him about Sam just wanting to get him naked, and Sam has no idea how he would even start to defend himself. But Dean just gazes at him again, stares for a few beats before he reaches down and flips the button of his jeans open, using his fingers to edge the zipper down. Sam watches him intently, watches dirty fingers edging down the zipper, watches Dean’s stomach draw in, gets caught up staring at the goosebumps trailing up Dean’s ribs.

Dean nudges his jeans down his hips, helped when Sam finally gets with the program and starts to pull the legs down. They finally get them off his body, leaving him in a snug pair of boxer briefs.
very similar to the ones Sam had first gotten Dean at Wal-Mart so many years ago. His face heats up at the thought.

He indulges for just a second, takes in the pale down of hair on Dean’s legs, the boyish knobs of his knees, the rounded weight of Dean’s dick and balls under cotton. It’s so close—*he’s* so close—he could just reach out and rub and squeeze, but.

But.

He tugs Dean’s feet up into his lap again, sitting back against the wall at the foot of the bed. He cups one of Dean’s feet in his hands, stares at the tops of them, at the indentations left by Dean’s tight boots, the sparse hairs under his big toenails, the bruised little toe that Sam kind of wants to kiss.

Christ, he needs to snap out of this.

He starts to rub at the arch of Dean’s foot, his hands big and firm and insistent, and Dean gasps, body locking up at the sudden attention to sore muscles. Sam shushes him with soft noises and keeps rubbing, and Dean slowly relaxes back against the bed, an arm thrown up over his eyes to hide his face.

Sam rubs until Dean’s feet are relaxed under his hands, and he works his way up his legs, digging in hard at stubborn, strong calf muscles, eyes focused desperately when he starts in on Dean’s thighs.

“Sammy, *Jesus,*” Dean breathes, his stomach clenched tight while Sam works the tension out of his tired legs. The muscles loosen up slowly, and Sam is maybe breathing a little too hard by the time he gets to Dean’s upper thighs.

“Turn over, let me work on your back for a little bit.” His voice is a bit gruff, a little strained but he manages to get the entire sentence out without blushing, so that’s something. Dean hesitates, lazy with the massage and the pain pill slowly making its way through his system, so it takes a few beats for him to agree. He flops over onto his stomach and sighs into the pillow. “Keep your arms down to the side, okay?”

Dean grunts and Sam smiles as he shifts on the bed, kneeling next to Dean in an amazingly tiny amount of space so he can reach his shoulders without straddling him.

Not that he’s ever imagined straddling Dean.

He closes his eyes as he starts to rub Dean’s shoulders and neck, focusing on what Dean’s body is telling him and trying so hard not to think about Dean’s warm skin, the galaxy of freckles he’s touching, the thick cords of muscle he’s got under his hands. They’re both breathing pretty hard now, Dean with painful relief and Sam with exertion and maybe arousal.

“You still with me, Dean?”

Dean groans into the pillow and Sam grins.

“This massage come with a happy ending?”

Sam is so, so glad that Dean can’t see his face right now because Dean’s caught him completely, completely by surprise. They’re both quiet for a bit, clearly waiting on Sam to respond, and Sam is blushing like a schoolgirl and making damn sure not to change the pressure of his hands on Dean’s shoulders. He runs a hand down Dean’s side and digs his fingers in, tickling him ruthlessly and making Dean bark out the most emasculating sound that Sam has to laugh. Dean jerks on the bed and lifts his head to glare back at Sam, his eyes already heavy, pupils blown.
“I hate you.”

“Why? Because you sound adorable when you get tickled?” Sam threatens with his fingers again just to feel Dean tense, but he’s a merciful tormentor, so he goes back to the massage. Dean growls a little but it eases out into a moan when Sam works his way down Dean’s back, baring down with his weight as he presses his hands in on either side of Dean’s spine, popping his back all the way back up to the nape of his neck.

Dean sobs then, a real sob and he melts completely into the bed, body shaking lightly all over. Sam keeps a warm, spread palm on his back and he watches him, watches the pain ease out of Dean’s body, leaving him in a pretty euphoric, painless state.

“You good?” He keeps his voice soft as he rubs his hand across Dean’s back, keeping the pressure steady but light. Dean makes what can barely be called a sound, and Sam can tell that he’s mostly asleep. He leans up with all of the courage in his body and presses a kiss to the nape of Dean’s neck, his lips soft and trembling. Reverent.

“Sleep,” he murmurs, his eyes slipping closed to savor him just for a second, his forehead pressed to the top of Dean’s spine just to hear his heartbeat, to feel the rhythm of his breathing, to smell his skin. Dean’s breath deepens and slows, and Sam kisses him again, one more time, right against the top notch of his spine. “Big brother.”

He pulls the blanket up over Dean’s body and stands up as quiet as he can, going the couple of feet away to sit on Andrew’s bed, pulling his long legs up to his chest and watching Dean sleep, like if he takes his eyes off of him, if he tries to go to sleep himself, Dean will just disappear.

--

Dean wakes up in increments. The first thing he realizes is that he’s not cold. Nice. He snuggles down into incredibly familiar-smelling blankets and grunts happily as he accepts the warmth and the covers.

The second thing he realizes is that there’s another person in the room. There’s nothing particular he can point to as proof of it, but he knows. He waits a few beats, trying to see if maybe he can just fall back asleep. His eyelashes flutter and catch on the blanket before he opens his eyes. Damnit.

Definitely awake.

He tugs the blanket down and realizes that it’s late afternoon, wherever he is. The light is low and golden out the little window above his head. He stretches, long and lazy as a cat, toes straining and touching the footboard, arms up high over his head and--

Shit.

He hisses, jerking his arms back down with a frown. His left bicep hurts like a bitch. Why--

Oh.

Oh.

He remembers. Being shot, the nauseating sterility of the hospital, alone, no money no gas Sam’s tree, alone. Cold, cold, cold. Alone.

Sam.

He turns his head, his beard scratching against the blanket. Sam isn’t in the other bed in the room, the
tiny twin that matches the one he’s currently in. He’s sitting on the floor, leaning back on the nightstand between the beds, legs stretched out in front of him, chin touching his chest.

Asleep.

He’s as close to Dean as he can get without being in the actual bed with him, and his hand is resting on the bed next to Dean’s arm, fingers just barely curled on the grey sheet. Like he couldn’t even stand to be even three feet away, in that bed over there. Like it was just too far.

Dean’s chest tightens in what can only ever be called love, and he’s drugged and unguarded enough right now to admit it.

He swallows hard, blinking some of the tired out of his eyes as he finally takes in his surroundings. The walls are white, institution white, and the beds have matching grey and blue bedding on them, a single, sad pillow each. There’s a desk with a computer at the foot of the other bed, and a tiny counter behind it holds an itty bitty microwave, a little sink, and about ten coffee mugs and cans of Dr. Pepper. The mini-fridge completes the dollhouse look of the whole thing, and Dean can’t help but smile at the thought of Sam, his overgrown, long baby brother, living inside of this tiny room for more than five minutes.

There are some family pictures over on the other side of the room: one of a family of four with matching, white smiles, another of a couple of kids playing on the beach, one at a birthday party that clearly happened in the 80s. And a Grateful Dead poster. Dean smirks. College boys.

Sam’s side is tidy, nothing out, nothing cluttered. There are two posters on the wall, both small and not as colorful as tie-dye and dancing bears: one for Pearl Jam and the other for Radiohead. No family pictures, nothing sentimental, nothing unguarded. All clean and unassuming and not caring to draw anybody’s eye for more than a few seconds.

That’s Sammy.

He looks down at the bed he’s in, and it all just kind of hits him. Smacks him in the face like an avalanche that he hadn’t even been aware was approaching. He’s in Sam’s room at Stanford. A place so fucking mythical in his own mind, in his masochistic daydreams and torments. Sam had just let him in, led him inside and let him pass out. Given him a place to feel safe and be guarded for a few hours. Let him rest. All without being asked. Without really knowing what Dean had gone through, what had driven him across thousands of miles and hours upon frozen hours to get here, to be here.

And now that he’s here, he’s supposed to find it in him to leave sometime, isn’t he? Can’t just stay here, sleep on the desk or something, right? He’s going to have to say goodbye to Sammy again, to climb in his car and drive away from him, something that he’s always hated with every single fiber of his being, something that has always gone against all of his instincts.

He clutches at the blankets, trying to make himself heavier, like somebody’s just gonna come in and rip him right out of the bed, out of the room, away from his baby brother. Tears sting at his eyes, and he’s so pissed at himself because he did this. He did it to himself.

“Goddamnit,” he whispers, breath hitching softly.

“Dean?”

Dean jerks at the sound of Sam’s voice so close even though he knows exactly where he is. He doesn’t look over at him, doesn’t let him see the wide vulnerable of his eyes, doesn’t let him see the
emotion in them that he just can’t put away yet.

Dean grunts a response, scrubbing his hands over his face, heels of them digging into his eyes, pads of his fingers scratch-scratching over his damn beard.

“Why you on the floor, Sammy?”

Sam is just as quiet as Dean had been at that question, and Dean finally looks over at him, curiosity getting the better of him. Sam is looking down, the faintest pink on his cheeks. Of course Sam still blushes. And shrugs like a little kid.

“Dunno. Just kind of did it in my sleep.”

Dean watches as Sam stands up, as he stretches his ever-growing body, flashing a flat stomach, a strip of elastic under his pajama pants, and a faint trail of soft brown hair that disappears into it. He looks away.

Sam clears his throat as Dean sits up, the blankets falling away from him. Dean checks over his wound by running his fingers over it, and he grits his teeth at how fucking tender it is. It feels better though, isn’t worryingly warm to the touch. The other bed squeaks when Sam sits down on it, and Dean looks over to watch Sam stare at his hands.

Welp. This got awkward fast.

“Why are you here, Dean?”

The question hangs in the air between them, won’t let either of them go until it’s answered. Dean sighs and heaves himself up to lean back against the headboard and tuck into the corner of the wall, facing Sam. He wants a shirt because he hates having heart-to-hearts without clothes on, but now doesn’t seem to be a good time to ask for one. It’s Dean’s turn to little boy-shrug.

“Just seemed like the place to go, I guess.”

Dean’s eyes burn on the picture of the two little kids at the beach on the wall behind Sam, two boys, neither of them looking at the camera. One is building a sandcastle and the other is staring off at the sea right beside him. It could be him and Sam, in another life. It should have been him and Sam. Dean blinks rapidly, refusing to let the tears build. He feels fucking maudlin and he hasn’t even had any alcohol.

He looks back down and Sam is watching him, staring at him like Dean just offered him a kitten.

“Really?”
Dean raises his eyebrows, wondering how he managed to say the magic words to make Sam look like he’s twelve again, wondering exactly what they are so he can keep them and say them again later, tomorrow, next week, forever.

Another shrug though, nonchalant.

“Yeah. Can’t do anything with this bullet hole in me anyway, right? Might as well stay here and bug you for a little bit. I-I mean. If that’s okay with you and all.”

Sam blinks, head shaking a little like he doesn’t quite understand. “If it’s okay with--yeah. I mean, yeah, of course. Of course it’s okay, Dean, Jesus. You know you. I mean. You can always.”

There’s that flush again, and Sam clearing his throat, short and grownup.

“You can always come here. No matter what.”

Dean lets out a little laugh, the kind that’s just a breath that means Dean wants to grin but it’d be too genuine if he did.

“You’ll live to regret that offer.”

Their eyes meet again and Sam is serious this time, shaking his head.

“No. I won’t. I mean it, Dean.”

“Thanks.” Dean says it so quietly that it would have been impossible to hear if the rest of the world wasn’t utterly silent for them at that moment. “For. For everything.”

He motions around him, at the room, the bed, his arm. At Sam. And Sam smiles because he gets it. Of course he gets it. How did Dean ever manage to lie to himself and think that this would ever go away between them? That Sam would turn into a different person out here and not be his little boy anymore?

“So, uh. You hungry? There’s not a lot open on Christmas, but there’s an In-n-Out Burger across the street that’s open today. Want me to go get a bunch of burgers and fries and heart attacks and bring ‘em back?”

Dean is nodding and squirming on the bed, his stomach twisting and gurgling like a separate entity. He’d eaten the bare minimum on the way over to California: a donut, a bag of salt and vinegar chips, a whole bag of chocolate pretzels. And now he’s fucking starving.

Sam laughs, probably at Dean’s enthusiasm for food, and stands up. He shoves his pants down and roots around in the small closet Dean hadn’t noticed before, pulling on a pair of jeans and a hoodie. Dean just watches him, leans back on the bed and watches the way Sam’s fingers work over the brass button of his jeans, the way his long arms snake through the sleeves of the hoodie, the impossible wildness of his hair when he pops up through the neckhole and fixes the hood. He looks so good. Looks like Sammy, like he always has, but better. Bigger and more sure of himself, more confident in his movements, more direct in his words than he has been in a long time, maybe ever.

“You look good,” he finally says, the words coming out almost hoarse, awkward. Sam looks over and finds Dean watching him, raises his eyebrows. His smile is a smirk and it’s kind of adorable. Bastard.

“Thanks,” Sam huffs in a laugh, letting the smirk grow into a grin. “So do you, mountain man.”
Dean groans, reaching up to self-consciously tug at his beard. “Shuddup.”

Sam’s got a pair of running shoes on now, and he’s stuffing a wallet and phone into his pocket. When he looks back at Dean, his eyes are almost shy.

“You can shower while I’m gone, if you want. My clothes are in that closet, and my toiletry bag is under the bed. Use whatever you want. I’ll be back, okay?”

“Alright, man. Thanks.” This feels so weird, so formal. Sam playing the host, offering Dean things, doing everything for them. Dean should be the one taking care of them, at least going to get the food. Oh! “Oh, Sammy. Take the car, arrite?”

He looks around and spies the keys on the nightstand next to him. He reaches over and grabs them and tosses them to Sam who catches them with an unreadable look on his face. Dean watches him stare down at the keys, waits him out and tries to read the expression on his face. It hits him suddenly, and his whole body aches again.

“You miss her, don’t you?”

Sam glances up for that, caught. The keys rattle in his hand when he curls his finger into a keyring, and he clears his throat softly.

“Of course. I mean.” He doesn’t say anything more, and Dean doesn’t really need him to. There’s no way to talk about her, about that car, without getting emotional. And they definitely aren’t going to do this in the light of day, when Dean doesn’t have whiskey or darkness to aid him.

“She’s got gas in her. Go ahead. She misses you, too.” He smirks at Sam, hoping it’s casual enough. Sam returns it gratefully, giving a single nod before he turns for the door.

“Oh! Dean.” He turns around halfway outside, one foot already in the hall. Dean raises his eyebrows in reply. “Don’t get your arm wet.”

Dean rolls his eyes, lips pursing in amusement.

“Yes, mama.”

Sam glares but it’s followed by a blinding grin.

“Back in a minute, asshole.”

Dean finally lets out the breath he feels like he’s been holding since he woke up when Sam closes the door behind him.

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Sam knocks on his own door before opening it again, giving Dean a chance to scramble to get dressed or at least let Sam know he’s not. He steps in after a few beats, bags and cups balanced in his arms. Dean is sitting on his bed again, but this time he’s a little damp, pink from the shower and clean-shaven. He’s wearing one of Sam’s generic Stanford t-shirts and a pair of pajama pants that almost fit him. Sam can’t keep his smile in.

“Where did the scraggly guy go that I left in here? Did he take my shit and leave?”
Sam turns his back on Dean to close his door and to compose himself a little. Because Dean is sitting on his bed in his clothes, and while that’s not weird as his brother, it’s a little bit of a wet dream for Sam, the most fucked-up, terrible brother of all time.

“Don’t I look pretty?” Dean gives him his biggest shit-eating grin when Sam turns around again and starts unloading his arms. “Oh, by the way, you need a new razor.”

Sam snorts, dimple peeking out as he tries to hold in a smile. “Got some food, buttmunch. Figured about four burgers would do.”

Dean is already up and digging around through the bags, shoveling a few fries in his mouth and cradling one of the drinks with a straw poking out of it. He snatches up the bag of burgers and raises his eyebrows at Sam. “Sounds awesome. You get anything for yourself?”

Their smirks match exactly and Dean half-heartedly ducks when Sam goes to smack the back of his head. “Want some ketchup?”

“Nah, I’m good.” Dean carries his bundle back to the bed, digging a burger out and not hesitating to unwrap it and take a huge bite. He takes a deep breath as he chews, leaning back against the wall in a slump. He sighs before swallowing, his eyes falling closed. “God, that’s good.”

“You’re just easy. Move over.” Sam’s heart is stuttering, chest aching just for the sound of Dean’s voice resonating in this room, for his unspeakable scent all over everything, changing the shape and color and sound of this space forever. This room will never be quiet ever again, not entirely. It will always have Dean here, the echo of him, like the memory of a bell ringing.

Sam doesn’t eat, isn’t hungry. He reaches for his laptop and opens it up, pushing a few buttons and the screen fills with the very beginning of Return of the Jedi. Dean shifts excitedly beside him, hurrying to swallow again so he can talk.

“Really? We gonna watch it?” Dean sounds like a little boy, like Sam is his baby-sitter and whatever Sam says, goes. Sam leans back against the wall, not touching Dean because he doesn’t want to hit his hurt arm, but they’re close. Comfortable. Sam doesn’t reply, just lulls his head over to grin at Dean, their eyes catching for a few seconds and a warmth passes between them, settling in soft over them like sunlight.

Sam pushes play.

Halfway through the movie, the leftovers are tucked in the tiny fridge, the trash cleared, and Dean is drooling on Sam’s pillow. Sam has abandoned any pretense of watching the movie and is instead staring at Dean, at the lazy sprawl of him on his bed. It’s worrying him a bit that Dean is sleeping so much, but fuck knows when the last time he’d slept in a bed was.

The sun’s about to set on Christmas Day, and it takes a lot for Sam to clear his throat a little, to start moving around loudly enough to wake Dean. Otherwise he’ll be up all night. Sam knows his brother.

“Brgn,” Dean announces, burrowing down into the pillow, a stubborn pout on his face. “No.”

“Dean, it’s getting late.”

“Exactly, man. Lemme sleep. So mean to me.”
Sam smiles, a hand drifting up to rest on Dean’s tight calf that’s draped over his lap. He pulls out the big guns.

“So, you’re just gonna spend your whole time here with me asleep?”

It takes two full beats for Dean’s bright eyes to snap open, and they find Sam immediately. Sam smiles at him, fingers rubbing at Dean’s leg a little more deliberately now. Dean’s always been a bit more open to affection, to touches, in these delicate moments before and after sleep.

“You can sleep, too?” It’s a mumble but a hopeful one, and Sam huffs out a laugh, rolling his eyes. He gives Dean’s thigh a slap, closing the laptop and then hefts himself up out of bed, letting Dean’s legs flop back down onto the mattress without his lap to pillow them.

“It’s cool, man. You can sleep. I’m gonna read a little bit. Need to get ahead for next semester anyway.” Sam cracks his neck on his way over to the desk, flipping on the light there, letting the small glow warm the otherwise darkened room. He can feel Dean’s eyes on him still, and so he tries to look as sexy as he can while he settles down into the chair and tugs out his pile of books.

They’re both quiet for a few minutes while Sam selects a book and cracks it open, settling back in the chair to start reading. He thinks that maybe Dean’s fallen back asleep, he’s quiet for so long, but then he hears him sigh. Sam smiles.

“So,” Dean begins, his voice almost uncertain. “So, what do you wanna do, if I wake up?”

Sam lifts his eyes, finds Dean in the shadows of the bed.

“You mean you’re not awake right now?”

Dean’s glare is more felt than seen.

“I mean like, get up, drag my sweet ass outta bed, the whole nine.”

Sam shrugs, stubbornly not thinking about Dean’s ass or anything under those covers over there.

“Dunno.”

A thoughtful pause.

“What would you do if I wasn’t here?”

Sam looks around, glances at the window showing the dusk outside, at the room around them. “Prolly just this.”

“Read?”

“Mm-hmm.” Sam looks back down at his book, knowing now that he’s not going to read it, but it’s a good prop, if they’re going to talk. The book and the shadows. It’ll let them say more than they would otherwise, more than they would if they were face-to-face, with no distractions. It’s why they always talk more when Dean’s driving, or when they’re on the phone. No eye contact, something else to focus on. Anything that makes it easier for Dean.

“Still a geek boy, I see. That’s good, that’s good.” Dean sighs again and shifts on the bed, turning to stretch out on his back, his heels resting on the footboard. “Man, I don’t know how you fit in this bed. It’s ridiculous.”

Sam grins at the words in front of him. “I curl up real good.”
Dean falls quiet again, absorbs that, it seems.

“You gotta girlfriend?”

He doesn’t know why, but just the question makes Sam’s heart race. He licks his lips, stares intently at the book now.

“Nah.”

“A, um. A boyfriend?” This question is a little more loaded, more hesitant. Full of an underlying disapproval. It makes Sam’s face flush.

“No. Haven’t really dated anybody very much.”

There’s an exhalation of what can only be named relief from Sam’s bed, and it’s enough to make Sam glance up, try to see Dean. He still can’t.

“Why not? You’re.” There’s a tiny hint of movement, and Sam can see Dean motioning at him, implying that Sam’s attractive enough, why not? “Yanno. Not hideous anymore.”

It’s typical brother ribbing, guy buffering, but it still tugs at Sam, prickles at him. Hurts him a little. Because he never learned to have a thick skin against Dean.

“Not really interested. Had a few hook-ups and stuff like that, but.” Another shrug, Sam’s hand tightening in its grip on the book. He looks back down. “What about you? Banging your way across the lower forty-eight?”

“Something like that.” It’s all Dean offers, which is a little weird. There’s usually a story attached, some anecdote, some fish tale about a girl somewhere. It unsettles Sam a little.

“So why aren’t you and Dad hunting together? Why do you have the Impala?”

Dean’s so quiet that Sam thinks he’s pissed off, and he finally looks up from him book completely, closing it around his finger-turned-bookmark and leaning forward at the desk, striving to see his brother in the dark. His blood runs cold suddenly, a shock of fear spreading ice through his veins. God, surely nothing’s happened to Dad. Please, no. “Dean?”

“He’s, uh. I don’t know. Somewhere else. We hunt apart most of the time now. Got him a truck from an old buddy in Lawrence and just split, gave me the keys.”

Sam just blinks.

“So, you’re.” There’s a lump at the base of his throat, an ache in him that doesn’t let him take a full breath. “So, you’re just. By yourself now?”

“Mm.” It’s a grunt of an affirmative, and Sam sits back in the chair, eyes glazed over, staring off. Dean by himself. Dean, who needs somebody to depend on him, who needs somebody in the passenger seat, or in the driver’s seat. Dean who needs somebody there, even if they’re not talking. Somebody to anchor him down so he doesn’t just drift away. He’s alone now.

“Dean, that’s so dangerous,” Sam finds himself saying, safe, rational words coming out of nowhere when he needs them most. “You can’t just hunt by yourself. What if something happens? What if you need to rest, and. And. What if you need somebody?”

“Don’t need anybody.” Dean’s tone is flat, a vocal shrug. Matter-of-fact and lying. Sam knows that
Dean can see him perfectly, the only thing in the tiny light in the room. That he’s got a spotlight on him, and if Dean’s looking, he knows how upset Sam is. “And if I do, I can call Dad or Bobby.”

“But you got hurt.”

“And I’m okay now. Got patched up and got here. I’m fine.”

“The heat’s not working in the Impala, you know. It wouldn’t really kick in when I drove it earlier.”

“Yeah, I know.”

There was snow on the car, clinging in small places, when Dean arrived this morning. Which means that Dean drove across the northern part of the country to get here. Through the coldest parts at the coldest time of the year, with no heat. It’s enough to make Sam cry, and he doesn’t know why exactly. Maybe he’s too soft now, too long off the road, away from the life.

Or maybe he just can’t stand the thought of Dean being cold and alone.

“You hungry again?” Sam’s voice crackles like an old radio, and he clears his throat to get rid of it. He closes his book and stands up, heading to the fridge to distract himself. To keep himself from burrowing down against his brother and keeping him here. “There’s still some--”

“Missed you.”

It’s just two words, but they absolutely slay Sam. He stands where he is, his back to Dean, and lets the words tremble in the air, soft and fragile between them. He closes his eyes and is shocked to hear a hiccup of a sound leave his body, to feel tears slip down his cheeks. Why. Goddamnit, why can Dean always do this to him? Why can he always just slip right in and rip Sam apart from the inside with absolutely no effort? Why does it always hurt so much more when it’s Dean?

He turns to face him slowly, not bothering to wipe his cheeks off, letting Dean see the slick shimmer of tears on his skin in the lamplight. He lets their presence answer for him. He sniffs, a pathetically young sound, wipes his nose and face on his sleeve like he’s little.

“I don’t wanna sleep in the other bed tonight. Dean, I don’t want to not be next to you.”

The room feels smaller around them, like it’s closing in, all the things they’re not saying crowding around them, pushing them together, stealing all the air. Sam stays standing near the foot of the bed, his shoulders drawn in, arms wrapped around himself. If everybody he knows here could see him now. See Sam who they think is so responsible, so together and balanced, if only they could see the way he falls apart for his brother.

Dean pushes the covers back and climbs out of the bed, his bare feet so stupidly beautiful on the scratchy carpet. He wraps his arms around Sam’s waist when he gets close enough, doesn’t lift his arms because one hurts to move. Sam curls down over him, wanting so badly to be little again, to just be able to push his face up and into Dean’s neck, where it always felt safe.

He noses down anyway, hunching over so he can get back there again, tuck right into the warm clean home of Dean’s neck, his forehead against his jaw, mouth against his pulse, nose right in the softness of his hair right behind his ear.

They stay just like that, just there, for God knows how long. Sam’s body aches from the position, and he knows that Dean’s arm hurts, but they just can’t seem to let go. Sam just breathes him in, absorbs all the heat from Dean’s spread palms on his back, listens to the sound of his nose sniffling around in Sam’s messy hair.
“We’ll figure it out, Sammy. We’ll make it work.”

They pull back in tiny increments, and Sam knows that this is when he’s supposed to kiss Dean. When the stars want him to, when they lined right up and gave him this moment to do what he’s supposed to do. He stands up to his full height again, his eyes closed, not wanting to see any fear on Dean’s face, any hesitation, any wariness. He presses their foreheads together, feels their noses rub together. He runs his hands over Dean’s waist, over his flanks and his ribs, around to his back. He swallows and his throat clicks dry and it’s so loud in here, between them.

“I didn’t mean what I said,” he says suddenly, out of nowhere, like the words were just put in his mouth. He doesn’t know why he chooses then to say them, but he does. And they both know what he means. Both picture a rainy day in Colorado, feel that same ripping pull all over again when Sam just left. When he told Dean that he didn’t need him. “I’m sorry.”

They’re pressed so close that Sam can’t help but feel Dean’s reaction to it, feel the way his heart speeds up against his own chest, but hear the way he sucks in a sharp breath. Sam just tightens his hold on Dean, pulls him back in close, closer. Doesn’t let him pull away.

“Sammy, we can’t talk about,” Dean manages, but his voice is so raked raw, shaking. He doesn’t even finish the sentence, and it makes tears burn in Sam’s eyes again. “Please. Please, let’s just. Let’s just not. Okay?”

Sam nods because Dean sounds so hurt, so desperate, so broken open in a way he never does. He nods because he can’t bear the thought of Dean leaving because of this, running away from how much it hurts, from how scared he is of whatever is building up fortress-strong around them, keeping them together.

Dean pulls away first, stepping back and taking a huge breath that he lets out in a whoosh as he scrubs his hands over his face hard. Sam just watches him, just fucking obsesses over him and wants to marry him and give Dean every broken piece of himself and take all of Dean in return. He wants and he wants and it’s like he’s a kid again, all emotions and newness and the unbelievable angst of really feeling for the first time. He tugs his sleeves down over his hands and uses them to wipe his eyes.

“How ’bout we take both the mattresses off and put them together on the floor?”

It takes Sam a minute to hear what Dean said, to really wrap his brain around it. Oh. Right.

Sam looks at both beds and the space between them, letting his big brain do all the moving for them and he shakes his head. “Won’t fit. There’s not enough room between the frames.”

“Hm.” Dean is okay again, for the moment, now that he has a task, something to do. Sam walks over and turns on the lamp between the beds, giving them a little more light to work with. Dean snaps his fingers. “Okay, I got it. We tip your bed frame on its side, along the wall. That’ll clear the floor enough for two mattress. Especially these midget-sized things.”

Dean is moving before Sam can even agree because Dean knows it’ll work. They take the mattresses off both beds and lean them against the closet door before they count to three and heave up the bed frame, tipping it on its side and shoving it against the wall as far as it’ll go, clearing a bit more floor space. There’s a few books under Sam’s bed, a couple of pairs of shoes, a lost CD, and a lidless shoebox. Dean crouches down to gather it all up and he blinks when he sees something black in a large Ziploc bag stuffed into the box.

“What’s this?”
Sam is busy dragging the mattresses back over, and he frowns when he comes back to find Dean looking at some of his stuff. His heart rate picks up for no real reason and he kneels down next to Dean, peering down at--

“Nothing.”

He tries to grab the box, or at least the Ziploc bag out of it, but Dean snatches the plastic bag out and cradles it to his chest, determined to get to the bottom of it because of how fantastically Sam reacted. He waggles his eyebrows at Sam.


“Dean, no! Jesus, it’s. It’s just.”

Dean starts to open the bag up and Sam gasps, reaching out to snatch it from him. He hugs it to his chest protectively, looking down at where he has it gripped tight in his strong hands.

“Just. Don’t.”

Dean’s quiet for a minute, looking between Sam and the bundle in his arms, before his face smooths out with realization.

“It’s that shirt, isn’t it? The.” He pauses, the bad lighting hiding the blush but Sam knows it’s there. “The one I sent you.”

Sam doesn’t respond, but they both know it now. They stare at the sealed plastic bag holding Sam’s shirt, the one that had smelled so thoroughly like Dean and still does because Sam refuses to take it out of the bag, refuses to let that smell completely die.

“I just. I just keep it in here,” Sam offers as a pathetic explanation, resting a flat palm over the surface of it. “So. So I don’t lose it.”

“Lose what, Sam?”

Dean is close again, near but not threatening. Sam closes his eyes because he can smell Dean, not the second-hand scent that’s forcefully trapped in the cotton shirt in his arms but Dean’s living, real smell. Sweat and heartbeat and warmth and life. Inches from him. Sam feels like even his bones are shaking.

“Your smell.” It’s so soft, a hush of words. An admission of sorts that he can’t open his eyes for. Nothing stirs for several moments, several heartbeats, and then Dean’s even closer, tugging the shirt out of Sam’s grasp and pulling Sam closer to him.

“Hey. ‘m right here, Sammy. Right here. C’mere.” Dean pushes his knee into the closest mattress and leans back onto it, pulling Sam with him. Sam follows him, sinks down onto the bed, not caring if there are pillows or blankets in the right place. Not caring that there are two lights on or that it’s barely past seven in the evening.

They’re on their sides, facing each other on the shoved-together beds, and Dean’s the one who pulls Sam even closer, starts to tangle their legs up, starts to get skin against skin. Sam is breathing with his lips parted, panting softly when Dean’s leg lifts and wraps around Sam’s, their bare toes brushing, soft and intimate.

Dean guides Sam back to his neck, lets him tuck right in where he belongs, the place he’s made a home of. Sam breathes him in, the sound rushing like waves between them, and he’s not afraid to let
Dean hear it. Not now. He closes his eyes again and exhales hot against Dean’s skin, his fingers sliding over to grip Dean’s shirt, to hold onto him with a fierceness borne of knowing how easy it is to have something taken away. His lips slip wet and lax over Dean’s neck, tasting clean sweat and he breathes him in again, a tiny, desperate sound catching in his throat.

Dean just holds him there, cards his fingers through Sam’s hair and buries his nose right into it, like always. Like always. They’re like always, like no time has passed, like no one has ever come between them.

Sleep doesn’t ease their grip on each other, doesn’t pull Sam away from his warm haven, doesn’t put an inch between their bodies. Neither knows when they fall asleep because it all feels like a dream, slow and honeyed and so good it can’t last.

When Sam wakes up, he’s alone.

He doesn’t have a moment of confusion, of disorientation, of forgetting. He knows where he is and when it is and who he went to sleep with, who he still smells in the sheets beside him.

And Dean’s gone.

Sam hauls himself up, eyes still bleary with sleep as he yanks the dorm room door open and rushes into the hallway, heading for the stairs.

Maybe he hasn’t left yet. Maybe.

It’s morning, he knows that much, but he’s not sure what time. He tries to think as he races down the
stairs to get to the lobby, tries to remember where the sun was in the window in his room. Probably around nine. Maybe.

He practically bursts into the lobby, and suddenly this feels too much like that night when the package had been at his front door, chasing after the reminder of Dean.

He feels sick with worry, with fear. His eyes are burning with tears because it’s too fucking early for this, and he’s still vulnerable enough with sleep that he doesn’t have any of his normal walls up.

He hears two voices at the front doors of the lobby, and he actually gasps with hope. He rounds the corner and sees them and practically sinks to the ground with relief.

There's Dean with a girl hovering in the open doorway, letting in the cool morning air. Sam stops and watches, trying to calm his heaving breaths so they don’t hear him.

The girl laughs, high and flirtatious, and Sam has to lean back against the wall, his eyes falling closed as his heart sinks. It's so familiar, all of this, familiar in the absolute worst way. But at least he's here. At least he hadn't just left.

"--totally can, if you want. You can bring your brother, too. What's his name again?"

He recognizes her voice even though he refuses to look and see who she is. Doesn’t care, doesn’t want to know who is about to take away his precious time with Dean. Doesn’t want to hate anyone unnecessarily. There are plenty of girls across America who have Sam’s hatred as it is.

“Sam. Uh, Sam Winchester.” Dean sounds uncharacteristically hesitant with this girl, like he hadn’t wanted to give Sam’s real name. It’s strange enough that Sam opens his eyes and leans around the corner, taking in the sight of them again, how natural it looks to see Dean talking to a pretty girl.

Spencer. That’s Spencer Dalton. A friend of Brady’s. Fuck.

“Oh! Sam’s your brother? Really?” She sounds excited, surprised. Even gives a breathy laugh. “Wow, your parents must be smoking hot. Sam is. Is…” She actually sounds dreamy, like Sam might be the brother she’s daydreaming about. When Dean’s standing right there. Sam’s eyebrows shoot up under his messy hair. Well, this is weird.

He moves back to his hiding place.

Dean laughs, short and almost unamused. “Yeah. He is. Listen, uh. I’m gonna get back up there. Breakfast’s gonna get cold and all.”

There’s a rustle of a plastic bag and then the clunky sound of the door closing. Spencer laughs again, the door opening once more.

“Yeah, sorry about that. Well, I’m off for my run. We’re all meeting over at The Rose and Crown tonight around nine. Sam knows where it is. So. You guys can come, if you want.”

“I’ll talk to him. Hey, uh. Nice to meet you.”

Sam can hear Spencer's grin.

“You, too, Dean.”

Sam turns and flies back up the stairs before Dean can even start to walk toward him, using his long legs to push him back up to his room where he flops back down on the bed, his heart racing as he
tries to pretend he’s asleep.

He feels nine again.

Dean comes back in as quietly as he can, the door whispering shut behind him. Sam feels Dean’s eyes on him, feels the way he pauses and looks. Would give his life to know what he’s thinking about.

“Good morning, sunshine!”

Sam whines even though he’s already awake, burrows down into the blankets even more. They’ve played this game for most of their lives. He waits and nearly grins when he feels Dean kick lightly at his feet.

“C’mon, man. Eggs get all gross when they get cold.”

Sam is too happy about Dean getting him breakfast to pretend to be annoyed anymore. He opens his eyes and sits up, the yawn escaping his mouth genuine as he watches Dean pull out container after styrofoam container. The smell of bacon fills the room and Sam’s stomach growls.

“You got me breakfast in bed?”

Dean only snorts as he pulls out a couple of cartons of orange juice and then yanks out the desk chair to plop down into it.

“Not in bed. Get yer ass over here, princess.” The squeak of styrofoam and of plastic silverware being opened and then Dean is moaning, eyes falling closed as he eats his omelet.

Sam climbs out of their little camp on the floor and shuffles over, lips bitten raw from his attempts to keep from grinning. He sits at the foot of Andrew’s bed to reach the desk from the other side, and he grins when he pulls the other container closer and opens it to find pancakes with fresh blueberries with a side of scrambled eggs and bacon.

He looks up through his lashes to find Dean watching him with a strange, small smile on his face. Sam returns it shyly, busy ing himself with opening his silverware. He opens one of the little cups of syrup and smother his food with it, eggs and all. Dean huffs out a little sound that has Sam looking back up at him, eyebrows quirked in question.

“Heathen,” Dean accuses with the barest hints of a grin. Sam just beams at him and picks up a piece of syrupy bacon, chomping into it with relish. Dean shakes his head and grabs the other container of syrup, pouring its contents all over his omelet.

Sam gasps, scandalized.

“Dude! Gross!”

Dean blinks at him innocently, cutting into his food without looking and stuffing a huge bite of sausage and onion omelet dripping with syrup into his mouth. Sam pretends to gag.

Dean shoves an orange juice toward him.

“Shut up and drink your juice, kid.”

He snatches a few of Sam’s blueberries and they don’t stop smiling until well after every trace of food is gone.
“So, I ran into a friend of yours on the way back in this morning.”

It’s the first thing either of them have said in about an hour. They’re both draped over the bed with as much distance as the two shoved-together mattresses will allow between them, *Lethal Weapon 2* playing from Sam’s laptop. Sam reaches up and turns the volume down before turning his gaze to Dean. He’s been waiting for this all day.

“Hm?”

“Spencer or something? Great tits, brown eyes, thinks you’re hot?”

Sam snorts, the little zing of pride he feels covered up by the comment about Spencer’s breasts. They really are spectacular though.

“Yeah, Spencer. She hit on you?”

Dean shrugs, staring at the computer screen and not at Sam. “Told her I was your brother. She invited us out tonight. Said there were a few people still here that were hanging out later. She made it sound like you went sometimes. Thought you might wanna go.”

Sam ignores the ache that sets up across his ribs, the disappointment he already feels for having to share Dean with anybody else. He glances over at his brother and finds himself at a loss for the look on Dean’s face.

“Why? Do you want to go?”

Dean gives a grunt and a movement of his shoulders and Sam looks away again.

“Dunno. Just thought maybe you’d wanna get out of here. Realize there’s other people out there even though it’s winter break.”

Sam looks over again and watches Dean, doesn’t even bother trying to hide it. Maybe Dean’s just feeling cabin fever. Maybe sick of just having Sam to talk to. Maybe he just wants to meet some of Sam’s friends and doesn’t want to come out and say so. Sam nearly smiles for that.

“We can go. Just for an hour or so, okay? You aren’t up to a hundred percent yet, alright?”

Dean sighs and flops over onto his back, such an unguarded, unexpected thing to do that Sam can’t help but grin.

“Don’t make excuses for the fact that you’re a hermit, Sammy. You just wanna be shut up in this room forever with just me. Just be honest with yourself.” Dean has a smug grin on his face as he closes his eyes and a hand that’s resting on his own tummy, shirt tugged up a little. Sam looks him over, from his pinky to his infuriatingly beautiful smirk and nearly sighs.

“You caught me.”

Dean cracks an eye open and his smile grows even bigger.

“Knew it.”

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By nine-thirty, Dean is dressed in his own jacket and jeans and one of Sam’s shirts. Sam is wearing a sweater that Dean hasn’t stopped teasing him about since he pulled it on and the boots he’s worn since he was seventeen. The walk to The Rose & Crown is a short one, and they’re both unusually quiet on the way.

Sam looks over at his brother and finds his eyes wandering, taking in everything around him, all the signs and restaurants and the few people they pass.

“So, this is where you live, huh?”

Sam’s smile disappears at the tone of Dean’s voice, the strain in it. The separation the words put between them. He wants to do something stupid like reach for Dean’s hand, like guide him against the wall of the closed dry cleaner’s they’re passing right now and kiss him. He shoves his hands in his pockets and digs his nails into his palms.

“Where I go to school,” he corrects, but it’s one and the same and they both know it. Dean grunts a reply and falls quiet again, walking a step closer to Sam so that their shoulders brush every couple of steps.

Sam opens the door to the pub and tries to motion Dean in but Dean shakes his head, nodding for Sam to go in first. Sam nearly sighs but remembers Dean’s weird thing about following him into places, wanting to be behind him so he can see what’s in front of Sam and know first what’s behind him.

He steps into the pub and gets swept up by the scent of cigarettes and beer and cheap cologne. He can feel Dean at his back, silent and warm and every single thing important in Sam’s life. He spies Spencer and Max and Elliott and he takes a deep breath, letting his eyes close for a single second to poise himself before he steps forward, lifting his hand in greeting, offering the biggest smile he can find.

“Sam! I didn’t know you were here for winter break. Why didn’t you tell us?” Spencer hops up from her barstool, all bouncing cleavage and lip gloss and she wraps an arm around Sam’s neck and kisses his cheek, pressing her soft warmth all along his side. He nearly blushes but he just wraps an arm around her waist on instinct, reaching up to give Elliott a high-five shake in greeting and a little wave to Max.

“Sorry, just needed to recharge after exams. Just kind of slept for a few days before Dean showed up to snap me out of it. Guys, this is my brother, Dean. Dean, this is Elliott and Max. And you’ve already met Spencer.”

Elliott gives Dean a friendly smile as they shake hands and Max flashes her prettiest smile that Dean returns with a mischievous one of his own. Spencer lets go of Sam long enough to press all up in Dean’s space, meeting his eyes close and intimate like they’ve known each other for a long time and in very compromising ways and she leans up, pressing a kiss right to the corner of Dean’s mouth.

“Thanks for talking Sammy into coming. Really didn’t think he’d be up for it.”

It takes everything in Sam not to glare at Spencer, to yank her off his brother and steal the nickname right off her tongue and just march right back out of here, where he doesn’t have to share Dean with anybody else for just a little while longer, where he doesn’t have to just wait and watch for Dean to pick which girl he’s gonna end up with tonight.

Dean just smiles and takes a step back, glancing at Sam with raised eyebrows before he sinks down into the empty barstool next to Elliott, motioning the bartender over.
“So you’re all old enough to drink, huh? Weird for college kids.” Dean flashes his ID to the bartender who smirks at Dean before going to fetch his drink. The three of them laugh a little uncomfortably and Sam just sits back and smiles, enjoying watching Dean make his friends squirm.

“Yeah. More or less,” Elliott offers, clearing his throat shortly right before the bartender comes back over with Dean’s beer and a shot of whiskey. Dean lifts his shot and salutes Elliott before throwing it back, reaching for his beer as soon as he swallows. Sam watches Dean, watches his throat in the dark pub, hoping that nobody’s watching him because he really just can’t help himself. He leans over and asks the bartender for a Sprite, ignoring the snort that Dean makes when he does.

“So, Dean, why are you out here visiting Sam? Don’t you guys go home for Christmas?” Maxine leans back against the bar and recrosses her legs, trying to look as inviting for Dean as she can. Sam watches Dean glance over and appreciate the view but he goes right back to his beer, to watching the pool game going on across the room. Sam can see Dean’s mind working, trying to find the dumbest pool player, the weakest one. The one with the most money.

“Nah. Our old man’s not much for Christmas anyway. And he’s out traveling with our uncle for a couple weeks, so me’n Sammy’re on our own. Thought I’d come crash out here. Get the full college vibe for a little bit.” It all trips off Dean’s tongue so easily, half-truths and vague words coming as fluidly as they always have, and Sam can’t help but admire it.

“What do you do, man?” Elliott is turned toward Dean and Spencer has taken her seat again, all four of them angled toward Dean, hanging on his every word, even Sam. It’s what’s always bothered him the most, he thinks, about being in public with Dean. That he’s just like everyone else about Dean, just as smitten and infatuated as every other idiot they encounter. And he hates being just anybody else when it comes to his brother.

“Mechanic, mostly. Between jobs right now though. Trying to figure out where I wanna be, you know?” Dean takes a long drink of his beer, his eyes flicking around nervously now, not quite sure what to do with all of this attention on him at once.

“It’s just so great to meet somebody in Sam’s family. He acts like he was raised by wolves. Doesn’t tell us anything.” Spencer grins at Sam, reaching over to run a hand over his chest, over the soft knit of his sweater. Sam clears his throat and leans away from the touch as casually as he can, nervous about Dean seeing Spencer being like this with him. She’s always flirted with him, always pursued him so blatantly that it makes him uncomfortable. God, what if Dean thinks he’s slept with her?

“It keeps me mysterious.” Sam grins and grabs his Sprite and takes a big gulp, ignoring the straw in it. Spencer smacks his chest and leans back, grabbing her own technically illegal beer.

“Well, it works. Mysterious is sexy.”

“You hittin’ on my baby brother right in front of me? You’ve got balls, woman.” Dean’s grin is movie star bright and just as fake, the neck of his beer tipped at Spencer before he finishes the whole thing off. He signals for a refresher and Sam sinks deeper into his seat, nervous about Dean drinking too much, about him saying too much, about his friends scaring Dean off. About not being able to keep his eyes off his brother enough to be around normal people with him. It’s been awhile.

“Are you really the overprotective type? Sam’s like six and a half feet tall and he’s got a bodyguard? Fuck, that is so cute. Can I keep you both?” Spencer leans into Max as they both giggle and Elliott rolls his eyes appropriately, giving Dean a pitying smile and finishing off his own beer.

Dean throws back his new shot of whiskey and snatches up his beer, his smile a little looser now. He throws his free arm around Sam’s neck and Sam can’t help the way he leans into it, can’t help but
savor the heat of his brother’s body and the clear possessiveness of the move. “Been lookin’ out for him since he was in diapers. Not gonna stop no matter how big he gets.”

“Even from nice, available, interested girls?” Spencer tips her head to the side and tries to look innocent, her highlighted hair falling over one side of her face as she pouts at Dean. A smile plays at Dean’s lips from behind the mouth of his bottle.

“Especially from them.”

They all laugh and Sam relaxes again, easing back into Dean’s hold on him that doesn’t leave, doesn’t even try to. He glances over at Dean, at the curve of his profile, the long tips of his eyelashes, his moving throat as he swallows. He wants to be buried against that throat just like he was last night, wants to smell Dean’s sweat and taste his skin just right there, feel the scratch of Dean’s beard on his lips. Dean looks over at him and it’s so sudden that Sam doesn’t have time to bury it all, to keep it all hidden from Dean the way he wants to.

Dean meets Sam’s eyes and holds them, just a few beats before he’s gulping down the rest of his beer.

“Sam, I’ve gotta catch my flight out, remember?” Dean grimaces in beautifully feigned regret as he puts his second empty bottle on the bar and stands up to tug out his wallet. Sam grabs his own faster and thrusts a twenty in the bartender’s hand to pay for Dean’s drinks and his own. Spencer whines and stands up, grabbing at Dean’s wrist so childishly that Sam wants to throttle her.

“You’ve gotta go? You just got here!” She reaches for Sam, trying to reason with him, too, not realizing that she’s not getting anywhere with either of them with her lost little girl act. Sam gives her a smile and extracts himself as politely as possible. He stands up beside Dean, tipping his head to nod at his friends.

“He’s right, we’ve gotta get him to the airport. But thanks for letting us hang out for a minute, guys. I’ll see you all soon, okay?”

“Yeah, it was nice meetin’ you guys. Friends of Sam’n all.” Dean gives his biggest smile to Elliott and the smallest to Spencer. Spencer kisses Dean’s cheek again before Dean can back away.

“Sam, I’ll come by in a couple of days, okay? Maybe we can hang out!” Spencer grins at Sam, pushing up onto her tiptoes in a hopeful bounce. Sam smiles at her, patient and practiced.

“Sure, Spence. Uh, night, guys. Don’t have too much fun.”

They head out with Dean behind Sam like always, and Dean lets out a loud exhale the second they hit fresh air again.

“Sorry, man. I just had to get out of there. Thought I was gonna deck her if she didn’t climb off your dick, chick or not.”

Sam’s cheeks heat up at Dean mentioning his dick and his hands go right back to his pockets. “No, it’s fine. Sorry about her. She’s a little. Eager, I guess.”

“She always like that with you?”

They shuffle along down street slowly, like they don’t have anywhere in particular to be. And they don’t, really. Cars drift past and people edge around them and they walk close, arms brushing. Sam is so suddenly content that he aches with it.
“I guess so. Always tries to get me to ask her out, always finds me at parties and stuff. Climbed into my bed on Halloween and tried to make out with me. Not used to hearing no. You know the type.”

Dean huffs out a laugh that’s anything but amused. He stops suddenly and glances both ways down the street before jogging to cross it. Sam follows him in a hurry, not sure where they’re going but he’s always going to follow. Dean opens the door to the liquor store and Sam smiles when he steps in after him. Of course.

“Jealous that she wasn’t all over you?” He means it as a joke, of course, as just something to say while Dean scans the tequila aisle, but Dean’s frown makes him regret saying it.

“No. Just ready to kick her ass if I needed to.” He grabs some 100% agave tequila before rounding the corner toward the whiskey. “Or at least, you know. Put her in her place. Verbally.”

He grabs some Maker’s Mark and they head to the checkout. They don’t exchange words with the bored girl behind the counter, and Dean rummages through the bin of tiny bottles near the register. He pulls out some strawberry vodka and grins at Sam.

“Want somma this, baby girl?”

Sam blushes deep and elbows Dean hard, forcing a scowl onto his face. Dean drops three of the tiny strawberry vodkas onto the counter and Sam sighs loud enough for Dean to hear it, just so Dean can hear it. It’s just what they do.

--

Sam does indeed drink the three little vodkas, along with a swig of the Maker’s Mark and a respectable amount of the tequila. Dean’s drinking the whiskey like it’s water, his body and mouth loose where he’s sprawled on the makeshift bed. Sam’s sitting up next to him, back against the nightstand because he doesn’t trust himself, not with alcohol and Dean’s body and his own lack of discipline when around the combination.

“I’m supposed to be at Bobby’s, you know it? He came and saved me’n everything. Blew him off ‘cause.” Dean stops, licks his lips clean of whiskey, staring with bright, glassy eyes across the room. He finally blinks, comes back into himself, looking down at the bottle he’s clutching. “I don’t know why. Just. Just knew I wanted to be here.”

Sam is quiet for a minute, alcohol making him rambly and rash just like it does Dean, but this feels important. “Saved you from what?”

Dean shrugs, frowns. Takes another drink, half the bottle gone. Dean’s always been able to drink people under the table, Dad and Bobby included. Sam stopped a little bit ago because he’s smarter than they are.

“Ran out of money so I ran out of gas. Spent the night outside of Blue Earth in the car. Blizzard was comin’ in, and I just eased her over to the side of the road and got in the backseat. Dad wasn’t answerin’ and Bobby wasn’t either and I just felt so fuckin’, like.” Dean’s gone, far away, quiet for a few moments. Sam just watches him. Always, always watches him.

“Alone. You know? And the damnedest thing happens. Get out of the car to take a piss and guess what I see?”

Sam hums a reply, a question. Shuffles a little to get closer. Dean’s slumped on the bed now, head on
the pillow, eyes on the ceiling. Still wearing his boots. Sam reaches over to trail a finger over Dean’s jacket sleeve.

“Your goddamn tree. You remember? That random tree you were obsessed with?”

Sam frowns, tries to remember in his quite inebriated state. His tree? What--

“Oh. Oh, shit. Yeah, I forgot about that. Wow. I haven’t seen it in years.” He grins at the thought, of the silly tree his young self fell randomly in love with. He looks down at Dean, drinks him in. Lets his finger trail down to the back of Dean’s hand bravely. So, so brave. Dean’s hand twitches, a tiny movement, but he doesn’t pull away.

“Still there. I saw it. Car died right next to it. Like. Like she wanted me to. To see it, I guess. Spent the night right next to it.” Dean goes quiet again but he pulls himself out of it, seems to wake up a little. He sits up enough to drink a little more before settling in again. “Anyway. Bobby found me. Guess it got you on my mind though, because I ended up here.”

“I’m glad you did.” Sam sets the tequila aside and moves finally to get down closer to Dean, to share a pillow with him, their hair tangling. He traces the full moon of Dean’s thumbnail with the pad of his own thumb. “Because I was lonely for you, too.”

“We sound like a crappy teen drama, Sammy-wammy.” Dean tips his head up and grins at Sam, so close. Too close. Sam bumps Dean’s forehead with his own and smiles at him.

“Then shouldn’t you be kissing me right about now?”

“You gonna let me feel your tits under your bra if I do?”

“Let you feel my anything under my anything.”

Dean hums and waggles his eyebrows enough for Sam to feel it. “So you’re the girl who seems all good and sweet but is actually a freak in bed?”

Sam nods a little, his forefinger and thumb rubbing at Dean’s thumb now, slow and suggestive and hungry. “Got me figured out.”

“So who does that make me?”

“Hm?”

“In our shitty teen soap opera. Who does that make me?” Their noses graze now and Dean’s breath is bitter and sharp and burning hot over Sam’s face. It feels like they’re dancing, like they’re flirting in steps, in a practiced, sweet slowness.

“You’re the bad boy with the heart of gold that I’ve been in love with forever.” It’s the truest thing Sam has ever said, the most freeing. He feels Dean grin and he slips his fingers forward, their palms lining up, fingers lacing together at a slightly awkward angle.

“You gotta give me time to figure it out, Sammy. Let me get my wild days behind me, sow my oats and everything. I’ll be worth the wait. Plus, all the unresolved sexual tension is gonna drive the ratings through the roof.”

“What if I just want you to fuck me right now?”

Dean hesitates for just a second, body going tense and he finally stirs, sits up and leans back against
the nightstand where Sam was earlier. He grabs the whiskey again and drinks down two healthy
gulps, enough to make Sam’s throat burn in sympathy.

“Teen dramas don’t work like that, Sammy. We need some candles and some acoustic guitar music
and you need a lot more mascara.” Dean’s grin is drunken and lazy and Sam stays right where he is,
sewing his heart back up in the tiny window of time he’s being allowed.

“And a condom.”

“Eh, fuck condoms. Let me just knock you up. Season finale cliffhanger.” Dean takes another swig
and tips the bottle at Sam with a wink.

Sam almost cringes at how fucking quick his dick fattens up at what Dean says. He snatches the
whiskey out of Dean’s hands to take a few drinks himself. Hands it back with a shiver and a wrinkle
of his nose.

“We never finished Spaceballs earlier.”

“Oh, shit. You’re right. Make it happen!” Dean motions at Sam’s computer on the nightstand,
curling back down onto the bed again. Sam grabs his laptop and opens it up, tapping in his password
and waiting for the DVD inside to whirl to life again before he presses play. He takes his place again
sitting up, letting Dean curl up on his side next to him. They watch the rest of the movie in relative
silence, Dean giggling like a fucking child at nearly every scene and Sam smiling the whole time,
trying so hard to stop replaying what just happened between them on repeat in his mind.

It doesn’t work.

Dean wakes up before dawn. It’s pale blue and shadows in the room, and a little chilly. He looks
down at the warmth wrapped around his chest.

Sam’s cheek is pressed right over Dean’s heart, his lashes still and soft on his cheeks. He’s wrapped
around Dean like he has for most of his life: completely and suffocatingly. Dean smiles.

He reaches down to trail his fingers over Sam’s bare arm, his big hoodie apparently lost during the
night. Dean’s still a little drunk and this feels so good, like the morning after amazing sex, after
intense eye contact and a few orgasms and falling asleep together because why not?

Sam feels that good.

Dean strokes through Sam’s hair that’s getting greasy, a little smelly. He pushes it back from Sam’s
face, tries to tuck it behind his ear. Cranes his head down to bury his nose in it, grease and all.

Perfect.

His hand is now dangerously low on Sam’s spine, slipping down over the arch of it, right over the
velvet soft skin that almost feels like a girl’s body. God, do all guys feel like this? Do they feel this
good?

Dean closes his eyes and breathes Sam in, fingers tracing in light, continuous circles on the small of
Sam’s back. Sam shifts against him, pushing in closer, tucking more under Dean’s chin. His leg slips
up and rubs right over Dean’s dick that is thick and hungry like it is most mornings.

Fuck.
Dean pushes his hips up because he’s a guy, because it feels good, and fuck, Sammy feels so good. Perfect weight on his dick, fucking perfect soft skin, smelling just like home.

Dean swallows, the sound so loud in the silent room.

God, he’s gotta stop. Can’t do this. This ain’t even right when it’s not his baby brother.

Sam moves again, just a little, leg hitching up higher across Dean’s body.

“Fuck,” Dean breathes, his head digging back hard on the pillow.

He hasn’t felt like this since he was a fucking teenager. Back when he’d wake up and Sam was draped across him like Dean was his bed, his pillow, his fucking boyfriend. Back when Dean would get hard just from hearing a guitar lick. He’d gotten up every single time then, jumped out of bed and jacked off in the bathroom, like a good brother.

He pushes his hips up, grinding up into the meat of Sam’s inner thigh. He chews on his bottom lip to keep the moan in.

Fuck, he’s not being a good brother right now.

He could just grab Sam’s thigh, grab him right behind his knee and just fuck up against that thigh, right into the crease of Sam’s leg. Fuck yeah. Sam would let him. He would let him, right? Just rub his leg down and kiss across Dean’s chest, suck his nipple through his shirt, suck bruises on his neck and whimper in his ear, say please, Dean and so hard, Dean, gonna come on me?

Dean is breathing hard through his nose now, hips working in miniscule, tight little circles, his dick getting just enough sweet friction to drive him fucking crazy. He runs his free hand over Sam’s back, right across his shoulder blades, and he just holds onto him. Holds Sam right where he is. His free hand is stroking lower and lower on his back, tips of his fingers slipping under his pajama pants. Oh, fuck. The soft swell of Sam’s ass, right between his cheeks. Rubbing over his tailbone. God, he thought he knew Sam, knew all of Sam. He realizes then that he’s never touched this part of him. His little tailbone. His fucking peach of an ass.

Gotta stop. God, Dean, fucking stop.

He digs kisses into Sam’s hair, his breath rushing hot across Sam’s scalp and Sam is still snoring, light and dreamy and oblivious to Dean falling apart under him.

He rubs his finger up and down over Sammy’s tailbone, at the top of his crack, Dean’s balls drawing up tight, his entire body trembling when he finally, blessedly comes. He rides the wave of it as quiet as he can, soaring silently under Sam’s lax body, sucking on the dirty strands of Sam’s hair caught in his mouth.

He finally relaxes, falls back into his own body, lets his eyes flutter open. Still before dawn, Sam still sleeping on like a baby. Like his sweet baby brother.

Fuck.

He climbs out from under Sam, letting his heavy, long boy body fall down alone against the mattress. Dean stands over him, legs still shaking from orgasm.

He’s gotta get out of here. Has to leave. Now.

He rips Sam’s clothes off his own body, teeth gritted in barely-contained fury at himself. Disgusting.
He’s horrible and a complete fucking bastard and he just violated his own fucking brother while he fucking slept.

He wipes himself down with the pajama pants, wipes his dick clean of the smear of come. Stuffs the pants in the little trashcan by the desk. Pulls his own clothes on: dirty jeans, stinky, bloody shirt, jacket, boots. He’ll figure it out. Get to Bobby’s and get his shit together and figure stuff out. A plan. Okay.

He grabs his keys and quiets their sound by shoving them in his pocket. He looks back over at the bed and sees Sam, still unmoving, still thinking that Dean’s here, that he’s gonna stay. That they’re going to get to have each other for a little while longer.

He closes his eyes to the tears that immediately build. Presses his fingers into them and takes a deep breath that he lets out in a rush.

He’s going to walk out the door and get in the car and drive away and be alone again. Even if he gets to Bobby’s. Even if he takes another job with Dad. Even if he finds a girl on the way to anywhere. It’s not the same. It’s never, ever the same as this and it never has been, and he’s about to leave.

He opens his eyes again, ignoring the few tears that escape, and he sets his jaw. He has to do this. Has to. Let Sam hate him, be mad at him, whatever. Just let Sam get on with the life he wanted. The one that isn’t complicated, that has a focus and a goal and possibilities.

He doesn’t need Dean anymore, no matter what he might think. No matter how much Dean might need otherwise. No matter if Dean shuts down without Sam there to need him.

He takes a few steps closer to the makeshift bed they made on the floor, his boots heavy-soft on the hardwood floor. He kneels down, bones creaking like an old man. He doesn’t touch Sam’s hair again, even though he wants to. Doesn’t touch his back even though he wants to.

Doesn’t just climb right back into bed with him and let Sam curl up around him. Doesn’t just hold Sam and say fuck every single other thing in this world but you, boy.

Even though he wants to.

He leans down and kisses the high point of Sam’s cheekbone, moves a little further in to kiss his beauty mark.

Wants to kiss his mouth. No, he needs to fucking kiss his sweet little mouth.

He closes his eyes again, a tear falling from his eye and splattering on Sam’s face, slipping down his cheek. His lips hover over Sam’s mouth, ghosts over it just like that night back in Colorado. The one he’s wished he could re-do at least one thousand times.

And where would they be right now, if he had done something different. If he’d kissed him. Where would they be?

He can’t even imagine.

And he doesn’t kiss him now.

He pulls back, eyes slipping open to take in the sight of him one more time. Just one more time.

Then he gets up. Grabs Sam’s discarded Stanford hoodie and stands up. Leaves without looking
back because he can’t look back.

Because there are a lot of things Dean Winchester can take, a lot he can do with a brave face, with more courage than most men can even fathom. But walking out of this room without it ripping his heart straight out of his chest isn’t one of them.

He pulls his jacket and shirt off once he’s in the car. Tugs Sam’s hoodie down over his head, lets the smell of his little brother fill the car, making it smell good again, familiar again. Letting Dean pretend at least for a little while longer.

He doesn’t remember the drive to Sioux Falls.

Sam wakes up to a room that’s too warm and smells stale, like neglect and semen. He grunts as he stretches and lets his eyes slit open, taking in the position of the light from the window. Probably about nine again. He glances over beside him and isn’t surprised to see the bed empty and rumpled beside him.

Trust Dean to always be awake at the crack of dawn, bullet wound and vacation be damned.

He sighs and flips over onto his stomach, snatching Dean’s pillow away and wrapping his arms around it, just because he can. He wonders if Dean’ll bring food from the same place this time, or if he’ll take the easy route and get some cereal and milk from the store.

He falls asleep dreaming about Apple Jacks and Dean’s milk-damp mouth.

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When he wakes up again, it’s definitely past eleven in the morning, and the room is still empty by the time Sam opens his eyes again. He frowns, his head pounding because he slept too fucking long.

He sits up and realizes he’s bare-chested and shivering. He reaches blindly for his hoodie and glances over when his fingers don’t find it. Gone.

“What the fuck?” The words sound expansive in the quiet room, the quiet building. He forces himself to his feet, his full bladder begging him for relief. His hunter’s eyes slip on seamlessly, and he takes note of everything around him: the two lamps from last night still on, his missing hoodie, Dean’s clothes gone, boots gone, keys gone. Pajama pants in the trash can. Nothing in the room has moved for hours except Sam.

He shakes his head as he makes his way around, coming to inevitable conclusions. Maybe he went to eat breakfast somewhere. Maybe he’s getting groceries. Maybe he ran into Spencer again and they’re in her dorm room, having loud, sweaty sex. His stomach turns at the thought but it’s better than. Than.

“No,” he whispers, just once, resolute. Not possible. Dean wouldn’t just leave. Not after the way he showed up. After the fucking rollercoaster of need and loneliness and bone-deep relief they’ve gone through since Christmas. He wouldn’t just leave. He couldn’t.

Dean’s not the one who leaves. He’s not the heartless bastard in this relationship.
Sam leaves his room and trudges half-naked down the hall, his bare feet freezing on the linoleum floor of the hallways. He’s shivering by the time he gets outside, squinting in the cheerful morning sun. He feels so young all of a sudden, so lost, like he’s been misplaced in a department store. And Dean will find him soon. He always does.

The Impala’s gone.

The trip back to the room is a blur, and Sam’s hands are shaking by the time he finds his phone and scrolls down to Dean’s number.

Straight to voicemail.

“Dean, uh,” he fumbles out, his throat clenching up tight. He drags a hand through his tangled hair and tries to ignore the burning behind his eyelids as he closes his eyes. “Just woke up. Sorry for sleeping forever. Uh. Just, um. Just wondering where you are. If you’re lost or somethin’. Palo Alto can be a little confusing sometimes. Yogurt shop on every corner and all. Just, um. Just call me. Okay? I can get you back here. I can--”

He stops, his stomach twisting up painfully. It hits him then, pummels him like a mountain. The truth. Dean’s gone. He left. He tries to open his mouth again but he can’t get any words out. Can’t even find a way to end this message. He hangs up the phone and stares down at it, stunned.

This is his fault. Somehow. He’s freaked Dean out. He knows it. Can scent in the air of the room like a fucking bloodhound. The panic, the fear. Maybe Dean figured it out. Maybe Sam did something in his sleep, groped him, didn’t let go, wrapped up tighter than usual around Dean. Maybe he said something. Acted out some graphic sex dream against Dean’s body.

Maybe it was just their weird, beautiful almost-pornographic flirting last night, that Dean had been a part of just as much as Sam. Maybe it had just been too much. So much that he couldn’t handle facing Sam again in the morning.

And Dean just took off, just like that. The way any rational person would, if they found out their brother had the hots for them. Just get the fuck out and let time and distance take care of the rest.

He stumbles to the bathroom to piss and makes his way back to the room, not bothering to lock the door. It’s weird, this new low. It’s completely foreign to Sam because he’s so far from any home he’s ever kept for himself, anybody he really knows or who knows him.

Just a few hours ago, Dean had been here. Had been wrapped around Sam like someone might dare to try and take Sam from him while they slept, like anybody possibly could. The room still smelled vaguely like him, like Dean’s sweat and his morning breath and the secret smell of his armpits. Sam reaches out and grabs hold of the desk chair, the breath leaving his body. He wants to bottle it all up, zip it up in that bag with the shirt, hold and keep and preserve forever.

Dean’s gone. He’s gone.

His hand slides across the desk, grazing the edge of the book he’d been reading a couple of nights ago and then touches on something plastic. He grips it, pulls it closer. Picks it up. The first-aid kit. He’s rifling through it, pulling out the bag of pills before he even registers what he’s doing. Small handful, three or four. Swallows them down with nothing but the spit in his mouth and coughs, almost hacks them back up.

Doesn’t know why he takes them. Couldn’t explain why if anybody ever cared to ask. Because he doesn’t have any cigarettes, maybe. Because he’s too old for that anyway, right? Longs for the burn
of it anyway, the obliteration of fire on his skin in a perfect circle. Wants his brother under him, on top of him. Inside of him. Wants to suck the spit from his mouth and lay his fists into Dean’s body until he feels something break.

Wants to use the entire arsenal in the trunk of the Impala on himself. Anything to make this go away. This deadly, impossible pain that he can’t ignore.

He’s back on the bed without knowing how he got there. Sprawled across both mattresses, across this temporary bed that has only ever held him and his brother. He stares at the ceiling until his eyes feel too heavy and they have to close.

He floats and floats and then he’s fourteen and Dean is soaking wet in just his underwear after they’ve gone for an impromptu swim in a river and Sam actually creams himself right there, staring at his brother’s crotch, at the weight of his balls in wet cotton, the visible ridge under the head of his dick. So good. Everything about Dean is so good.

He’s eight and he’s burning himself on the eye of the stove trying to make Dean chicken noodle soup when Dean has a cold. Dean rubs some toothpaste on the burn after kissing it better and curls Sam up in his lap as he eats the soup and neither of them care when Sam gets a cold, too. They share everything.

He’s twelve and watching through the window of the motel while Dean gets his dick sucked in the Impala in the parking lot. The girl is bobbing up and down from the passenger’s seat and Dean’s head is tipped back, eyes closed like he’s dreaming. He looks so serene, like nothing could be better than this. Sam spends the next six months sucking on things: on popsicles, whole pickles, bananas, anything to practice. Just in case Dean ever lets him.

He’s sixteen and Dad almost bleeds out in the car on the way to the hospital. There’s too much blood and Sam and Dean both know it. Dean is crying freely, his hands shaking on the steering wheel as he guns for the hospital, glancing back over his shoulder every few seconds, barking out panicked, breathless orders at Sam who is holding a flannel shirt to Dad’s neck, who has his father’s blood all over his hands, who just absorbs Dean’s harsh words, just takes them in and stays quiet for Dad, for Dean, for all of them. Dad makes it and neither of them know how and Sam has blood under his nails for a week and Dean doesn’t sleep for longer.

He’s five and it’s the first day of school and he nearly passes out from crying so hard when Dad drops him off, just leaves him in a room full of strangers. He doesn’t cry for his dad. Just screams Dean’s name, just clings to the door handle and sobs his brother’s name until he can’t breathe from crying so hard, so loud, so long. Until the entire class is quiet, owl-eyed and watching Sam fall apart. He cries himself exhausted and stumbles through the rest of the day. He pukes up his lunch, PB&J and fruit cocktail, all of it coming right back up, syrupy sweet and all over the carpet of poor Miss Judith’s room, Dean’s name only a whisper on his lips now.

He’s eleven and the only person he wants to ask to the Winter Wonderland dance is his brother.

He’s eighteen and he has a dream that Dean is Mom and Sam’s nursing from him, an ageless thing with his mouth attached to Dean’s nipple, drinking down the honey sweetness Dean’s body makes for him. Just for him.

He’s nineteen and there are voices around him, some raised, some afraid, some calm. Somebody’s moving him, jostling him and ignoring his protest to just leave him alone because he’s so tired. He falls back asleep because that’s where he wants to be. That’s where Dean is.

--
He wakes up in a white room feeling more drained than he can ever recall. He tries to move but it hurts, a sharp pain shooting up his left arm. He winces and looks down, eyes traveling numbly from the IV on the back of his hand all the way up to the plastic bag on the hook holding a clear liquid.

How the fuck did he get here?

“Mr. Winchester?”

Sam’s head jerks so fast it makes him dizzy when he spies the woman in the doorway. Early forties, warm brown skin, hesitant but kind smile. Sam settles back in the bed with a sigh.

“Hi.”

“Hello. I’m Dr. Sahni. How are you feeling?”

Sam shrugs, throat closing up around any words that feel like venturing out. He looks away and towards the window covered by blinds, blocking out most of the light and any of the view. He wonders what day it is.

“Do you remember how you got here, Sam?”

“I’m guessing it has something to do with the pills I took.” He sounds angrier than he means to, more sarcastic and childish but he can’t take it back now. He just grits his teeth, sets his jaw and stares even harder outside.

“That is correct.” The door to his room closes and Dr. Sahni gets closer, hovering at the foot of Sam’s bed. “Do you might if I sit?” She gestures to the chair near Sam’s bed.

He shrugs again, glancing over at her as she settles into the chair, a pen hovering over the clipboard she’s holding.

“You were admitted here three days ago. You didn’t take enough pills to overdose, but you did take enough to knock you out for awhile. You hadn’t gotten out of bed in nearly three and a half days, from what we can gather. You were severely dehydrated, Sam.”

He still says nothing, just watches a bird land on the windowsill and find that there’s nothing there only to fly off again. There’s nowhere he wants to be less than right here, right now.

“If your friend Spencer had not found you, there’s no telling where you would be right now.”

He bites down on telling her that Spencer is not a friend, is nothing to him because he doesn’t have friends. He can’t even find it in himself to feel thankful for being saved. He’s not really feeling a whole lot right now and it’s terrifying and comforting in equal amounts. It’s familiar, at least. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, letting it out in slow, even measures.

“Well, just wanted you to know that you’re on suicide watch right now, Sam. You’re going to be kept in here for a couple more days to recover completely and also to make sure you’re not a danger to yourself or anyone else.” Dr. Sahni stands up and clicks her pen closed. Sam keeps his eyes closed tight, like she’ll go away if he does.

It’s so quiet that Sam wonders if she really did leave, but then she speaks again, her voice coming from the doorway. “Whatever drove you to this, whatever made you decide that it’s not worth it anymore, you need to let it go, Sam. Nothing is worth what you just put your body through. You have so much going for you. Don’t let anyone else destroy all that you’ve worked for.”
The door opens and closes again and he knows when he’s alone again. He opens his eyes and realizes for the first time that there are tear tracks down his cheeks. He growls in frustration and wipes at them hard, ignoring the pull of the IV tube. He’s giving it a couple of hours and then he’s bailing. He’s John Winchester’s son and therefore a fucking expert in ditching hospitals and all of their nosy questions. What he does isn’t any of their fucking business. They don’t give a shit about him. None of them do.

The truth of Dr. Sahni’s words needles at him, digs in under his skin. He almost died and he knows it. He can feel it thrumming low in his body, trembling weakness in his bones. And if he had, how long would it have taken anybody to find out? Dean, Dad, Bobby? Months, probably. He’d be rotting in the ground, worm food and decaying before they even heard.

He can’t do this anymore. Can’t keep doing this. Banking it all on Dean, betting the house on Dean coming to him and staying. Dean sinking down into his body and making a home there. It’s not going to happen.

It’s not. Going. To happen.

“It’s not going to happen,” Sam says to the quiet, his voice shaking and tearful and bloodied raw but it’s finally out there. The truth is finally out there, in his own words. And there’s no turning back now. He’s gotta let him go.

He’s got to let Dean go.

Cut him out with surgical precision and sew it closed and move on. It’s all he can do. It’s the only thing he can do and survive at the same time.

He sinks back down into the warmth of clean sleep but his body is already working away, detaching all the millions of tiny threads that have sewn him up with Dean his entire life, doing the very last thing he ever thought he would.

Moving on from Dean.

February 2005

“Hey, Winchester! Grab the Doritos, bitch.”

Sam stares down at the bowl of nacho cheese-salsa, the five beers, and the plate of hot wings that he is somehow miraculously carrying in his two wide hands and he looks back up at the living room where his friends are gathered.

He scowls.

But he’s a little brother and so he’s more than used to being an errand boy, to being told what to do. So he sighs and grumbles a little and grabs the bag of Cool Ranch Doritos with his teeth and continues on where everyone has congregated.
“Thanks, man!” Ethan snatches the Doritos from Sam’s mouth and pries the bag open, eyes glued to the television where the pre-game show is playing.

“I could have helped. I didn’t know there was so much to get.” Jess smiles and takes the plate of wings from him. Sam manages to meet her eyes and give her a brief, bashful smile before he’s walking around the couch and putting everything else down.

They’ve been doing this--this dance--for months now. Jess will attempt a conversation, and Sam will mumble his way through it. Jess will stick a headphone in his ear and get Sam to listen to a song, and he can only nod afterwards as a reaction. She fell asleep on his shoulder last weekend and he nearly jumped out of his skin when he woke up, hangover or not.

He may have a bit of a crush.

She settles in beside him on the couch and he tenses up, arm freezing where it was about to reach for his beer. She snorts and elbows him and snatches the beer up herself, grinning at him from behind it before she takes a big drink.

“Who are you rooting for?”

Sam just stares at her for a long moment, distracted by her pink mouth shiny with beer and spit, with the glimmer-blue of her eyes when she smiles at him. He blinks a little to clear his head and then glances back at the TV, watching the flurry of colors as the teams run out onto the field, the Super Bowl finally getting under way. His eyes fly to the uniforms to identify the teams. Eagles and Patriots. Right.

“Um,” he starts, looking back and forth between Jess and the TV while he absently still grasps for the beer on the coffee table that simply isn’t there anymore. “The Patriots, I guess?”

He knows he’s said the wrong thing when he feels her eyes narrow at him, a scowl taking over her pretty mouth. Then he glances down at her green jersey and winces.

“Let me guess. You’re from--”

“Philly. Yeah.”

“Right.” Sam gives her an apologetic smile and she relents then, heaving a world-weary sigh and passing his half-drunk beer back over. He brings it to his lips just for something to do and he can taste her mouth on it, sweet and warm. He drinks with relish.

“You still for the Patriots?”

Sam just shrugs then, trying to keep the smile off his face but this feels so good, flirting and being flirted back with. The dizzying swirls in his stomach that feel like the start of something, like this is the prologue to a story. He leans back on the couch and she nestles in against him, solid and warm and soft at his side.

He can’t pay attention to a single minute of the game, not his friends yelling, not Brady spilling blue cheese dressing all over the floor when the Patriots scored a touchdown, not even Paul fuckin’ McCartney singing “Hey Jude.” Because every time Jess moves beside him, he can feel her, smell her. Can get her to smile just by catching her eyes, no matter what’s happening in the game. And it makes Sam feel like he’s flying.
Of course the Eagles lose.

She’s cleaning up the impressive mess after everybody else is gone, tossing trash while Sam scrubs the rug clean of blue cheese. He walks into the kitchen to toss the paper towels he used and finds her at the old sink, arms submerged in bubbles up to her elbows, blonde hair tumbling down her back over the number 5 of her jersey. She’s in the embarrassingly unclean kitchen he shares with three other guys, after her team has lost the Super Bowl, doing dishes. Helping him.

He may have a pretty big crush.

He clears his throat gently so he doesn’t startle her when he starts to throw away all the bottles and napkins.

“You, uh. You don’t have to do that, you know. I’ll take care of it.”

She turns to look at him, her eyes sad but she still has a little smile for him.

“I don’t mind. I like to clean when I’m upset anyway. Distracts me with the monotony, you know?”

He nods, a sympathetic smile ghosting his lips before he stands up straight and walks over to her, sidling up next to her and grabbing a towel. He picks up one of the plates in the drying rack and starts to dry it, opening up the cabinet it belongs in and replacing it.

He looks back over to find her grinning at him, and it’s so beautiful, so startling, that he grins back.

They finish the dishes and Jess cleans all the counters, scrubs them clean and shiny and Sam sweeps purely just to impress her, having to use the ripped-off cover of an *FHM* magazine in place of a dustpan. It’s quiet and comfortable and so achingly domestic that Sam doesn’t know if he loves the normalcy of it or hates that he’s joyfully sharing chores with somebody who isn’t Dean.

It’s nearly midnight when they’re done and she’s ready to leave, and Sam can’t find the words to make her stay. Instead, he watches her pull her ratty tennis shoes on, her jacket, watches her find her purse.

The house is empty, all the rest of the group out at the bar to keep the night going. Sam watches her from the doorway of the kitchen and the word “stay” is trapped in his throat, trapped by his racing heart, by the mountains of pain he has buried deep inside of himself, kept hidden from all the blissfully ignorant civilians around him. Ignorant of the horror of fighting alongside the one person in the world you want to keep safe, of wanting to protect your fellow soldier over everybody else. Of that soldier being your brother. Of the war being against bloodthirsty shadows, evil so pure it doesn’t need reasons, a bottomless evil with no end in sight. Of being in love with the only person you’ve ever been allowed to keep. Of having to let them go anyway, for your own sanity.

He can’t do it to her. Can’t drag her into it. Can’t subject her to his own fucked-up self.

“Night.”

She’s at the door, has it open already. The winter air drifts in from outside, dancing over Sam’s bare toes and up his spine, making him shiver. She’s haloed in moonlight, watching him expectantly. Hopefully.

Sam lifts a hand and waves, gives this stunning, brilliant girl who likes him an inept wave and then she’s gone, gone in a loss of golden curls and a ready smile and the smell of white, summer flowers.

“Night,” he says softly, the sound dying in the still air before it gets very far from his mouth.
A few days later, it’s Valentine’s Day. He wakes up and shuffles to his door to take his morning piss and he nearly trips over the most gigantic, most horrifyingly, insanely huge white teddy bear he’s ever seen. It stares up at him with its sparkling, liquid brown eyes, a red and pink ribbon tied around its neck. He closes his eyes and dares to crack one open again, just in case it’s a really weird fucking dream.

It’s not.

He grabs the card tucked in the bear’s bow and opens it to find a fat baby Cupid blowing heart bubbles on the cover. He snorts softly as he opens the card, bleary eyes dancing over the pretty curls of words.

*Sam,*

*It appears that subtlety doesn’t really work on you, since all of my flirtations thus far have gone unnoticed. I hope Edgar (yes, that’s his name, and don’t you dare try and change it!) here is declaration enough. And just in case you need words in addition to a massive teddy bear, here they are:*  

*I LIKE YOU. A LOT. GO OUT WITH ME. ON A DATE. A ROMANTIC ONE. PLEASE?*  

*Hope that clears things up. Oh, and Happy Valentine’s Day. :)*  

*Jessica*

He stares at the card for a solid three minutes before putting it back in its envelope. He looks up at Edgar and sighs. Spends the next five minutes dragging the bear into his room, fitting his enormous, fluffy arms through the doorway and shoving him into a corner of his room.

Sam goes to his desk and rummages around in the top drawer, finally finding a piece of cardstock from a project last semester. He folds it in half and focuses intently as he cuts a heart shape out of it, making it fat and happy and respectably heart-like. He grabs a Sharpie from his pen-cup and scratches a single word into it.

*YES*

He always figured he would be able to remember their anniversary in the future because it was so easy: Valentine’s Day.

It’s a reunion of sorts, and it’s only fitting that it’s in Kansas. They met up in Abilene, killed a shapeshifter, and decided it was high time to get drunk.

Dad’s looking a lot older these days, more ragged, more haunted than Dean remembers. He looks tough though, fortified with his vendetta and all the nights alone. Dean sees his future across the
sticky bar table, sees it in the hunch of his dad’s shoulders as he takes his first drink of straight whiskey, in Dad’s glance around the bar, surveying everything, memorizing the layout and every single person inside, keeping one eye on the door the whole time. Sees his future in the distrust, in the grim pull of Dad’s face that makes him look like he’s never smiled in his life, in the greying whiskers furring down over the mouth that Dean inherited.

It’s enough to make Dean ask for another whiskey just after he finishes off the first one.

“Where you off to next?” Dean’s staring down at his glass, his voice lifted so it can find Dad in the smoky, noisy haze of Friday night in a low-life dive. They don’t look at each other when they talk, not really. Haven’t in a long time. Not until they’ve had an entire bottle of whiskey between them, at least.

Dad moves his shoulders in what is supposed to be taken as a shrug, watching with residual interest as the pretty girl brings Dean another shot and stealthily leaves the bottle. She winks at Dean and grips his shoulder, her fingers small and barely felt over the layers of his clothes. Dean grins on instinct, glancing over at Dad who’s still watching the girl with the long dark curls tumbling over her shoulders and down into her cleavage and the cherry-glossed mouth.

He wonders not for the first time if Dad hooks up sometimes, if he’s just the same as Dean is about women. They’ve never talked about it, not in explicit detail anyway. Life on the road requires a certain discretion, and neither of them like to talk much as it is.

“You need anything else, big boy?”

Dad sits up straight when the girl’s attention turns to him, when her other hand comes down on Dad’s knee bouncing under the table. Dean raises his eyebrows over at him, a smirk tugging on his lips at the way Dad’s eyes travel over her body, a quick, almost unnoticeable glance before he meets her eyes again.

“Not right now, sugar. But don’t be a stranger, alright?”

“Mm.” She winks at Dad before looking back over at Dean, her eyes so deep brown they’re almost wine-colored and they’re burning into him, practically licking over him. He returns the look, never one to back down, especially in front of another guy. Even if it’s his dad.

She walks away and they both turn to watch her do so, focused man-hungry on the tight jiggle of her ass in black shorts. Dad’s the first to lean back and he sighs heavily, the rumble of it settling low in his chest. He refills his glass and shakes his head before he takes it.

“Think she wants to take us both home with her.”

Dean, a rather worldly kind of guy, nearly spits his drink back into the glass. His head snaps back over to where she’s gone to another table, a couple of middle-aged guys who can barely keep their hands to themselves.

He allows himself to think about it, to entertain the thought just for a second. Sharing a girl with his father. He doesn’t think he could do it, couldn’t handle it. Could never see his father kissing another woman. He can remember him kissing Mom, his hands strong and firm as he held her cheeks, kissed her goodbye, kissed her good morning. Kissed her I-love-you. Remembers how fragile Mom looked when Dad held her like that, kissed her like that. Like a bird, like an angel.

No. He couldn’t do it. Never, not ever.

“Not in the mood anyway. Don’t care if it’s Valentine’s Day or not.” Dad scratches at his beard, the
sound carrying even in all the din. Dean just watches him, quiet for once in his life, wondering what his dad is thinking. Has spent his life wondering that, really. “Never am anymore. You just wait. Your time’ll come.”

Dean smirks, breaking out of his silence to meet Dad’s eyes in a quick glance.

“I don’t know. I really can’t imagine that ever happening. Twenty-six and haven’t slowed down yet.”

Dad grunts, a rueful smile hidden under his scruff. He pours them both another shot and they toast wordlessly, throwing the shots back without a grimace.

“I was just like you. Don’t think I wasn’t. Your poor mom—” He stops abruptly, all the humor leaving his face. It closes up again, drawing like a curtain. Closed.

Dean waits him out, glass caught with his middle finger and his thumb, hovering over the table still.

“I shouldn’t talk about her like that to you.” Dad’s glass hits the table with a sharp snap.

Dean shrugs, trying to look at as casual as he can but his heart is racing a little. The liquor is finally hitting him, sloshing over his brain in a honey-warm haze. He’s still got blood under his nails and he realizes that he spends all his time in bars, in the car, in motels, or in blood. He pours another shot for himself.

“Say whatever you want. I’m a big boy now.”

Dad’s quiet, stewing over something, working it around in his mouth like tough meat. His thick, graceful fingers play over the drops spilled on the table, spreading them out into swirls and lines.

“We fucked all the time. Constantly. Couldn’t get enough of each other. She was just so fucking beautiful, so sweet. Knew just what I liked. I got to be. You know.” A pause, a lift of his hand to pour another shot. Another lift to drink it. A shrug. “Got to let go with her. Get lost for a little while.”

Dean listens like it’s a life lesson from a wise man, like it’s a fairytale. He can’t fathom such a love, such a haven. Had it briefly with Cassie, but it had been more fire than water. Burning more than soothing. But he nods anyway, can easily imagine his mom, his beautiful, forever young mother, being just like Dad’s saying.

“But after she had you, it slowed down a little. You know. She was busy, I was working all the time. We were both tired. And you slept in the room with us for months. She didn’t want to let you out of her sight. Stayed up all night worrying if you were in your room. And you try having sex in front of a baby.” Dad raises his eyebrows, smiling behind the bottle that he’s lifted to his lips, fuck the glass.

Dean returns the smile, not having the brain to look apologetic, even just to be funny.

“But I would ambush her. Come home at lunch, when you were down for a nap. While she was cooking dinner sometimes. Random times. Because I still wanted her. Still needed her. And she just let me. Gave me anything I needed. She always.” He stops short again, tears in his eyes this time, the words sucked up into the thick, humid air and Dean swallows hard, his eyes burning.

“Most people don’t get that. That one person who’ll do anything for them. Who will take anything you throw at them because they love you. It’s that simple. Just that simple.”

It’s the last thing Dad says for awhile, that either of them say. The bottle disappears slowly, and the sweet sounds of Creedence filters through the air, overtaking the silence, saving them from it.
“Sometimes I think I’m going crazy from being away from Sammy for so long,” Dean says after an incredibly long, slow quiet, out of absolutely nowhere, horrifying himself and surprising his father out of his maudlin stupor. Dad’s dark eyes swing over to him and they can look at each other now, when everything is moving and heavy and whiskey-soaked.

Dad grunts, an acknowledgment, but he doesn’t say anything. He’s listening now just like Dean had been earlier, that careful rapt way of listening that means this is important, somehow. That all the words Dean’s saying are being heard, really heard.

Dean’s about half a minute away from a panic attack, from just shutting the ever-living fuck up right now and pretending he never said anything, but Jack Daniels has never really helped him stay quiet, in fights or in speech or in bed.

“It’s just.” Dean sucks in a sharp breath, his fingers clutching so hard at his glass that he’s afraid he’s going to shatter it. “It’s just that he’s always been there, for as long as I can remember. He’s always just been right there, and now he’s not and I just. I just don’t think I know who I am without him.”

The bottle’s almost empty now, just a slosh at the bottom that Dean finishes without a flourish, that he holds in his mouth to let it burn before he swallows. Dad’s still looking at him, the air between them heavy with history, with unspoken thoughts. Dean couldn’t look up if he tried.

“I know just how that is.”

The words are incredibly sober and sobering, a simple truth that almost makes Dean look at him again. Dean’s suddenly aware of how fucking weird this conversation is, how weird the parallels are. He wants to look at Dad to see if he knows it, too, to see if he’s freaked out by it at all. But he doesn’t. Can’t. Couldn’t even if his life depended on it.

He’s too fucking drunk for this conversation.

“C’mon,” Dad sighs, slapping his palm down on the table the very same second that Dean has his revelation, making him jump, his eyes shooting up bright and glassy to blink at his father. “Let’s find ourselves a room to crash in tonight. I’m beat.”

Dad drops some bills down on the table and heads for the door. Dean stands up slowly, adjusting the collar of his jacket and standing still for a few seconds to get his bearings so he doesn’t fall flat on his ass in front of the hot waitress. The hot waitress who is watching him, the question in her eyes obvious and underlined and bolded and Dean can barely smile at her, only looks at her for a second before he follows his dad, hoping that weird, emptiness in his gut is at least filled with whiskey tonight.

The first date had been sweet, Valentine pink. A rose in a vase on the table and a small kiss on the mouth at the end. Sam floating home.

The second date had been funny, laser tag where Jessica had beaten him, defeated him with a perfect shot and laughed in triumph, arms in the air. They’d made out against the wall of her building, his hands tight on her hips. He’d passed out after jerking off that night.

Third date had been a study date, full of coffee and sandwiches Sam slapped together for them and
fingers brushing over highlighters and socked toes sneaking touches under the table. Ended with both of them collapsed in exhaustion on their books, drool blurring a few words about field studies of American folklife and criminal justice.

The fourth date had been a drive over to Gray Whale Cove State Beach to have a picnic and watch the sunset. They’d made out right there in the sand with billions of stars as silent, ancient witnesses, they’d grinded against each other and gotten off and driven back home with their hands clasped on Sam’s thigh.

Fifth date and Jess dragged him upstairs to her room in the apartment she shares with her best friend Talia who is graduating in a couple of months. The apartment had been empty and dark and he’d fucked her on the tiny kitchen table, all his clothes still on and the collar of her shirt stretched out so he could get to one of her nipples to suck on while he came.

They’d done it again in the bed two more times before he drifted on clouds to class the next morning.

It’s a week later before he can finally relax and breathe and accept that this is happening, that she really seems to like him and isn’t planning on going anywhere. It’s a Saturday morning and the sky is stained pink with dawn and he’s inside of her, inside of that warmth that feels just like the colors outside.

“Sam, yeah. Yeah, deeper.” She spreads her long, tan legs even wider, her feet pointed like a ballerina’s, toes clutching at the sheets. Her hips are tipped down and he’s hammering into her G-spot, giving it to her as hard as he’s learned she likes it early in the morning.

He’s pretty sure he’s already in love with her.

He’s dripping sweat all over her, hair in his eyes and he’s watching how her tits bounce the harder he thrusts and he freezes, arches his back like a girl when her hands slide down his back and grip his ass, spreading his cheeks and pulling to get him in even deeper.

His breath stutters in his throat and his eyes flutter closed, his dick jumping dangerously inside of her, so fucking close just because she put her hands on his ass.

“What? You like that?” She tightens her grip on his ass and he strangles a whimper in his throat, dropping his face to hide it against her sweaty neck. He couldn’t have said yes better if he’d screamed it. Her fingers venture in further, the tips of them almost in the seam of his ass now, so, so close to his asshole that it’s twitching, hungry.

“Please.” It’s lost in her hair and he can’t say it again, couldn’t possibly. His cheeks are burning hot with embarrassment and he almost sobs because she seems to hear him, seems to get it. One of those hands disappears and he hears the sound of her mouth working wet around something and the fingers are back, spit-slicked and seeking.

One of them traces a slow circle around his hole, just feeling him out, almost shy. He shoves his dick up hard into her, making sure he’s as deep as he can get, seeming to try and assure himself of his masculinity, of his heterosexuality as his hole clenches and reaches for that finger. The tip of it slips in past the impossible tightness and he gasps, forgoing his masculinity to pull out a little as his ass lifts, begging.
“Do it do it do it. Do it please just do it.”

And she does, pushes her finger in like she knows he wants the whole thing, like she knows he’s starved for it. He sucks his bottom lip into his mouth and chews on it, tears springing to his eyes from the pain he’s inflicting on himself and from how fucking good it feels to have something inside of him, something that isn’t his own fingers.

“Is this okay? Is this what you want?” Her voice is soft, not dirty talk, not fearful or judging. Just wondering. He nods, the only thing he can do, but it’s hard and emphatic and he loosens up around her finger a little bit, showing her that he’s okay, he can take it, he wants it.

She kisses the side of his face over and over as she works that finger inside of him, curling it around and around to loosen him up as much as the awkward angle will allow her to and all Sam can think is thank God she’s got long arms and thank God she’s the perfect girl.

She pulls it out only to come back in with another finger, two pushing into him this time and he can feel every bit of it, every knuckle sinking in, all of it feeling so huge, so much bigger than should be possible. She seems to know a little about the male anatomy because she angles down as best she can, brushing over his prostate and his whole body trembles, making him lift up and stare down at her in praise and amazement, his mouth falling open to let the shuddering little sounds tumble out.

“Fuck me,” he whispers.

“Fuck me,” she echoes, her voice pitched low and raspy, legs tightening around him and she does just what he asks, spreading those fingers out inside of him to make it as big as possible before she starts to work them in and out of him. He recovers enough to catch her rhythm, to let his own body get swept up in it and he starts to fuck her right back, pushing in when she does, tightening when she does, gasping when she does.

They’re being so loud now, both of them getting even more frantic and her fingers are jamming into him even harder, even faster, keeping up with the wild snap of Sam’s hips, with the hard fuck of his dick inside of her and Jesus God Almighty, she is so fucking wet now, just as turned on by this as he is.

She comes before he does, smothering his dick with the clutch of her beautiful inner walls and her entire body flutters around him and he just fucks her through it, grits his teeth and shoves through all those clenched-up muscles, through the sweet flood of her come.

Her hand had stilled in him while she worked through her own orgasm but it’s alive again, all of her attention on Sam even as she shakes and pants under him, and Sam knows she’s only seconds away from coming again and god he loves this girl.

“Take it, Sam. Yeah, take it in your tight ass.” Her voice is even lower now, practically a growl in his ear and he whimpers, his balls drawing up so tight, eyes falling closed. He’s buried inside of her now and letting her muscles work his dick, all of him so tense, so still, focused on those fingers fucking him, focused on how good it feels to get fucked.

He keens when a third finger joins the first two inside of him, her ring finger forcing its way in and it’s too dry, too tight and it’s the best thing Sam has ever, ever felt and he shows it by exploding inside of her, flooding the condom and letting out sounds that he’s never made before, howling, wretched, inhuman sounds that soak the room, make the windows shudder.

He feels her coming again, feels the vice grip around his dick and her heartbeat all around him and he gathers up all his energy to pump his hips a few times, drawing it out for her, giving as much as
he can before his dick is too sensitive and he collapses then, shaking hard on top of her, her fingers still lodged possessively inside of him.

“Fuck,” she says after a full minute of them just trying to catch their breath, of absently-placed kisses over each other’s faces. “That was so hot.”

He blushes again and shakes his sweaty hair over his eyes, not daring to look at her even though he knows she wants him to.

He finally rolls off of her and holds onto the condom so he can do the oh-so dignified shuffle to the bathroom to throw it away. Tries not to think about how big his asshole feels right now, how hurting and puffy and good.

He washes up and brushes his teeth and she joins him after a little bit, peeing and wiping herself down and brushing her teeth right beside him. It all feels so normal, so familiar, even though she’s a girl and not--well. And not somebody else.

He glances over at her in the mirror and she crosses her eyes at him. He laughs, spitting minty, foamy bubbles all over his own reflection and she grins, looking like the happiest rabid dog ever. They rinse their mouths and turn to each other, naked and loose from fucking and content and when she kisses him, he has to hold back the ‘I love you’.

“Can I ask you something?”

It’s Tuesday evening now and they’re in his bed, fucked out and Sam’s dozing, half-asleep and unguarded and he hums a reply, a yes sound.

“Have you ever.” She stops and moves around beside him. He keeps his eyes closed, still floating in that lovely haze that happens after his brain has exploded out of his dick. He feels her hand on his chest, rubbing over it, paying special attention to his nipples which he kind of likes. A lot. “Have you ever been with a guy?”

He’s awake all of a sudden, his eyes flying open and he turns on his side to face her, mouth opening and closing around words that he just can’t seem to find.

“What?”

“It’s just.” She sucks in a quick breath and lets it out in a tiny huff before she starts to ramble. “It’s not a big deal or anything. I was just wondering, is all. I mean, you just let me rim you for half an hour. And. And I know that just because you like me to. To, you know. Do things to you like that, doesn’t mean you’re gay or that.” She shakes her head and closes her eyes, a flush creeping onto her already pink cheeks. “I was just wondering.”

He stares at her, stunned. He’s watching her now, watching her lashes flutter but her eyes stay closed and he’s glad that she’s as uncomfortable with this conversation as he is. He flops back down onto his back and stares at the ceiling, not wondering at the question anymore so much as he’s wondering how much he should tell her about himself.

“Yeah. I have.”
Her eyes fly open at that and she’s on her side again, her eyes piercing and interested.

“Really?”

He nods, determined not to blush or act like a kid, to act like this is just matter-of-fact and he’s totally cool with the question.

“I mean. I’ve done stuff with guys. I’ve never gone all the way. Almost did once, but.” He stops, trying not to think of that night, of Dom being so sweet, so thorough, wanting him so bad. And his own panic, the thoughts of. Of. Can’t think about him. Doesn’t matter.

His hands move under the blanket, thumb rubbing over his scar. It’s faded so much it’s barely there anymore, barely raised, barely noticeable even to him. But he knows it’s there. Will always know how to find it.

“So. So are you… bi?”

He looks over to find her studying his face, one side of her bottom lip caught between her teeth, getting chewed on.

“I don’t know,” he says honestly, comforted by just being able to say it. “I don’t really know what I am, I guess. It’s more of a case-by-case thing than a label. Does that make sense?”

“Totally.” Her voice is soft again and she’s stroking his hair back, untangling it with gentle, patient fingers, her nails dragging just barely over his scalp, just like-- just like he used to feel when he was little. “It does. Thanks for telling me. I didn’t mean to pry or anything.”

“No, it’s okay. I’m. I’m just glad you’re so awesome. That you’re not running from the bed, screaming about AIDS or something.” He smirks at her and she curls up against his side, a hand sliding down his stomach and under the covers, dancing over his cigarette scars and between his legs, bypassing his dick completely and rubbing at his hole just like a guy would.

“So, when are you going to let me buy a strap-on and really fuck you?” Two fingers slip inside of him effortlessly, curling up and nudging right at his prostate. He spreads his legs and rubs down against her fingers, hard breaths shuddering through his nose.

“T-tomorrow?” He closes his eyes just when he sees her start to grin. He shoves the panic down, the thought of no-wrong-not-Dean away and won’t let himself think of him. Not now, not anymore, not ever again, if he can help it.

--

The next evening, he’s in the laundry room, folding up his t-shirts and balling up socks when he feels a tall, warm body press up behind him.

He goes through a thousand thoughts and emotions in about five seconds, from striking out and knocking this person out to fear that he’s unarmed to being completely, blindingly hard at the feel of being manhandled like this and that’s when her perfume washes over him, sweet and flowery and her mouth attaches to the point of his jaw.

She shoves her hips forward and there in the tight trap of her jeans is the outline of a thick, hard cock pressing right into his ass. His hands come down hard on the dryer in front of him and he gasps, arches his back helplessly.

She presses her mouth to his ear, her long hands finding his hips and pulling him back hard so she
can grind against him.

“I want you upstairs in twenty minutes, naked and spread out on your bed. Because you’re gonna get
fucked.”

She punctuates it with a hard slap on his ass and a kiss to his cheek and she’s gone, leaving him
diamond-hard in his jeans and jelly-kneed and he shoves all his clothes back into his duffel, fuck
folding anything else ever again.

Forty-five minutes later, he’s coming all over his bed untouched, Jessica’s tits heaving against his
back, her neon pink dick working over his prostate, her wicked fingers pulling on Sam’s nipples so
hard he’ll feel it for days.

He’s in another world, feeling gun callouses instead of manicured fingers and stubble and teeth on
the back of his neck instead of a soft mouth and smelling beer and the earthy musk of a man and
hearing the constant, hungry growl of “Sammy, Sammy, Sammy” in that voice. In his voice.

A few drops of blood drip from his mouth, the skin broken from how hard his teeth were clamped
down in an attempt to keep Dean’s name from falling from his lips.

The last weekend in September, Jess drags Sam to a carnival. It’s small and a little sketchy, but Jess
is as excited as a kid when she reads the flier to Sam and talks about the film she already bought for
her camera to take pictures while they’re there. Sam sighs and drops his shoulders and it’s as good as
a yes and they both know it.

He’s got his hoodie zipped up against the chill in the air and Jess is buzzing around him like a hyper
little bee, a swirl of blonde hair tossed up into a ponytail and the grey of her sweater and the soft
click-spin-spin-click of her old Kodak Pony. Sam keeps his hands in his pockets and watches her
instead of the spectacle around them, his smile soft and only for her.

“You wanna split a funnel cake?” She’s beside him again for the moment, the camera winding film
up in a noisy churn while she fishes another roll out of her purse. He watches the whole thing with
amused interest, eyebrows lifted to show it.

“Not really?”

She stops what she’s doing and just looks up at him, leveling him with a stare that makes him take a
step back, a laugh tripping out of his mouth that he can’t seem to hold back.

“Are you kidding me, Winchester? You’re actually gonna funnel-cakeblock me?”

He laughs again, pulling a hand out of his pocket to wrap it around her waist and pull her in against
him, tickling her a little when she tries to squirm away.

“Hey, I didn’t say you couldn’t get one. Knock yourself out.” He tugs her toward the brightly-lit stands advertising everything from fresh-squeezed lemonade to fried Twinkies. He wrinkles his nose at the greasy-sweet smell of it all. “Here. I’ll even pay for it.”

He goes to reach for his wallet and she scoffs at him, the smile on her lips giving away how much she’s enjoying this. “Keep your money, grandma. Here.” She pushes her camera and a new roll of film into his waiting hands. “Load the film while I get it.”

The kiss she gives him is a quick smack and she’s gone, leaving him standing alone in the middle of the milling throngs of people. It’s all so bright and loud here: kids shrieking with laughter, teenage-girl perfume drifting by every few seconds, the victorious ding-ding! of games won, the luring shouts of the men in charge of booths, trying to coax people in to win cheap toys and printed photos of celebrities.

He’s been raised to expect things to go wrong, to be suspicious of each and every thing around him, and so he finds himself trying to catalogue it all as he loads the camera, his fingers sure and patient just like Jess taught him. He tries to memorize each ride and their operators, tries to keep track of especially loud sounds, tries to identify each of them. It’s so much, too much. His hands slip a little as he closes the camera back up, letting the film get settled in and start to wind itself down into place but he catches it just in time.

A man walks by holding a lit cigar, a sweaty, meaty shoulder jostling Sam and almost making him trip over his own feet. He wants to go home suddenly, wants to be in a quiet room where all the sounds are expected ones, wants to only hear one voice, smell one thing. His grip tightens on the camera and he looks up to try and find an exit, an escape when Jess appears again in his line of vision, holding a paper plate with a heavy, winding funnel cake topped with powdered sugar and strawberries weighing it down.

“Hey.” She touches his arm, her entire expression drawn into concern. “You okay?”

“Yeah, I’m.” He stops, doesn’t have the mind to lie just now. “Can we go take a break or something? Find somewhere to sit?”

“Sure. Of course.” Her smile is the warmest he’s ever seen and she leans up to press a kiss to eyebrow before she takes her camera back and drops it down into her bag. “C’mon. There are a few tables around here somewhere. I saw ‘em when we first came in.”

The sky is clear and velveteen overhead, stars dancing in seeming merriment as they make their way through the crowds. It starts to thin out once they get away from most of the rides, only a few booths over this way, all apparently selling things they don’t feel the need to shout about.

There’s a single, rickety picnic table that has seen more days than Sam and Jess combined at the very end of the line of booths, plenty far from most of the craziness for Sam to feel like he can breathe again. There are a few lights overhead that are almost blindingly bright, but at least it’s not sitting in the dark.

They make their way over without a word, Sam winding his way around so he can sit facing out toward the rest of the carnival while Jess plops down beside him.

There’s a woman at the table already, curled down over a little styrofoam cup that’s billowing steam up toward her face. She looks neither old or young, her hands strong and lithe and lined with rings where they clasp the cup. Jess doesn’t pay her any mind, doesn’t see anything past the strawberry on
her fork that she’s lifting up to Sam’s mouth very graciously, an understanding smile on her face.

He leans over and catches the strawberry on the fork with his lips, eating it just because she wants him to. The smile she gives him is a little relieved and it makes him relax, body sinking down further onto the bench.

“Not much of a crowd person, are you?”

Sam looks over for that, for the soft strength in that voice. The woman is looking right at him, her eyes an unfathomable color like dark grey or maybe a deep forest green, and he shivers a little when they meet his own.

“Not really,” he finds himself saying, not even really thinking before answering. She makes a sound of agreement before lifting the cup to her mouth, taking a careful sip before she speaks again.

“What are you doing here?”

Her tone is off, almost accusing. Sam sits up a little then, sits back and glances over at Jess who is just watching him, powdered sugar dusting her lips, fork hovering, everything from the quirk of her eyebrows and the wide of her eyes telling Sam that she’s just as lost as he is. He looks back over at the woman.

“Um, I just wanted to take a break from it all. Jess here wanted to come and take pictures and--”

“That’s not what I mean.” The woman lifts her head for the first time and looks him in the face. She’s probably in her late-fifties, her hair long and soft brown and framing her face in wind-lost curls. Her mouth is beautiful in its unhappy line, it’s soft and sensuous and almost too young to belong on her face. Sam’s heart picks up speed for how boldly she’s looking at him, for how her gaze is piercing him, prying right into him in places that he guards with tight fists. “What are you doing here? Away from him?”

He reaches for his pockets immediately and finds them empty, of course. Civilian Sam doesn’t carry salt or holy water, doesn’t have any charms on him to at least give him the illusion of safety. He closes himself off then, cloaking his mind and not letting her in any further. His expression hardens and she sets her cup down, the tag from the teabag inside of it getting trapped underneath.

“Excuse me, but who are you?” Jess pushes her funnel cake away and turns her body in toward Sam, a hand resting on his forearm, like she knows what’s going on, like she can guard him from anything. Sam angles himself away from her then, protecting her as much as she’s trying to protect him.

The woman doesn’t look away from Sam to acknowledge Jess, doesn’t break eye contact even once. Her eyes soften and she lets out a sigh, hair tumbling around her shoulders as she shakes her head.

“Lost. Poor boy, you’re just so lost. Don’t even know how much.” She lifts her arms then, her bracelets sounding like the ringing of bells as she cups her hands together to reach for Sam. He leans in toward her, lifts his hands to offer them to her even as Jess is tightening her grip on his arm, trying to pull him away from her.

“Lost. Poor boy, you’re just so lost. Don’t even know how much.” She lifts her arms then, her bracelets sounding like the ringing of bells as she cups her hands together to reach for Sam. He leans in toward her, lifts his hands to offer them to her even as Jess is tightening her grip on his arm, trying to pull him away from her.

“Sam, don’t. She’s crazy. Let’s just go.” Jess stands up, unfolds her long body from the table and pulling her purse up onto her shoulder. The woman closes her hands around Sam’s and he feels it like lightning all through his bones and he knows without question that this woman is a true psychic, a reader, and that she’s prying his soul open with kid gloves right now and there’s nothing he can do to stop it.
He slams his eyes shut to the tears that drag themselves up, he clutches his hands together between hers and lowers his head, jaw clenching hard. He hears the woman make a noise, a soft sound of almost pity, hears Jess drop back down into the seat next to him.

“Sam--”

“He’s near the end of his rope. He wanders around lost, just like you. Except he’s looking for trouble. Looking for someone to take it out on. Looking for someone to take him down. Doesn’t think anyone will care anymore.” Her eyes are closed when he dares to look back up at her, her eyeballs working behind her lids like fluttering wings, her beautiful mouth whispering unheard words.

“Tell me more.” His voice sounds raked apart, like he’s been crying all night. Like this has torn him wide open and he can’t stop the bleeding. He untangles his hands from each other and turns them so that his palms line up with hers, so that she can access any part of him she needs to, anything to get her to tell him more. “Is he okay?”

“Lost, so lost,” she murmurs, like it’s a song, a forgotten prayer. Her thumb strokes over his knuckles, the silver of her rings cold on his skin. “He knows where you are and so he can’t look for you. Can’t pretend that’s his quest, not anymore. You were always his North, always the thing to work for and work toward and so what is he now? What is he protecting now?”

“Everyone,” Sam interrupts, trying to meet her eyes, pleading with her, arguing with her. “He protects everyone. He doesn’t need me. He doesn’t--”

“You cannot tell someone they don’t need their soul.” Her voice sounds even stronger now, the whole tone of it lower, like someone else is taking hold of it. She meets his eyes and he sees that they’re green, the green on maps, the green that lives with brown. He feels like he’s known her forever. “You cannot tell someone they don’t need half of themselves. He needs you just as you need him. Do not blaspheme against what you are to each other, boy.”

“Sam, we’re leaving. Now.” Jess is up again and she’s pulling on him so hard that she’s hurting his arm. He blinks then, tearing his eyes away from the woman to look up at Jess. He blinks at her like he really is lost, like he has no idea who she is. She looks terrified and angry and she uses all of her strength to yank him up, to make him listen.

He scrambles up from the seat, pulling his hands from the woman’s grip and running his hands through his hair, trying to get control of himself, trying to sew himself back up again as fast as he can.

Jess snatches his hand, tucking her fingers between each of his and she pulls him away from the table, away from the woman who is just watching them, watching him. She reaches out just as they walk by, wrapping long fingers around Sam’s wrist, drawing him back into her gaze just as easy as breathing.

“Please,” he whispers, not knowing exactly what he’s asking for, what he wants. Jess’ hand is trembling in his own and the night is alive around them, bright with sounds and people’s voices and the smell of smoke and sugar and the cool of autumn, but he can only hear the low rasp of Dean’s voice when he’s just woken up, can only feel how warm Dean’s skin gets in the sun, can only smell the inside of the Impala and that secret scent of Dean’s skin on his neck, right where Sam tucks his face to hide from everyone, from everything. He’s drowning.

“Go to him,” she says right back just as soft, like she doesn’t want anyone else to hear it. Her eyes are bright in the dark and imploring with him, her grip tightening on the bones in his wrist. “There’s
so much blood in your life, boy. So much blood. You can’t escape it, but you can be there beside him when it happens. There’s burning and there’s blood but you don’t have to be alone. He doesn’t have to be alone. And lost. So lost.”

She collapses back down onto the bench, her cup rattling on the table. Jess pulls Sam so hard that he almost falls into her, almost trips over his own feet. They stumble back through the alley between lines of booths, everything almost sinister now, skewed like a funhouse mirror. He sees a little table off to the side that he hadn’t seen before, one containing just a stack of cards, an unlit candle, a bell, and a small, handwritten sign that says “Back in Twenty.”

A mind-reader.

He stops in his tracks and looks back toward the woman at the table with her back to them, her hair spilling long down her back, her shoulders drawn in.

“Sam, stop it. Stop it. You’re freaking me out.” Her voice is shaking and Sam looks over at Jess, really looks at her for the first time since they sat down over there. Her eyes are shining with tears and her face is pale, everything about her expression pleading with him. “What the fuck was that? What was she talking about?”

“Can we just go home?” He feels exhausted and it’s all of a sudden, out of nowhere and it hits him like a tidal wave. “Can we leave? Please?”

She opens her mouth like she’s going to say something else, like she’s going to argue, but she stops. Takes a deep breath. “Yeah. Let’s go.”

They make it back to the apartment without speaking another word, both of them lost in their own heads. The apartment is just starting to feel like home, all their stuff unpacked and blending together until it’s finally starting to feel like their stuff.

Jess turns on the light in the livingroom and Sam keeps walking until he gets to the bedroom. He doesn’t bother turning on the light, doesn’t look around before he starts stripping off his clothes layer by layer. He falls down onto the bed in just his underwear, pulling the blankets up around his shoulders, his mind still spinning with words, with lost and blood and alone and do not blaspheme against what you are to each other, boy.

His eyes are closed by the time Jess comes into the room, everything about her movements quiet, careful. She closes the door behind her, the soft patter of her clothes hitting the ground comforting before she climbs into bed with him.

Her hand on his shoulder has him immediately submitting, turning over to sprawl on his back so she can tuck up against his side, her cheek resting warm and soft on his chest, right over his heart. He strokes her hair back from her face just as she wraps her arms around him, neither of them sure what to say yet, it seems. He watches the ceiling above him, watches the play of headlights there, wondering what she’s thinking.

“Who was she talking about?” It feels like they haven’t spoken for hours, the low hum of her voice almost loud in the utter silence of the room. His hand pauses at the base of her skull just as his heart speeds up right under her ear.

“Just,” he starts, his voice rusty, thick with lies, “somebody from my past.”

She doesn’t say anything again, just nestles in closer to him, her hand spreading out on his stomach.
He focuses on breathing, on a steady in and out that will calm him down.

“Do you still love him?” She sounds carefully neutral, like the answer wouldn’t affect her either way. He glances down at her, at the top of her head, feeling with a strange clarity how young she is, how innocent to so many things. How unlike him she really is.

“Like I said. Somebody from my past.” He cranes down to press a kiss to her forehead, right over that beauty mark he teases her so adoringly about. He feels her relax a little, feels a smile creep onto her face as she tips her head up to kiss him.

They settle back down and Sam indulges in taking a deep breath that he lets out in a slow, aching sigh, his eyes falling closed. Dean is there behind his eyelids, like he’s just been waiting. Sam can see him as clear as day, sleeping in the Impala, no blanket, no pillow, no real rest. Scruff on his face, haunt in his eyes.

There’s burning and there’s blood but you don’t have to be alone.

“Do you believe in soulmates?”

Sam’s eyes snap back open then, dragged back into tonight and reality and away from Dean, from the worn leather and pain of him that Sam could almost, almost smell. He tries to crane his neck, to look down at Jess again, a frown digging at his mouth.

“Hm?”

“Soulmates,” she says again, turning a little more so she’s mostly on her stomach and braced up on his chest, finally meeting his eyes. She’s searching his face, looking for tells and secrets and answers. He knows better than to give her any of them. “Do you believe in soulmates?”

He shrugs, wriggling a little to settle deeper into the mattress, eyes slipping closed once more. “I don’t know. Maybe. I don’t think everybody finds theirs, if they do exist.”

He can feel her eyes on him still and he’s aware of how tense his body is under the outward appearance of relaxation, aware of how much he’s really holding his breath, waiting for this conversation to be over.

“Hm.” She sighs and curls down around him again, hand running up and down his side now, bumping over the bones of his ribs and the tiny curve of his waist. “Do you think you’ve found yours?”

Yes. He knows the answer before she’s even done speaking, knows without question. He forces a smile onto his face, pushes himself into making one last effort to end this whole moment before he flies right out of his skin.

“I can’t even find a matching pair of socks most days.” His tone is teasing and light and it works, thank God. She smacks him flat on his stomach and he coughs up a laugh, his own hand sliding down to tickle at her ribs.

“You’re an ass.” She’s grinning again and he opens his eyes to see it. He smiles right back and kisses her when she comes in for it, arching a little under her hand that makes its way down his body, to his hip, to his thigh.

“You love my ass,” he mumbles against her lips, shivering a little for the way that hand immediately slides down and beneath him to grip his ass, pulling hard on one cheek like she owns it.
“Still wanna get fucked, Winchester?” She works her way under his underwear and nudges at his hole with a dry finger, rubbing at it in tiny circles. He pulls back to meet her eyes again, giving her a gentle smile that hopefully lets her down easy.

“Maybe in the morning. I’m kind of drained and it takes us twenty minutes to get that thing strapped onto you.”

She groans, pushing into him with the tip of her finger before she withdraws it completely, giving him one final kiss and then sinking back down beside him.

“Fine, fine. Expect an early wakeup call, then.” She sounds just as tired as he is, and he can’t keep the affection out of his smile as he tugs the covers up over her.

“Noted.” He kisses the top of her head, hugging her as tight against him as he’ll let himself. “Love you.”

“Mm. Love you, too, babe.”

It takes him two hours to fall asleep, every single one of the old woman’s words repeating themselves over and over again in his mind, all of them making him want to get out of bed and find his shoes and a car and just drive, just find him. Even though it will end in blood, just like she said. Even though it would have always ended in blood anyway.

*There’s burning and there’s blood.*

He dreams about Jess burning on ceiling that night for the first time, pinned like a butterfly, bleeding like a slaughtered animal, burning like a sacrifice.
“Goddamnit, Dean, turn around!”

Dad’s voice is so shrill, so frantic that Dean flinches before he gets his shit together enough to just obey. It all takes a total of two entire seconds but he’s ready, gun cocked and aimed as he does a 180.

It’s a girl, this werewolf, can’t be a day over twenty, but she’s gone, disappeared under a mouth of deadly fangs and the feral, blind stare of an animal. Dean tenses right when she does, reacting just quick enough when she lunges for him to pull back on the trigger, nothing but years of practice putting the bullet straight into her heart without effort.

She’s a girl again before she hits the ground, and she does so with a sickening thud. Dean’s heart is racing in his ears, pulse jumping in his neck as he takes a step toward the heap of her body, both hands still on his gun, finger on the trigger.

Dad is next to him and Dean doesn’t know when that happened, only knows that he can smell Dad’s blood and it should frighten him more that he knows the scent.

“She’s dead,” Dean pants, the words needless but he’s got to say something. He chances a look over at Dad and finds his face drawn, ashen and grave. Their eyes lock and Dad manages a sneer.

“Gonna get yourself fuckin’ killed one of these days.” Worry is threaded through Dad’s voice so Dean doesn’t take it—or the look on Dad’s face—to heart. He eases his tense finger off the trigger and pushes the safety on before tucking his gun back into his pants. He wipes the sweat dripping from his face off on his jacket, about to open his mouth and say something else before Dad shoulders past him, knocking into him hard as he does.

“Burn it. I’m heading back into town.”

Dean looks around, at the dripping alley between two crumbling skeletons of warehouses outside of Spokane, and lets out a tired bark of laughter.

“Dad, how the hell am I supposed to get back to the motel?”

“I don’t know, Dean! Figure it out. While you’re figuring out where your fucking head was at when you were supposed to be watching my back tonight.” Dad’s back is to him and he’s getting farther away with each word, every one of them echoing off the quiet around them.

Dean stares after him, his body shaking with exhaustion and adrenaline and no small amount of pain, chest heaving as he tries to think of something to defend himself.

“I’m never riding with you again!”

He thinks it’s a pretty good retort, but when Dad doesn’t even miss a step as he walks away, Dean sighs. He hears the sound of that god-awful truck start up and he turns back to stare down at the girl, at her pretty brown curls damp with dirty rainwater and her own blood.

“Goddamnit,” Dean says, soft and defeated. He closes his eyes, trying to prepare himself for the damaging moment of dragging a still-warm person to a dry place to light their body on fire. It never gets any easier.

Every bone in Dean’s body aches but he shuts his mind down, turns it all off to reach down and lace his fingers with hers, silently counting to three as he lifts her, dragging her up onto his shoulder.

The rest is muscle memory.
He gets back into town almost two hours later, shuffling into a liquor store to buy a couple of bottles of rotgut with the last few dollars he has on him. He gets about half of one bottle drank before he shoves his key into the lock of their motel room door.

Dad’s sprawled out on his bed, a bandage around his arm, a good beer nestled in his palm. Dean sets his jaw and stubbornly ignores the burn of the piss-flavored liquor in his throat.

“Thought you’d decided to spend the night out there or somethin’.” Dad at least sounds amused, and it’s enough to take most of the fight out of Dean. He sighs and steps into the room proper, shouldering the door closed behind him.

“Almost did.” He reaches down to yank at the laces on his boots, setting the brown bag he’s holding down on the floor to do so. “And there wasn’t a dry spot anywhere so I had to--”

“Check the salt line.”

Dean whips around and runs his gaze along the floor in front of the door, looking for any disturbances he might’ve caused coming in.

“It’s fine. I’m takin’ a shower.” He plunks his gun down on the table before toeing off his socks and shrugging off his jacket, dropping it down on the wobbly table. He shuffles toward the bathroom, his shoulders and neck aching for whatever hot water this shittest motel can give him.

“Your phone rang about half an hour ago.”

Dean pauses, his heart leaping up stupidly into his throat. He closes his eyes, glad his back’s to Dad for the moment so he can find his game face. He takes a deep breath that he makes sure comes out as normal as possible.

“You answer it?”

Dad grunts in the negative, the wet sound of him guzzling more beer all Dean hears for a few seconds. “Figured it was none-a my business. Figured it mighta been a booty call or somethin’.”

Dean groans, rubbing his hands hard over his face. “Jesus Christ, Dad. Could you just not say the words ‘booty call’ ever again?”

That earns an amused snort from Dad, and it’s enough to make Dean turn around, eyes rushing over the nightstand in search of his phone. He spies it on the unmade bed finally and snatches it up, trying to shove down any hope at all that it’s a call from. From.

“Oh.” He stares down at the name listed under Missed Calls on his screen, his shoulders falling in disappointment. “It was Bobby.”

“I’ll call him back.” Dad reaches for the remote to hit ‘mute.’

Dean manages a laugh as he drops his phone back on the bed, tired fingers falling to his belt buckle, tugging it loose. “Doubt he wants to talk to you, old man. ‘S probably why he called me in the first place. Didn’t realize we were doing this one together.”

“Go get in the shower,” Dad gruffs, grabbing his own phone and staring down at it like he can’t remember how to work it, or that he’s maybe too drunk to.
Dean turns to walk away again, belt clinking as he reaches up to tug his shirt off. He flicks the bathroom light on and almost steps inside when Dad’s voice stops him again.

“Who were you hopin’ it was?”

Dean stares straight ahead into the low-lit bathroom, finding himself face to face with his own reflection in the dirty mirror.

“Nobody, I guess.” He stares straight into his own eyes and realizes this is what he looks like when he’s lying.

“A girl?” There’s a smile in Dad’s voice, a tiny overlay of pride. Dean’s tired, a shiver settling over his bones like a thin layer of ice. He doesn’t have anymore truth left in him tonight.

“Yeah, Dad. A girl.” He steps inside and closes the door behind him, not meeting his own gaze anymore.

He showers, military-efficient and unthinking, and brushes his teeth harder than he should. He makes his way back into the room and Dad’s still on the phone with Bobby, lamp beside the bed on, journal out and he’s hurriedly scratching notes into it.

Dean drags the towel through his hair one more time before tossing it on the ground next to his bed. He crouches down to rifle through his bag, listening in on Dad’s conversation but he’s mostly just surprised that Dad and Bobby are being civil to each other.

“...Well, yeah, we’re in Nine Mile Falls outside of Spokane. It’d take me until sometime tomorrow to get down there even if I leave right now.”

Dean pulls on a pair of sweatpants and he doesn’t letting himself overthink it too much when he unearth a soft, faded maroon hoodie. He pulls it on over his head, the stitching of the letters itching his skin and scratching his nipples up all to hell but it’s worth it. It’s a Sam-hoodie kind of night.

“Yeah. Yeah, alright. Well, I’ll leave first thing in the morning, then. I just--well, what the fuck am I supposed to do about that?! I can’t be in two places at once!” Dad lets out a laugh that’s half annoyed, half something that could have once been called playful. Dean sinks down onto his squeaky bed and watches Robin Williams talk animatedly to Jay Leno on the TV screen, trying his best not to feel like a little kid with the way the sleeves of Sam’s hoodie cover his hands and the way he’s just waiting for his dad to get off the phone and tell him what’s going on. “Tell you what. You finish up your haunted nursery thing and I’ll see where I get in Jericho after a couple of days, and we’ll see who can head down to New Orleans the fastest.”

Jericho. New Orleans. Dean’s heart races with thoughts of driving, with the pull of his car even though he would probably drive off the road if he tried to get anywhere tonight. But Jericho. If Dad means Jericho, California, then that’s way down past Palo Alto. Maybe they can--

“Dean, did you hit your head or somethin’?”

Dean blinks, yanking his head out of the fucking clouds and sitting up straight, hands on his thighs. “No, sir. What’s Bobby talkin’ about? Haunted... babies?”

“Hm?” Dad finishes off his beer and hauls himself out of bed, groaning with every movement but he’s reaching for his boots. Every bone in Dean’s body aches but the obedient son in him forces him to stand up, too. “No, it was, uh. An old lady who used to work there or somethin’. Haunts the place and scares all the babies shitless every day. Like, two dozen screaming babies all day long. Bobby’s about to go out of his mind.”
Dean manages a smile as he reaches for his boots that are still soaking wet, still dripping bloody water onto the carpet. “Where’re we goin’? Jericho? The one in California?”

“Couple hours east’ve LA, yeah.” The quiet, satisfying murmur of Dad pulling his shoelaces tight and the split second to tie them both up with double knots and then he’s up and shrugging on his jacket. “Guys keep gettin’ killed along this one road, all in the same stretch of highway. And he said that he just got a call from a friend of his about some people droppin’ dead down in New Orleans, no cause apparent of death.”

Dean pushes his feet down into his boots, socks getting soaked. He pauses. “Sounds like voodoo.”

“Or witches. Who knows? Anyway, you comin’ to Jericho?” Dad’s suddenly completely dressed, keys dangling from his hand, eyes wide awake and only half drunk now with the promise of a new hunt in front of him.

Dean pauses, lowering his eyes from Dad’s to think for a minute. He licks his lips, focuses on tying his shoes.

“Jericho’s past Palo Alto. Right?”

He can feel it, when the room changes. When the air leaves it and fills instead with Dad’s anger, his impatience. “Yeah. And?”

“And nothin’.” Dean shrugs and stands up, not caring that he’s in sweats because he’s just going to be driving all night, and he’s gonna sleep in the car, most likely. “Just thought maybe we could stop in, see how Sam’s doin’. Couldn’t hurt, right?”

“Dean. We’re not driving straight down through California. We’re taking I-84. Palo Alto’s about five hours out of the way.” Dad looks taller now, just like he always does when Dean can sense that they’re about to have a fight. But sometimes Dean just can’t help himself.

“Not really. I mean we could just take that one highway that runs down through Oregon. It’s a better drive anyway. Just. Maybe we could take him out for breakfast or somethin’. We don’t have to--”

“You really think we have time to stop and eat fucking pancakes with Mr. College Boy when people’s lives are at stake, Dean? Are you really that selfish or are you just tryin’ to piss me off?”

Dean’s quiet as he packs up the rest of his shit, shoving clothes into his bag and kicking his wet towel into the bathroom. He pockets his phone and reaches for his gun, tucking it awkwardly into the back of his sweatpants.

“Nevermind, Dad,” his voice is a mumble, barely heard over the sound of his boots on the rough carpet. “Let’s just go.”

“No. No, Dean, I don’t think it’s a good idea. We’re kind of shitty at hunting together anymore, in case you didn’t notice.” Dad moves to stand in front of the door, the heel of his boots grazing the salt line. There’s more grey in the whiskers of his beard now, more lines around his eyes but they’re staring right at him, piercing him. He’s already made his decision.

“So, what? You just want me to stay here? This is the first case we’ve worked together in almost six months.” Dean drops his bag on the floor with a loud thump, aware suddenly of how quiet it is in their room, of how easily he can hear the couple in the next room fucking against the wall behind him.

“I have a lot of shit going on, and I don’t need you in the middle of it. Especially not if you’re just
going to pout like a fucking schoolgirl over some boy the entire time.” Dad opens the door and a sharp twist of wind cuts into the room, slithering all over Dean, curling through his wet hair and making him shiver. His cheeks burn hot at Dad’s words, at the implication of them.

“I just thought we could go see Sam! I didn’t think it was that big of a deal!”

“Maybe Sam doesn’t want to see us! He doesn’t give a shit about us anymore. He would’ve called if he did! Stop lying to yourself, Dean. Christ. It’s getting to be pathetic and you know it.” It’s raining outside behind Dad. The werewolf-girl’s mother had told them earlier in the day that it’s supposed to snow tonight. That she was worried about her daughter being out there alone in such bad weather. Dean’s head throbs in his left temple and he reaches out on instinct for the brown bag liquor beside him.

“Whatever, Dad.”

“You’re not going. Smartass. Call Bobby and get the intel on the case in New Orleans. You’re heading down there first thing in the morning at the very latest. That’s not a suggestion.”

Dean lifts the bottle at his dad in a salute before he gulps down a few mouthfuls, the ruinous taste of it spreading all through him like razors. He slams it back down on the table and turns his back to on Dad, trying to kick his shoes off again.

“If I hear about you in Palo Alto, so help me, boy. Do you hear me?”

“Goodbye, Dad.” He yanks off his once-clean socks and his jacket, letting them both fall where he is. Gun thunking back on the table. The trip back to the bed is short and Dean can feel Dad fuming in the open doorway.

“You’re going to New Orleans and you will call me when you get down there. If I don’t hear from you in two days, there will be hell to pay, Dean Winchester. There are some things a little more important than Sam, believe it or not. New Orleans. That is an order.”

He collapses back on the bed and closes his eyes, letting his brain swim around in an ignorant haze behind them. Sam’s hoodie is almost too soft now, too many hours worn, too many washes. Dad hasn’t even commented on it. He never has.

“Yessir.”

Dad is slamming the door before Dean even finishes getting the word out. The truck’s engine shatters the quiet a few seconds later, the bright headlights shining on the rain-slicked windows. Dean listens to him leave, listens to the sound of being alone once again settle in all around him.

He turns over onto his side, his eyes sliding open to gaze over at the empty bed next to his own. His hands are so cold that they feel numb, his knuckles raw and scratched pink, skin so dry it’s cracking. He stretches out the sleeves and pulls them over his hands, trying to warm them up.

He and Sam have always shared a bed. They used to try and get a cot for Sam to sleep on sometimes when they were fighting, but Dean’s guilt would win out and Sam would end up curled in bed next to him more often than not. But if Sam were with him now, if Sam hadn’t left, they’d have separate beds. Sammy’s so big now, so long, he’d never want to share a bed again. Surely. They could never make it work.

And Dean knows he’ll never find out, that he’s chasing ghost stories, at this point. Dean is Here and Sam is There, and that’s just the way it is now. Nothing could bring Sam back at this point, not after he’s been gone for so long.
The bitch of it is, he knows Dad’s right. Sam’s gone because he wants to be gone. That’s the long
and short of it. Doesn’t matter what things would be like if he was here. It’s almost like wondering
what things would be like if Mom was here.

And Dean doesn’t let himself think about that, either.

Another heartbeat or two and he’s forcing himself to sit up, rubbing hard at his eyes to try and wake
up. New Orleans is almost two days away. Better to just get it over with.

Truth is, he finished the case in three days. Turned out to be some woman on a revenge spree against
a guy’s family because he wouldn’t leave his wife for her when she told him she was pregnant.

It was one of the most surprising moments of his life when he tracked the evil voodoo priestess with
a serious hard-on for Marie Laveau down and saw balloons on her mailbox for a baby shower.

She’d taken one look at him, raised her eyebrows, and invited him in. The shower was just wrapping
up, women leaving in hordes after kissing Violet on both cheeks and petting her tummy, every single
one of them eyeballing Dean with undisguised hunger as they slinked out. He’d looked around, baby
blue crepe paper everywhere, tiny baby shoes, pacifiers. Goddamnit.

Violet had locked the door after them all and turned to face him, hands on her stomach, and said,
“Knew you was a hunter the minute I saw you. And what do you want, boy?”

He let her live, of course. Voodoo priestess or not, she was fucking pregnant. Gave her as stern a
talking-to as he could while eating her homemade pimento cheese. Turns out she only killed her
baby daddy (deserved: he was a cheating bastard), the guy’s brother (tried to sleep with her once
himself and it’d almost gotten ugly when she’d said no), and his monster bitch of a mother (self-
explanatory). She sweet-talked him all the way out the door, promised to name her baby boy Dean,
promised she’d be good from here on out, and the next thing he knew, he’s in his car, heading back
toward the Quarter with a smile on his face.

Damn mind-reading, head-fucking magic women.

New Orleans opens up to him then, keeps her arms wide to cradle him for nearly two weeks. He’d
chased warmth all the way across the country and felt the last remnants of it down here on the edge
of the Mississippi, and he isn’t in any hurry to leave. Especially when he’s got nowhere to really go.
Especially since Dad hasn’t called like he’d threatened, hasn’t even answered his damn phone.

And so why the fuck not drink too much, why the fuck not do a few drugs he’s always been curious
about trying, why not lose a few brain cells and not remember what a goddamn terrific time he had
down in good ol’ New Orleans.

And maybe his arm itches where the needle went in a couple of days ago, maybe his hands have
been shaking a little bit more these days but the bars are eternal, vampiric in their nocturnal
immortality, in how their inhabitants can’t seem to get enough of him. He’s kissed more mouths,
been on and under and in more bodies in the past eleven days than all the rest of his life combined,
and why not?

Only twenty-six once. And the one person whose opinion he actually cares about is probably holed
up in some library, seducing some girl with a fucking rant about orphanages in Bosnia or something.
Probably hasn’t thought about Dean in weeks. Months, even. So who the fuck cares, bring it on,
please sir, can I have another.

Now, it’s four days later and he’s sprawled out naked as a newborn on a mattress in the tiniest apartment he’s ever seen, ass on full display while he dozes and who cares if it is?

“I have to go to work.” Olalla, the girl who he’d gone home with two nights ago and who is taking almost suspiciously good care of him comes bustling in from the bathroom, smelling like something peppery and warm, some spicy perfume that makes him lick his lips as he remembers what she tastes like. “Are you going to be a lazy bones again?”

He grins as she slips into a pair of red flats, her tits pushed near up to her chin and goddamn, she looks good.

“You sure you just don’t wanna come back to bed?” He flops over onto his back and stretches out on the bed, fingers bumping against the jelly jar holding a handful of dead dandelions on the windowsill. His dick lays heavy on his stomach, half-hard just because he’s awake and been getting sex on the regular and his body just knows what to do.

She groans, pushing a hand up through her horse-tail thick dark hair and lets out a string of words in Spanish that he’s pretty sure are all about how he’s a fucking sexgod. She struts over to the bed and wraps a sure hand around his dick as she leans over and kisses him, smearing his mouth with red lipstick. He moans, bucking up into her hand and licking into her mouth, chasing after the sweet spice of her that he tastes even in her mouth. He doesn’t remember how he got here, was way too drunk the night he met her to recall the technicalities of it all, but she’s been real sweet to him, fed him and kept his dick happy, and he’s been as good to her as he knows how to be.

“Believe me, I would rather ride your dick all night than make drinks for sweaty old men, but you ain’t payin’.” Her Cuban accent is softened around the edges by her New Orleans one, and that in combination with the way she plays with his slit is making his toes curl.

“Maybe not in cash, but--” His phone bursts to life on the bedside table, ringing and vibrating into the empty condom wrappers. His green eyes lock on her brown ones and she gives him a smile. She reaches down to give his balls a hard rub before she’s standing up again.

“Go ahead and answer it. I’ll be home around 4 or so. You’d better be awake because imma be ready for you, you hear me?” She’s wrapping a scarf around her neck and grabbing her purse, and Dean is already pouting, about to open his mouth to complain about food. “There’s muffulettas in the fridge, don’t be a baby.”

He relaxes a little then.

She grins as she heads to the door. “White boys. Always hungry for food y papayas.” She turns to look at him one more time, her eyes raking hard over his body and his now fully-hard dick lifts at the attention. “Mm. Bye, cariño.”

The phone has stopped ringing by the time she closes the door and leaves, and Dean gets that distinctly itching feeling he always does when he’s stayed too long in one place. Pet names are a sure sign that he needs to get the fuck out. He ignores his dick for the moment to grab his phone when it chirps that he’s got a message.

He falls back onto the bed after he pushes all the right buttons to check his messages, fingers sliding down to idly pluck at the hairs of his happytrail.
“Dean… somethin’ big is starting to happen… I need to try and figure out what's goin’ on. It may... Be very careful, Dean. We're all in danger.”

He stares at the ceiling with unseeing eyes, his mind racing frantically to catch up with what he just heard. He yanks the phone away from his face and hits the button to listen to the message again, his blood running cold as he sits up in bed.

He listens again, a finger jammed in his other ear, eyes closed. He’s missing chunks of what Dad’s trying to tell him, but he gets the general idea of what he’s saying. There’s something there though, something interfering.

“Gotta be EVP,” he murmurs to himself, brain already five steps ahead of his body. He climbs out of bed and listens to the voicemail one more time, eyes tracing the darkening room for his pants.

“...We're all in danger.”

We? We who? Him and Dad? Bobby? The world?

He saves the message and calls Dad back as he yanks his jeans on over his bare ass, phone cradled between his cheek and his shoulder.

“This is John Winchester. If you--”

“Damnit, Dad.” He stops in the middle of the strange apartment and snaps his phone closed, night settling in around him, the sounds of the Rue Ursulines waking up outside the cracked window. Dad doesn’t use the word danger lightly. Doesn’t just say it if he doesn’t mean it. He only uses it with Dean as a way to underline what he’s already warning him about, and he usually only says it when he’s talking about--

“Sammy,” Dean breathes, the ancient, greedy air of the French Quarter taking the word from him immediately, sucking it straight up and carrying it away out the window. He shoves his phone in his pocket and finds his shirt, working on auto-pilot now. Shirt on, jacket on, shoes on. Find your gun. Find your keys.

The questions are rumbling around in his head, the whys and hows and whos, but none of them eclipse the possibility of something happening to Sam. Sam who’s practically an innocent now, who’s unarmed and unprepared and alone.

He grabs a muffuletta and a can of Diet Coke out of the fridge, not leaving a note in his wake because he doesn’t want Olalla to romanticize whatever it was they had. Better if she realizes that he was just a dick, that all guys are dicks, that she needs to better protect herself from assholes like him, pretty smile and talented tongues or not.

He dials Dad on his way down the wrought-iron staircase, nearly throwing his phone when he gets his voicemail again. Three weeks. Three fucking weeks, he hasn’t heard a word from him, and now this. It all slots into the vague feelings of dread and worry and not right he’s had the entire time, and it’s enough for him to climb into his car just as the sun is setting in late October in New Orleans and prepare himself to drive back across the fucking country for the second time in less than a month.

If Sam’s at risk, there’s no question where he’s got to go.
Season One

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

PART THREE

The hunter in Sam wakes up in the middle of the night. Hears the sound of a window opening downstairs, maybe in the livingroom.

He’s not drowsy, not scared, not unsure. There’s someone else here, in their home. He can feel it right down to the tremble of adrenaline in his empty hands as he makes his way down the stairs, his feet silent.

It’s all moonlight down here, shadows and spills of pale shine through the opened window on the old wood floors, and he knows just where to step to keep them from creaking. There’s a silhouette through a doorway and his heart flies right up into his throat, trapped against his fluttering tongue. Every single sense is heightened, sharp as knives. His skin is singing with fight, muscles tensed for a struggle, aching with remembered training.

He was built for this. The sudden danger of it is making him almost giddy.

He waits and pounces at precisely the right second, when the guy’s back is to him, when everything in him tightens and releases like a spring.

The guy fights back, perfect and immediate.

It’s beautiful, the feeling of hard bone and muscle striking out against his own again. His would-be burglar/murderer/sandman telegraphs his every move like he’s been watching Sam, studying him for months, seen his body in action and planned this all down to the last kick.

It seems to go on forever, like a dance. His right right cheek stings from a perfectly landed punch, his knuckles burning from contact with an unforgiving body. He’s being bested and he’s furious, a little scared now. The shadows drink the man right up, shroud him completely until Sam is suddenly flat on his back, all the air knocked out of his lungs.

A voice fills his ears before he can even suck in a breath, and the entire world narrows down to a single person on top of him, to his brother. To Dean, who has his hand over Sam’s heart to keep him where he is, whose smile is too bright for the years between them, for the unspoken words that stretch like miles of thread between their bodies, each one like a pinprick on his skin.

“Easy, tiger,” like they’d been sparring all afternoon. “Easy, tiger,” like this is just what they do. Like they touched each other every single day for the last two years, like Sam hasn’t almost forgotten what Dean’s voice sounds like. Like his skin isn’t burning up every single place they’re touching, like his heart isn’t slamming at the back of his teeth, threatening to jump right out, to go right to Dean, right where it belongs.

Dean.

It’s just barely after three a.m. when Sam tosses his duffel into the back seat of the Impala, the sound of the door closing echoing through the quiet of his neighborhood. He glances back up at the
apartment, at the light on in his and Jess’ bedroom window. Her plants are visible even from here, happy, well-kept things that she tends to like they’re her children. They even have names. Pete and Townsend right up there, the two that live in the windowsill.

Dean’s already in the car, the engine off. He’s waiting with an amazing amount of patience, even though Sam’s hand has been poised on the door handle for more than a few seconds.

Sam remembers with a start that they’re almost out of milk, and he forgot to put it on the grocery list on the fridge door. He’ll have to call her in the morning to remind her.

He opens the door, the specific sound of the passenger door reminding him of Dean so vividly that a shiver drags up his spine. Except Dean’s in the driver’s seat now and Dad is years away from Sam. He wonders if Dad looks older. Wonders if Dad would think Sam looks older.

“You trancin’ out there? C’mon, let’s get on the road.” Dean’s waited long enough, and even Sam knows it, so he doesn’t snark back. Just sinks down into the passenger seat, long legs more wedged than he remembered, the old bench seat giving beneath him, the vinyl cold even through his layers.

The smell of the car hits him like a punch. The stale, vintage air: dust and hamburger wrappers and sweat and the echoing scent of beer. Dean, laced all through it. That smell he’d forced himself to forget, that he’d forgotten finally. That he’d replaced with the white flowers and honey of Jess.

And here he is.

He pulls the car door closed, jaw tensed. Stares straight ahead.

Dean’s looking at him and he knows it. Probably frowning at him, confused by his quiet, by how weird he’s being. Like he’s forgotten what a freak Sam is, forgotten how annoying he is to be around.

“You ready?” Dean almost sounds caring, like he’d listen if Sam said no, not yet. Like he wants to hear what’s going on in Sam’s head. Like Sam has ever really let anyone in there, even Dean.

He shifts in the seat, not blinking as he nods, a single jerk of the head. He toys with the black bracelet around his wrist, thumb stroking over skin, avoiding the scar. He hasn’t needed to touch it for a long time, and he’s not gonna start now.

Dean starts the car finally, the engine growling to life all around them, straight down into Sam’s bones. He closes his eyes and lets it thrum through him, all that familiar rumble and purr and power, that sound that’s more comforting than any song. He feels Dean’s eyes again, but they’re gone as fast as they’d come.

Dean throws her into drive and eases down the empty street, the black and orange of Halloween littering the sidewalks on either side. It’s a clear night, stars bright even in the city, the moon a tiny, curved slip of bone against the black void. Almost a new moon. Will be when he gets back home.

The silence builds up around them until it’s almost loud, until it’s awake and unavoidable. Dean weaves his way through these streets like he knows them, like he’s been here almost as long as Sam has. It unnerves Sam, makes him dig his nails into his skin and scratch until it hurts.

“You, uh. You can sleep if you want. I didn’t really mean to. To wake you guys.” Dean sounds so awkward, so stiff, like he’s talking to a fucking stranger. Sam shifts again in the seat, pushes up tighter against the door, letting his head rest against the cold glass, eyes going unfocused as Dean takes the ramp for I-5 South.
Sam doesn’t respond, his throat fluttering around all the things he could say. The quiet makes Dean clear his throat, makes him squirm and run his hand over the steering wheel, thumb stroking over the smooth curve. There’s a frown on his face, and Sam doesn’t have to look at him to know it.

It’s like they’ve never spoken before, like this is a social experiment or something. It’s like they don’t know each other’s every single breath and nuance, like they didn’t grown up tight around each other like twins in a womb. Like all those years are erased, every touch and glance and word. Like they’ve been replaced with this: this unease between them, this lack of anything between them.

This silence.

Sam pulls his sleeves down over his hands and forces his eyes closed, doesn’t want to be awake anymore. Wants to go back to sleep, wants to pretend for a little bit longer that Dean hasn’t just destroyed the tentative playhouse of a life Sam’s been trying to build, like he hadn’t just dug his perfect hands in and ripped out all of Sam’s scabs and reopened all that pain, all the ache and ruin between them just by coming back. Just by letting himself into Sam’s window. Just by inviting himself back into Sam’s life.

He’s tried so hard to forget Dean. Tried to save himself in the only way he knows how. And he’s back, just like he never left. And he feels like he’s drowning.

He keeps it all contained, keeps it all down deep in his chest, doesn’t let the rattle of his heart affect his breathing the way it wants to, doesn’t pull and pluck at the moon of the scar on his arm.

He pretends to sleep until dawn, trying to block out everything around him when all he really hears is Dean’s every single breath, every slide of tongue over his dry mouth, every quietly sung word, like Dean’s trying to stay awake, like he’s offering Sam a lullaby.

He spends every mile until dawn reminding himself that this is what’s temporary, not Stanford. Not Jess. This is the weirdness in his life now, this is the anomaly. Dean isn’t his life anymore. They’ll find Dad and he’ll be back home and his life will unpause, and Dean will turn back into that burrowing ache in the center of his chest in the middle of the night.

That’s the way it is. The way it has to be. Sam can’t really handle it any other way.

The next night finds Sam exhausted as he wanders through a gas station somewhere in the Yucca Valley outside of Jericho, waiting for Dean to come out of the bathroom. He hasn’t eaten since lunch the day before, but nothing much is appealing to him. Butterfingers, pork rinds, cereal bars, trail mix, soda, and beer. He wrinkles his nose and seeks out a bottle of apple juice and a water, turning around just in time to see Dean come out of the bathroom, still coated in head to toe in mud but he’s wiped his face off a bit, no more mud clinging to his eyelashes. Sam can’t help but smile though he pulls it into a smirk just in time for Dean’s eyes to find him.

“I hate the bathrooms in these places. You can practically smell the STDs.” Dean shuffles over to Sam, water drops sliding down his neck, making tracks through the mud dried on Dean’s skin and disappearing under his ruined shirt. Dean keeps his eyes down and Sam keeps his on Dean and they both know it, both can feel it, like riding a wave.

“I got juice,” Sam says suddenly, lamely, holding up the bottle along with his water. Dean frowns,
looking almost confused before he blinks out of whatever world he’d been in before, the one that Sam had been in, too, the one that they used to share with each other and only with each other. They take a step back at the exact same time, eyes averting.

“Yeah. They got some apples up front, I think. Go ahead’n put your stuff up there and I’ll get it.” Dean turns his back then, fixated on a display of peanuts and sunflower seeds. Sam can see the tips of his ears and how pink they are all of a sudden, such a vulnerable flush of color that it makes his chest ache.

“I’ve got mine. I’ll be in the car.” Sam heads to the front of the store then where the cashier is perched, reading through a gossip magazine and picking her nail polish off. He drops his drinks down and grabs a couple of apples in the basket near the register, fishing his wallet out as she rings him up. He doesn’t glance back at Dean though he wants to, feels the weight of his silence behind him.

“Six seventy-six.” The cashier watches him with the flat, level stare of a woman who’s seen it all and doesn’t fall for a sweet smile. He digs a ten out of his wallet and busies himself with the inventory of lighters to his right. The woman takes his money and keeps staring at him, waiting for him to meet her eyes. When he does, she frowns.

“Better tell your boyfriend he’s getting mud ever’where. And who do you think’s gotta clean it up?” Sam opens his mouth but no words come rushing up to be helpful, to correct her, to apologize. The only thing running through his mind is that she saw them back there, saw them standing close, saw Sam’s eyes on Dean, and had drawn her own conclusions. His cheeks heat up.

“Sorry,” he finally manages, his hand coming out, wide palm on display, eyes pleading with her to please give him his change, to please let him get out of here before Dean comes up. He doesn’t want to hear her repeat that in front of Dean.

She gives him one last, good glare and dumps the change into his hand and he lets out the breath he didn’t know he’d been holding. He takes the money and his bag and leaves without looking back, not glancing back to have an idea of where Dean is, if he looks as alone as Sam has made him.

Sam rinses an apple off with a splash of water out the window of the car before taking a bite out of it. Dean leaves the gas station finally, silhouetted by the artificial light before he steps out into the dark, towards Sam in the Impala. Sam looks away, looks down at his fingers slick with juice that he licks off. A car pulls up beside them and Sam can hear a couple of guys get out, laughing and teasing each other and using the word “fag” and he can’t help but freeze up.

The guys stop right in front of Dean, both blatantly staring at him and his mud-caked self. Sam can only see the guys’ backs but Dean’s face is drawn into a scowl, probably fresh from an argument with Ms. Sunshine behind the register.

“What? You ain’t never forgotten to take off your mud mask before you leave the house?” Dean steps toward the guys, his shoulders back, every inch of him alpha and challenging, eyebrows raised like he’s daring them to say something.

Sam pulls his lips into his mouth, ducking his head to hide a smile as the guys clearly submit, their own heads dropping as they step past Dean, not even looking at each other on their way inside.

Dean rolls his eyes to himself and walks around to the driver’s side of the car, sinking into the towel-
covered seat. He lets out a wet snort, obviously directed at the guys.

“Classy bastards, huh?” He yanks the door closed after him and roots around in his plastic bag, making lots of racket as he does and Sam just has to take a deep breath and let it out slowly, staring down hard at the apple in his hand, the flesh already starting to brown. He doesn’t respond.

“Got you a sandwich. They had ‘em in a case near the register we didn’t see before.” Dean sets the wrapped up sandwich on Sam’s thigh, the label facing up, reading ‘Turk Club - Exp. 11/2/05.’

“Not hungry.” Sam scoops up the sandwich and passes it back over to Dean, not looking as he drops it back in the bag. “Thanks anyway.”

He watches the two guys in the gas station arguing over beef jerky in bags and laughing. He wonders if they would have tried to pick on him in high school. Wonders if he could take them both right now, just because.

“You doin’ that thing again?”

Sam snaps his attention back over to Dean who’s sitting just like he was before, who is watching him in the mostly-dark of the car. Sam’s heart rate picks up for no reason, nerves itching all under his skin. He doesn’t meet Dean’s eyes, just raises his eyebrows in his general direction.

“Uh. What are you talking about?”

“That not eating thing. I didn’t think you’d done that in years.” Dean’s voice is careful again, like Sam’s made of spun sugar or something. It makes Sam’s blood pressure kick up, makes him grit his teeth and look away with a sharp turn of his head. He throws the rest of his apple out the window.

“I’m not not eating. I’m just not fucking hungry. Not that it’s any of your business.” He sucks in a quick breath and sinks down deeper into the seat, hands on his thighs so he doesn’t cross his arms over his chest like a fucking teenager. He can see Dean’s eyebrows go up out of the corner of his eyes, can imagine every bit of his reaction.

“Christ, Sammy, this isn’t an interrogation. I was just asking a question. Unclench.” Dean huffs, an annoyed sound and Sam knows where this is going, where it always goes when they’re both being like this. Dean digs around in his bag again, the sound even louder than it was before, probably on purpose.

“It’s not like you’d know anyway. You haven’t even been around me since I was a teenager anyway. I’m a little different than the last time you saw me, Dean.” He opens his water and gulps some down before recapping it. His leg is jumping in a fit of angry energy, everything from the set of his shoulders to the way he’s staring dead ahead saying that he’s just spoiling for a fight. Anyway, it’s easier than silence.

“It’s not like you’d know anyway. You haven’t even been around me since I was a teenager anyway. I’m a little different than the last time you saw me, Dean.” He opens his water and gulps some down before recapping it. His leg is jumping in a fit of angry energy, everything from the set of his shoulders to the way he’s staring dead ahead saying that he’s just spoiling for a fight. Anyway, it’s easier than silence.

“It’s just been a couple of years, dude. You’re not some big fucking mystery, Sam. I know you like to think you are, but.” Dean rips open a bag of chips and shoves a few in his mouth, slouching down into the seat himself. They’re not going anywhere and they’re saying this shit now. They’re doing this here, apparently.

“You know what, Dean? I think I’m tired. I’m just gonna go to sleep.” Sam jumps up then, throwing the door open and climbing out of the car only to find himself face-to-face with one of the guys trying to get back in their car. Sam steps up onto the sidewalk and waits for the guy to pass, both him and his friend getting into the car in silence, almost like they can feel the fight in the air, idiots or not.
They pull out and Sam finishes up his decision to take the high road by climbing into the backseat and jerking the door shut. He stretches out over the seat, head pillowed on his duffel. Dean keeps eating his chips and sipping on what smells like beer, the air between them swirling with resentment.

“You call your girlfriend?”

Sam looks up and over and stares at the back of Dean’s stupid head. He wants to smack him.

“Jessica. Her name is Jessica.”

“Okay, fine. Jessica. Did you call Jessica?” Several gulps follow and then the sound of an empty can getting thrown into a plastic bag. The snick-pop of a new beer being opened.

“I’ll call her in the morning.” It’s all he’s offering Dean and it’s more than he deserves. He folds his arms over his chest and closes his eyes. Maybe he can fall asleep even if Dean is talking. Just snore through his questions.

“Bet she’s wild in bed. Is she?” Movement and Dean’s turning a little to look back and down at him. Sam squeezes his eyes shut even tighter, can’t look up at him or he really will punch him. He purses his lips and refuses to answer, even if it’s just going to be something mean back. Ignoring Dean hurts him more.

Dean surprises him by not saying anything else, by not tossing out increasingly vulgar questions until he gets a reaction out of Sam. He finishes eating whatever it is he got, guzzles down his second beer and even burps quietly. He shoves all his trash into that loud-ass bag and lets out a sigh.

“You wanna get a room tonight or what? I don’t have a whole lot left on this card, and if we wait ’til morning we won’t have to pay for two nights.”

Sam stays quiet, slowing his breathing down so Dean’ll think he really did just fall asleep. Dean growls after a few seconds, a low, deeply discontent sound followed by a hand rubbing hard over a scruffy face.


More movement, the sound of boots being kicked off and finally stillness punctuated by Dean letting out a long, heavy sigh.

They stay there in the parking lot of the gas station that night, Sam in the back seat and Dean in the front. The windows are cracked but it’s still warm inside the car. Sam spends most of the night staring at the ceiling of the Impala, listening to the drift and rumble of Dean’s snores, pretending he doesn’t want things the way they used to be. That it’s not his fault everything’s different.

November 2, 2005

The Woman in White is just a story once again, and Sam had forgotten how good it feels. The deep contentment of keeping people safe, of leaving a place and knowing that you played a big part in protecting them. It’s so simple and so straight-forward, so different than laws and debates and loopholes of the American justice system.
The air blowing in through the open window is cool, an icy lick all over his tired body, and he has to hold the map down firm in his lap to keep it from blowing out. He’d found Blackwater Ridge, had finally had the conversation with Dean that he’s been waiting for all weekend.

He’d told him no, in more than that many words. And Dean had told him he’d take him home, and that was that. Lights off between them again, Dean’s eyes straight ahead in the darkness, sadness leaking from him in tired waves. The quiet language of them, the one they’d started creating back when Dean used to sleep in Sam’s crib, the one that Sam is still fluent in, no matter how many years they’re apart, is painfully loud now.

Sorrow, that’s what Sam’s getting from Dean. Sorrow. He wonders what would happen if he told his eleven-year-old self about this moment, about the pain between them, the excruciating knowledge that they’re about to separate again, maybe this time for good. What if he told his younger self that it’s all his fault. That he’s the one making that decision. Young Sam would never understand, could not fathom being away from Dean, even for a few hours.

And he can’t explain it, even now, even to himself. He can only chalk it up to survival, that he has to do this or he wouldn’t be alive. The pull to Dean is irresistible and undeniable and just as strong as ever, and Sam knows he can’t open himself up to it again. Because nothing will come from it, nothing ever comes from it. Because Dean just isn’t as fucked-up as he is, and Sam can’t bring himself to wish that he was.

Dean reaches up to turn the radio up and he settles in to drive, eyes heavy and beautiful with exhaustion. Sam just wraps his arms around himself, right thumbnail finding the barely raised scar on his wrist and digging in hard. They don’t speak all the way back up to Palo Alto.

They don’t even say goodbye. They never do. He feels caught in Dean’s eyes, held there inside the eternity of a second, and it’s almost enough to pull him back in, almost enough to make him say fuck it, to climb back in the car.

But he doesn’t. He steps back, watches Dean drive away, listens to the sound of the Impala pulling away without him which has always twisted at his gut, made him feel like he’s going to throw up. Some things just don’t change.

He sighs to himself, hefts his bag up onto his shoulder, and digs his keys out of his pocket. The night air is still here, cooler than Southern California had been. But at least he’s home.

The apartment is completely dark when he walks in.

“...Jess? You home?”

His voice echoes through the entire downstairs, and he gets no reply. He closes the door absently behind him, eyes already trained on the little plate on the kitchen table next to his National Geographic magazine. The cookies are fresh, the smell strong in the air, and the note lifts the very last of the shadows from his smile.

*Missed you! Love you!*

He’s suddenly starving after not eating the entire weekend. His stomach rumbles grumpily and his smile softens as he reaches under the note to grab one of the cookies. Still warm, perfectly baked, and exactly what he needed to see.

He loves her. Maybe not with all of his heart, and maybe she’s miles and miles too good for him, but she loves him right back. It’s never what he expected to find, she’s never what he expected to have,
but it’s enough. And they work.

The cookie crumbles and melts in his mouth, and he lifts his eyes to the stairs. He’s suddenly not tired anymore and he can’t wait to see Jess.

Bile rises up in the back of Dean’s throat when he gets to the end of Sam’s street. There’s a panic that’s been building in him ever since they crossed into Santa Clara County, and it’s so strong now that he can’t even focus to drive.

He stares out at the empty street, at the fog hovering under the streetlights. The roads are slick, raindrops beaded all over the windshield, and the air from the broken window has a bite to it. It’s that feeling, the one that’s been gnawing at him for days, the one that got him here from New Orleans so fast. The one that made him feel like he was being chased. The one that feels like everything is wrong but hiding, in the shadows. Waiting to pounce.

And he’s just left Sam again. Drove away, left him standing alone on the sidewalk.

_We’re all in danger._

He realizes then that he’s been holding his breath for nearly a full minute, that he’s gripping the steering wheel so hard his hands are shaking. He exhales quick just so he can breathe in again, his body sagging back against the seat.

“Why don’t you act like more of a drama queen, Winchester. I dare ya,” he mutters to himself, rubbing the bridge of his nose between his thumb and forefinger. “Jesus.”

He hits the gas again and eases down the street, forcing himself to loosen his deathgrip on the wheel. It’s kind of fucking ridiculous, really. They’d just solved the case Dad had been on, they’d found the coordinates for the next case Dad wanted them, well, _him_ on. There’s no reason for this, no reason to be so dramatic. To be acting like such a chicken shit when the only thing that’s wrong is that his heart is breaking the further he gets away from Sam.

“Sky ain’t fallin’,” he says softly, a trace of a sad smile tugging on one side of his mouth. He’s tired all of a sudden, the whirlwind of the weekend suddenly crashing down on him. He wants to get at least as far as Reno before he stops for the night, but he doesn’t even know if he can make it out of the city now. He needs sleep.

He glances at his watch, the hairs on the back of his neck standing up when he sees that it’s stopped, stuck on 2:50, the second hand unmoving. He spares a quick glance in the rearview to make sure he’s still alone on the road before he makes a U-turn right there, foot pushing down hard on the gas. He’s two blocks away. And clocks don’t stop on their own. Not for them.

He remembers Dad telling him. Remembers reading it in the journal. About how the cops said all the clocks in the house were stopped on the same time the night of the fire. The night Mom died. He’s heard it a hundred times in his life.

Shouldn’t have left him alone. Shouldn’t have fucking left him.

“Goddamnit,” Dean whispers to himself, his heartbeat pounding in his ears, the only thing he can hear. He runs a stop sign and eases over to the side of the road to throw the car into park.

“Goddamnit.”

He shoves his keys into his pocket and runs across the street, the adrenaline racing through his entire
body, every single one of his senses focused on one thing and one thing only. Which is how he hears Sam’s voice in the window above just as he reaches the front door.

“No! Jess!”

Dean’s blood runs cold, all the color draining from his face.

“Sammy. Sammy!”

He charges up the steps and lifts his leg, throwing all his strength into it as he kicks the doorknob with the flat of his foot. The door gives easily, clattering open just as the thick scent of smoke hits his nose, the smell of cooking flesh, of scorched hair.

“Sam!” He heads right for the stairs, racing up them two at a time and he can see their bedroom the second he hits the top step, can see the smoke pouring out through the open door, the flicker of bright orange, can hear Sam’s voice.

Sam is on the bed when Dean gets to the doorway, he’s staring up at the ceiling like he’s terrified, like the monster is up there, like he can’t seem to leave because of whatever he’s seeing.

Dean’s heard Dad’s story. Heard it since he was little, heard every small detail so many times that he feels like he was there, really there. Saw-his-mom-burn kind of there. He’d always thought he understood, always thought everything he’d seen in his life had given him enough personal experience to really, truly know what it had been like for his Dad, walking into that room, seeing her pinned to the ceiling like that, her body dissolving in fire.

Jess had been so beautiful. She’d had bright, intelligent eyes that hadn’t fallen for Dean’s charm, she’d had a kind of strength that seemed to draw Sam right in, made him trust her. Made him love her.

Now he’ll never forget what it looks like when the white and green of her eyes seem to be melting in flames, never forget what it’s like to see one of those angel blonde curls fall from where she’s held to the ceiling by evil, the yellow strands of it burning where it hits the bed, catches the sheets on fire.

It’s a split second but it’s there in his mind, the reality of it. It’s really happening right in front of him, and inside of that second he feels like a little boy again, like that’s his mom up there, like his whole life looped back around onto itself and he’s never going to escape it, the nightmare of this.

But then he hears Sam again.

Sam.

“Sam!” He races toward his brother who doesn’t seem like he wants to move, wants to leave. “Sam! C’mon, we gotta go!”

He grabs him up by his jacket and Sam fights him, just like Dean knew he would. He keeps screaming her name, screaming it like she can hear him, like she’s still really alive up there. And what if she is? What if she’s living through this, can feel it?

Sam almost gets away from him so Dean tightens his grip on him and yanks him out of the room, shoving him out into the hallway even as he grabs onto the doorframe, tries to get away from Dean, to get back in there to her.

“Sammy, she’s gone. Man, she’s gone. It’s—”
A rush of flames swoops down just then, heading straight toward them. Dean reacts then, fight or flight, fists Sam’s jacket and pulls him down the stairs, getting them both out of the house or losing his arm in the process because he ain’t letting go, not now, not ever.

They burst out of the front of the apartment and they both suck in huge gasps of clean air before they start coughing. Sam collapses down onto the grass, his body suddenly wracked with sobs, the sounds caught between heaving coughs.

“Sammy.” Dean’s in tears himself, his hands shaking so hard he can’t get a better grip on Sam’s sleeve. “Sam, please. We have to get away. C’mon, just get to the sidewalk. Not here. C’mon.”

“Jess,” Sam whimpers, soft, panting hiccups finally breaking through and it’s honest to God heartbreaking, those pitiful sounds coming from his brother. From Sammy. “Jess.”

“Please,” Dean whispers, pleading with Sam, with Dad, with anything that will help. Just need to get Sam safe, need to get him away. Away. “Please, just--”

Chaos descends on them like it’s been waiting in the wings, like it’s seizing its chance. People come rushing out of doors and from down the street, sirens coming from all sides, shattering the quiet from only ten minutes before.

Dean covers Sam as much as he can, hides him from the eyes of every single person who has appeared, all these safe, unknowing people without targets on their backs. He looks up at the burning building, at the window to their bedroom that’s been shattered, that’s spilling out flame and smoke like rushing water.

Sam’s lifeless now, curled in on himself and sobbing. Dean grabs him under his arms and lifts him up, almost falling back himself to do so. He drags Sam away, just need to get him away, dragging him to the sidewalk, just far enough away that they can’t feel the burn of the heat anymore.

They sprawl there on the sidewalk as the firetrucks finally arrive, people shouting and crying, dogs barking, hoses being dragged out but it’s all obliterated by the roar of the fire, a sound like the eye of a tornado, like the deafening rush of water as you’re drowning.

Dean just watches, his arm around Sam’s waist, not letting go of him for any fucking thing in the world. Watches firefighters rush into the apartment, watches the fire grow and grow in that window up there, in Jess and Sam’s room. And Jess is the center of it, the source of all the flames, the sacrifice, right at the heart of it all.

And right now, there’s no one else. No one to take care of this, no one to deal with this, but Dean.

It’s nearly dawn by the time they find a motel and get a room. They don’t say a word as they turn on the lamps by the beds, as they take off their jackets. Dean closes the blinds and the curtains, ignoring the lightening sky for now. He turns around and there’s Sam, standing in the middle of the room, his hoodie still on, his face startlingly blank, his eyes far-off, gone.

“Sammy, uh,” Dean starts, walking up to him slow, one step at a time, like Sam’s a frightened animal. “Why don’t you go take a shower? We both smell like smoke and--”

“I don’t have anything,” Sam says back, his voice distant, like he’s recalling something, like he’s talking in his sleep, maybe. His eyes are bloodshot, rimmed in red and swollen. He looks shaken, his face deathly pale. “I don’t have anything anymore.”
“I’ve got some sweats and a t-shirt for you to change into. Don’t worry about that. We’ll worry about all that tomorrow. Just. Just go take a shower, okay? You’ll. You’ll feel.”

He pauses, stops himself from saying you’ll feel better because it’s a horrible thing to say. A fucking false, lying sentiment, in the face of what they’d seen tonight. Of what Sam has just gone through.

“Just,” Dean starts again, licking his lips, wanting to reach up and touch Sam, just to remind himself that Sam’s here and he’s alive and he’s not hurt. He’s okay. But he won’t. He won’t. “Just go ahead. I’ll leave the clothes on the sink for ya.”

Sam nods, a curt, single jerk of his head, not meeting Dean’s eyes as he turns away. He flicks on the bathroom light and pushes the door to but doesn’t close it, just like they’ve always done. Habit, probably.

Dean digs through his own clothes, grateful for having something to do, even if it’s just finding a damn clean t-shirt. He finds a grey one that’s not too dirty and his favorite pair of black sweatpants that he only wears when he’s officially off-duty. They’ll be laughably short on Sam, but they’ll work. He even finds a clean pair of socks and a pair of underwear, adding them to the top of the pile.

Steam is swirling around in the bathroom when Dean opens the door, and it reminds him suddenly and too much of the smoke. The smell of it’s everywhere, all over Dean’s clothes, all over Sam’s clothes there on the bathroom floor. Dean feels a sudden need to vomit.

He sets the clean clothes down on the edge of the sink and glances over at the closed shower curtain. He can see the top of Sam’s head, the near-black of his wet hair. Doesn’t hear or see any movement, doesn’t smell soap or shampoo.

“Sammy, you doin’ okay?” Waits a beat. “You need anything?”

Silence. The water rushes on from the showerhead, sound dampened a little by Sam’s body. Dean closes his eyes against the burn of tears that sneaks up on him, and he reaches out to steady himself on the sink.

“There’s some clothes for you on the sink. Just, uh. Just take as much time as you need.”

Dean waits, listens for something, anything. He sighs when he still gets nothing, reaching down to gather up Sam’s clothes, hugging them to his chest on his way out.

He pulls the door closed behind him, trying to give Sam at least the illusion of privacy. He strips down himself and shoves his and Sam’s clothes into an empty garbage bag, tying a knot on it and tossing it beside his bag. He just wants rid of that smell, that horrible, unmistakable smell of burning skin, cooking human flesh. But it’s in his nose, caught there, not leaving for days.

He changes into another pair of his makeshift pajamas and pulls down the covers on one of the beds, turning all the lamps off but one. He doesn’t want to turn on the TV, doesn’t want to go to bed before Sam comes out.

He knows he should call Dad, call Bobby, someone. But there’s nothing anybody can do tonight, nothing anybody can do to actually fix this. The only thing left to be done is to avenge it. And Dean is not taking that job away from Sam and giving it to anyone else, even Dad.

He pulls out the box of salt from his duffel, still new, unopened. He moves on instinct as he lines the door and window, not letting himself feel silly as he makes a circle around Sam’s bed, the pile of salt thick, two inches wide. Just in case. He scoops the cat’s eye shells out of the pocket of his jacket, the ones from Dad’s motel room and puts them in a little pile next to the phone on the nightstand,
between him and Sam.

Just in case.

He slides back on the mattress, pillow cradling his head. He stares at the ceiling, the blank, white ceiling. He can’t imagine what Sam saw, how he found her pinned up there. What that moment was like for him. He closes his eyes, refuses to cry. Can’t fall into that, not when Sam needs him.

The shower’s stopped, and there’s some movement on the other side of the bathroom door. Sam steps out, silhouetted for a brief second before he turns the light off, leaving him in shadow except for the lamp between the beds. He smells so good, clean, like soap, and the scent breaks through even just for a second.

Dean’s head is turned and he’s watching Sam, watching him make his way to the other bed, watching him pull down the covers. He looks like he’s working on autopilot, like he’s following a very specific list of instructions.

“Sam,” Dean starts, not sure what else he wants to say.

Sam doesn’t pause, doesn’t look over. Just slides under the covers, facing away from Dean, on his side. He pulls the blankets up around him, hiding all but the wet curls of his hair. He doesn’t sigh, doesn’t sniffle, doesn’t speak. Silence covers the room again.

Dean just watches him for a long moment in the low light, eyes catching on Sam’s foot sticking out from under the covers, covered up with Dean’s sock but his ankle’s exposed, bare, almost heartbreakingly vulnerable. He gets the inexplicable need to cover Sam up completely, to hide him just for a little while. He wants so badly to keep talking, to get Sam to talk to him. To go over there to him, to touch his strong, long back, to press right up behind him and wrap his arms around his little brother, like he’s done before. Like he’s done so many times before.

But this, this time, this night, is nothing like the rest of them were. And nothing Dean can say is going to fix this. Not this time.

He turns the lamp between them off and turns on his side toward Sam. Exhaustion settles over him, his muscles shaking from exertion, but he knows he won’t sleep. He’ll stay awake, keep sentinel as long as Sam needs to sleep. Because it’s the least he can do. It’s all he can do right now.

When Sam wakes up the next time, it’s in a quiet room. He opens his eyes, vision crossed for a split second before everything straightens out, focuses. He sees a yawned-open bathroom door where carpet meets ugly green tile, a towel tossed at the foot of the sink in there. And it’s not his, not theirs. Jess would get onto him for that towel. She’d--

Jess.

It doesn’t come back in a flood. Floods are gradual. It’s like a light turning off. First, there’s everything. And then nothing. Then there’s nothing.

She’s gone.

He falls from the bed in his rush to get to the bathroom, getting tangled up in the sheets and the vomit is already rising in his throat, filling his mouth. His knees hit the tile hard and he opens his mouth and it splashes out, followed by another rush of it, and it tastes like horror.
Puke splatters in the water inside the toilet, leaving him in desperate heaves until he has nothing more to give. There’s a coolness at the back of his neck when he comes back into himself, a warm, firm hand holding a damp washcloth to his nape. Dean’s voice soothing, low and calm, like when Sam was little and would get a stomach bug and spend the night hugged around the toilet bowl and too miserable to even open his eyes.

“Hey, hey. ‘S okay, Sammy. Shh, ‘salright. Deep breaths.” Dean’s other hand is on his spine, stroking up and down, and Sam lets his eyes fall closed, forehead resting against the wonderful cold of the porcelain lid.

They stay like that for a couple of minutes, the sun shining bright from outside the tiny window in the bathroom, warming the tiny space around them. They’re still here, in Palo Alto. There’s things to be done. Someone needs to call Jess’s parents. Someone has to make funeral arrangements. Someone’s got to get the apartment cleaned out.

He lifts up, shrugging Dean off to struggle to his feet. Dean hovers behind him, hands lifted, his eyes worried, unsure. The scruff on his face tells Sam that Dean’s fucked up over this, too, that this really is as bad as it feels.

“I’ve gotta go.” He grabs the toothbrush on the sink--Dean’s, he’s sure--spreading a strip of toothpaste across it before shoving it into his mouth, scrubbing furiously. He stares at Dean’s reflection in the mirror and Dean, to his credit, doesn’t even make too much of a face at the abduction of his toothbrush.

“Listen, man. That friend of Jessica’s, ah. Daphne? The little one with the pixie cut? She said she’s a friend of the family’s, and she told us last night that she’d get ahold of ‘em. That’s already been taken care of. Now, unless you want to talk to the police more than you had to last night--”

“I’m going back there.” He rinses and spits into the sink and turns to look at Dean as he wipes his mouth off on the back of his hand, his eyes narrowed, set. Determined. Dean sighs, takes a breath to reply, and so Sam just shoulders past him to get back into the main room.

“Sammy, why you gotta do that to yourself? You know everything’s gonna be ruined. And who knows what shape the structure is in right now, so it’s probably dangerous to even try to go in, at this point.” Dean’s following him around, already dressed, shoes on, like he’d been expecting this. Like he knew Sam would do just this. And he probably did.

“Where are my clothes?” Sam looks around, eyes scanning the room, looking for his jeans, his hoodie. Dean sighs, scrubs a hand over his face, shoulders drooped in defeat.

“Had to go wash ‘em. They smelled horrible, man.” Dean walks over to his duffel and Sam pushes the sweatpants that he’s wearing off--Dean’s pants--stepping out of them as Dean rummages around and comes back with a surprisingly neat, folded pile of Sam’s clothes.

“You washed my clothes?”

Dean looks a little embarrassed, like there’s something inherently inferior about doing laundry, and it makes Sam almost smile, makes him almost feel human again.

“Whatever. They’re clean now. Just--”

Sam takes them from him and Dean sighs, just watching him, tired, worried eyes scanning Sam’s half-dressed body like he can diagnose him, just like Dean’s always done. And Sam very secretly finds a comfort in that.
He yanks his jeans up and settles them on his hips, not bothering to change out of Dean’s shirt. He shrugs into his hoodie and pulls on his socks, marching over to sit on the edge of the bed to put his shoes on.

“I’m coming with you,” Dean says finally, arms crossing over his chest, like that’s his ultimatum. Sam ties his shoes up and stands again, zipping his hoodie up over his chest and he finally meets Dean’s eyes, raising his eyebrows when Dean just stands there.

“Well? Alright. Let’s go.”

The apartment building looks worse than Sam imagined.

The fire destroyed the entirety of their bedroom, leaving it a gaping maw exposed to the elements, scorched like it had been struck by lightning, like it had been burned in the oven. There’s police tape everywhere, and there are people out in the cool of the late afternoon, walking dogs and holding hands and coming and going from this or that, all of them falling quiet when they near the building itself, like it’s in bad taste to talk near it, like they’re paying their respects. Or they’re afraid.

Sam will never say it, but he’s glad Dean’s here. He’s glad he doesn’t have to sneak in by himself, have to step into his home and see the downstairs just fine, just the way it always looks, untouched. He hovers in the doorway, too afraid to go in, to see anything else. Dean was right. He shouldn’t have come.

“Sammy, you don’t have to do this,” Dean reminds him, offering the out right now, before it gets any harder. “I can go in and see if there’s any clothes up there that you can take, and you can see if there’s anything down--”

“I’ll be back. This won’t take long. Just keep an eye out in case the cops come back.” His voice is even now, completely void of emotion, and he officially shuts down when he glances back into the house and sees the table, their kitchen table, the cookies and the note still there, like they’re new. Like they’re fresh, and Jess is still here. Waiting for him.

He grits his teeth so hard his jaw pops. But he looks away, doesn’t spare it a single other glance. Doesn’t look at the saucepan on the drying rack, doesn’t look at Jess’ favorite Celestial Seasonings tea box next to the sink. Ignores Dean who is still watching him, ignores his eyes on him and all the silent questions. Ignores it all and makes his way upstairs.

The plants in the window are burned up, nothing left but melted plastic pots and spills of scorched earth. Jess’ paintings stacked in the corner are gone, consumed, nothing but chunks of charred wooden frames. The dresser is singed and half-burnt up, all the clothes inside ruined when he tries the drawers.

The smell isn’t overwhelming, not with most of the roof gone, fresh air sweeping through. He takes a deep breath, counts to three, turns to face the rest of the room.

He can see where she fell from the ceiling, see the distinctive marks left by a burning body on the carpet, on the ruined bed, all of it looking like the outside of a burnt marshmallow.

There’s nothing of her left here, nothing but the far-off smell of cooking skin and the horrific memory of the silence in her last gaze on him, the plea in her eyes for help, the stunned pain that wouldn’t even let her open her mouth to ask for help.

It’s just like the dreams. She never asked for help in the dreams either.
The inside of the closet is mostly destroyed, any remaining fabric from clothes in a burned pile on the floor. Everything he owned, all the things he’d gathered around himself in the last couple of years to make a life: gone.

There’s nothing to save.

He meets Dean on the last step, and Dean at least has the decency to look guilty for the fact that he was about to come and check on Sam.

Sam just walks right past him, almost to the front door when Dean clears his throat.

“I, uh. I found a few things down here. A basket of laundry that I pulled all your stuff out of. A couple of pictures from the fridge and the living room that I thought. Thought maybe you’d.” Dean looks lost, an apology all but spilling from his features when Sam turns around to look at him.

Sam nods, just once, jaw clenching so hard he thinks his teeth are going to crack.

“Let’s go, then.”

“There’s some books, too, Sammy. A bunch of books that I thought were probably yours. They were over on that--”

“C’mon, Dean.” Sam opens the front door and glances around, making sure no one is walking by before he slips outside again, making his way to the Impala without looking back.

He’s already in the car, door closed, before Dean leaves the apartment. Sam watches him look around, eyes hooded, untrusting as he crosses the street. He opens the door to the back seat and tosses the bag in as careful as Dean does anything before he joins Sam in the front seat.

Sam stares out at the street, his hands shaking in his lap. Dean just sits there beside him, almost contemplative in his quiet. Sam can’t open his mouth to ask Dean if they can leave, can’t start talking because he’s afraid of what else he’ll say. The sun’s just starting to set, a heady splash of colors working their way up into the blue of late evening. Everything around them feels silent, watchful.

“We’ll come back tomorrow,” Dean finally says, his voice soft. “We’ll see if there’s any EMF, check around town to see if anything out of the ordinary has been happening. Look through Dad’s journal.”

Sam doesn’t blink, doesn’t unclench his hands from their grip on his thighs. He just nods, only just now aware that he’s crying, that he’s probably been crying since he went upstairs. He ignores the tears, doesn’t try to wipe them away. Dean knows. Dean’s already seen.

“You hungry?”

The directness, the simplicity of the question has Sam snapping out of wherever he’s been, out of the pain in Jess’ eyes last night, out of the nightmare of realizing he’ll never remember what she smelled like before the fire, won’t remember the white flowers and honey of her, only remember the smell of her burning.

He shakes his head in reply, his stomach clenching up tight at even the thought of eating. He hears Dean sigh beside him, watches him shift in his seat.

“I saw some market on the way over. Looks like they have twenty-dollar fruit cups and crap like that. Your kind of place.”
“The Fresh Market,” Sam offers, fingertips dragging over his own wrist, stroking the scar instead of hurting it, pinching it like he normally would. Dean watches him, watches it all. And Sam lets him.

“Yeah. Yeah, that sounds right. Anyway, thought I’d go in, get you a few things. And then go get me some actual food later. How’s that sound?”

It feels like a moment, in the past, when Dean would have touched him. The tone of his voice, the low kindness of it. It should be followed by Dean’s fingers lighting on his arm, the heavy weight of his strength closing in as he holds onto Sam’s arm, reminding him that he’s here, that he’s this close, if Sam wants him.

But Dean doesn’t touch him, doesn’t reach for him, and it’s just as well. It’s what Sam deserves. Doesn’t deserve comfort, deserve sympathy. This is because of him, this is on him. And even Dean knows that. Probably doesn’t want to touch Sam because he knows that.

“Sure,” he manages to choke out, because it’s what Dean wants him to say. It’s what he needs to say to make this stop, to get Dean’s eyes off of him, to be able to leave this place. He feels the gaze for just a second longer, to the point where Sam feels like he’s going to scream, where he almost lets it all go, lets it all out, but Dean looks away at the very last blink. Starts the car up and eases back out onto the road.

Sam closes his eyes, doesn’t watch the street disappear in the sideview mirror.

Dean drops Sam off at the motel with the garbage bag and a paper bag near-bursting with things Dean picked out for him at that market. Said he’s off to find a burger made of cows and not black beans and that he’ll be back when he does.

The motel room’s been cleaned while they were gone. The beds are made, the piles of clothes pushed into the corner with Dean’s duffel. Sam drops his haul on the wobbly table and opens up the paper bag.

There’s a container of fresh fruit: kiwi and cantaloupe and strawberries and blueberries and mango, complete with a tiny wooden fork. There’s some pita chips and fresh hummus, a small container of olives with sun-dried tomatoes, and a giant bottle of water.

Sam almost smiles.

He eats out of duty more than hunger, eats because Dean went out of his way, because eating is easier than answering questions about why he didn’t. He surprises himself by wolfing down everything but a spoonful of hummus and a few blueberries, even drains the entire water bottle.

He stuffs it all in the trash, his lips slick with fruit juice, stomach twisted and full. The garbage bag is next to his arm, like it’s waiting patiently. He pulls it over and spreads his hands across the top, feeling the lumps of its contents, the whole of the life he’d made with Jess contained in this bag.

He opens it up.

A couple of t-shirts, a pair of jeans, some socks and underwear. Two framed pictures: one Jess’ senior picture from high school, one the two of them when they’d gone to Gray Whale Cove this July, both of them tanned and relaxed and soft-eyed with happiness. One Polaroid from the fridge of them Halloween night just a couple of days ago, Jess in her nurse costume and Sam in his jacket and shy smile from under his bangs.
Four days ago. That was four days ago.

He swallows back the bile that rushes up his throat. Saliva floods his mouth and he closes his eyes, takes a few deep breaths. The bag’s not empty yet.

There are three books in there, even after Sam had said no, even after he’d left.

*House of Leaves* by Danielewski, dog-earred and full of tiny scraps of paper and underlined passages and notes written in the margins. His very favorite book. Dean hadn’t known that, not in so many words. Sam clutches it in his hands, stares at the cover a few more seconds before he puts it aside.

*Catcher in the Rye*, which he’d owned before he left Dad and Dean. The cover’s faded, pages soft. That’s the one Dean had known to be his favorite book. Back when Dean knew him.

The third book is heftier than the other two, and he has to put some effort into pulling it from the bag. *The Lord of the Rings*.

It’s their copy, the one that was Dean’s first and that became theirs. The one with the now-missing cover, lost somewhere in Wyoming the summer before Sam’s senior year, finally detached after being taped on half a dozen times. And there are their names: Dean Winchester in the confident scrawl of a newly teenage boy and Sam’s name underneath in careful, mimicking letters, his W matching Dean’s perfectly.

He swallows, his throat so tight that it hurts. He rubs his thumb across the exposed title page, across Dean’s name first and then his own. Thank God Dean grabbed it. That he hadn’t listened to Sam and just left. Thank God.

He pushes it all back into the bag and stands up, toeing off his shoes as he makes his way over to his temporary bed.

All his beds are back to being temporary. Back to not being his.

He pushes the covers back and slips under them, hoodie still on, jeans still on. He pulls the blankets up until they’re covering his face, stifling his breathing and darkening the world around him.

He doesn’t cry.

Dean drives around for a bit, gives Sam some probably much-needed time alone. Doesn’t really want to be there when he opens the bag, doesn’t want to see his reaction to any of its contents. It’s selfish and Dean knows it, knows he’s a cowardly asshole who can’t seem to handle anyone else’s emotions, let alone his own. But it’s *Sam*. This is *Sam*.

Dean has him back. Sam is with him again, like magic. Like he’s a wish granted. And Dean can barely stand to meet his eyes, can barely look at him, because it hurts. Replaying over and over again the look on Sam’s face when he’d dragged him from that room, the way he’d shut down back at the motel, the way he’s looked so haunted since. The way he’s looked so lost.

He’s never seen that look on Sam, not ever. And he can’t handle it. Maybe part because seeing Sam in this kind of pain is tearing him up in ways he didn’t know he could be torn. But mostly? Mostly
because it fucking hurts to see Sam care so much about someone Dean didn’t know.

Or someone who isn’t family.

Someone who isn’t him.

There. So, yeah.

He’s a fucking selfish asshole.

He looks up at the motel he’s parked in front of, squints to try and see into the small spaces of the window the curtain doesn’t cover, see if maybe Sam’s awake or asleep or crying or gone or what. Can’t see him, of course.

“Jesus,” Dean whispers, hand sliding over his mouth and up into the greasy tufts of his hair, yanking on them a little for good measure. Fine. Can’t hide forever.

He climbs out of the car, half-empty cup of bourbon-spiked Coke clasped in one hand. He unlocks the door quietly and steps into the darkened room, eyes adjusting as he puts his keys down and peels his jacket off.

Sam’s in bed.

He’s a long lump under a faded grey and white floral blanket, not even the top of his head showing.

Dean stands where he is in front of the closed and locked door, hand tightening on his cup, eyes on his brother.

When Sam was younger, Dean knew Sam worshiped him. Knew he didn’t have to do much to make Sam happy. Knew he just had to take the kid on an errand with him, just had to give him the remote for a few hours or pull him under his arm and mess up his hair a little and Sam would smile for what seemed like days. Effortless. It’s always been effortless, because Sam’s eyes were always on him, waiting for Dean to do something.

And there’s no better feeling in the world than being the one who makes Sam smile like that. Dean did it natural as breathing.

Now Dean hasn’t been the one to make Sam smile like that for years. Too many years, if he’s being honest with himself. Dean’s the consolation prize in Sam’s life. Not what he wanted, not what he’d planned around, but what’s left in the end. He’s the participation trophy.

He swallows, throat suddenly thick with emotion, with a choking amount of self-loathing. Because he knows, he’s always known, that Sam deserves better than anything Dean can give him.

And now here they are.

“Are you drawing me or something?”

Dean startles for that, for the sudden voice in the enclosing darkness, for the jolt of awareness now that he knows that Sam’s awake. Sam’s aware of him right back.

“No, uh. Sorry, just.” Smooth, Winchester.

He tosses his jacket on the chair and leans down to pluck his shoestrings loose with one hand, taking a long, bitter drink of Coke-laced bourbon while he does.
Sam stays quiet as he does this, as he shoves the boots off, lets his socked feet touch the scratchy carpet. Dean finishes his Coke with a loud suck, puts the cup down, ice rattling.

Silence seeps back in, waiting. Dean lifts his eyes, gaze lighting on Sam again.

It’s so much, suddenly. Too much.

He pads over to his own bed, sinks down onto it and leans forward, elbows on his knees, hands dangling between his legs. Doesn’t take his eyes off of Sam.

“Wanna talk?” Dean’s voice is soft, gritty with liquor and too much time alone, not speaking. The door of the room next to theirs opens, voices humming low in conversation. Dean’s shoulders draw in, hating even the hint of strangers nearby. Too close.

Sam doesn’t reply. Just shakes his head, only the rippling movement of the white flowers on the cheap fabric of the blanket heard. He doesn’t move again, doesn’t make a single sound.

The room is almost completely dark now, and Dean knows he should turn on the lamp, turn on the TV. Leave Sam alone. But he doesn’t. Has never known how to leave Sam alone. Has never done it well. And it’s more now. Worse. More urgent.

He stands up, hands sliding up his thighs as he does. He almost puts his hands in his pockets, a nervous tic, but he doesn’t. Just keeps his eyes focused on Sam, on his baby brother over there who is hurting.

His socked feet don’t make a sound as he closes the space between their beds. He stands just beside it for a few beats, doesn’t know what to do, now that he’s here. The bed’s narrow, too narrow to try and squeeze onto with Sam in the middle.

He sinks down to his knees beside Sam’s bed, the crack-pop of his bad knee interrupting the quiet they’ve created. He reaches out once he’s settled, hesitant fingers sliding across the blankets, questing, questing. Not stopping until they fumble over Sam’s shoulder.

Sam tenses the second Dean touches him before he seems to force himself to relax. Dean shifts closer, knees tucking underneath the bed to get as close as he can and he spreads his hand, palm wide and warm and gentle as it rubs over Sam’s back, across his still-bony shoulders and down his spine.

It’s circles at first, then figure eights. Fingers pressing in at times, near Sam’s shoulders, a half-hearted, stunted attempt at a massage. Sam stays perfectly still, quiet. Doesn’t move a muscle, but Dean can feel him softening, feel him easing deeper into the bed.

Dean’s fingers start to curl under, closing in a loose fist except for his forefinger. Then the figure eights turn into a more deliberate path.

He draws on Sam’s back for almost a full minute, tracing and retracing all the lines, making a complete picture, and Sam doesn’t guess. Just stays still under the gliding finger, his silence very much awake, listening.

“Jennifer Love-Hewitt?”

Dean can barely hear Sam’s muffled voice, can barely make out the words but his entire body relaxes when he does, relief flooding his muscles and his fucking bones and he can’t help but grin, feels safe to do so here in the dark when Sam’s not looking.
“What the hell made you think it was her?” He lets a laugh seep into his voice, leaning against the bed now as he lets both hands stroke across Sam’s back, light but warm and *there*. He feels the tiny vibration of Sam’s laughter under his fingertips.

“The hair?”

“Outta practice, Sammy-babe. Try again.”

He draws it again, his left hand resting on the small of Sam’s back, thumb rubbing slow and gentle at Sam’s spine. Sam stretches out under the over-and-over touches, sighs just a little, a warm little hum escaping even through the thick blankets.

“A… a troll doll?”

Dean laughs, sinks back on his heels and throws his head back and laughs.

“Perfect. Yeah, that was perfect. Very good, Sammy.”

He feels Sam shaking again with laughter as he rubs over his back with both hands, erasing the picture and resisting the urge to make Sam move over, to make room for him.

“It was the weird diamond in the middle of my back. Had to be a troll doll’s jewel thingie or Christina Aguilera’s belly button ring.”

Dean’s smile turns soft, fond. He slows his hands to a stop, holds in an annoyingly vulnerable sigh.

“Good job. Okay, my turn.” He makes a show of turning around, facing away from Sam and leaning forward, giving Sam his back. Sam, who obviously can’t see him.

“Hmm?”

“My turn. You draw, I guess, c’mon.” He closes his eyes, feeling a little exposed in just his t-shirt with his back to the person who has the starting threads to all of Dean’s emotions and stories and memories in the dark, but he does it anyway. Because it feels right. Because maybe, just maybe, he still knows how to make Sam feel okay, if only for a little while.

He waits, tries to be patient, to let Sam work through whatever he needs to. It takes almost a solid two minutes, but there’s a rustle behind him, a shift on the mattress and then there’s the warm ghost of a hand on his back. Sam’s entire hand, wide palm and long fingers, coming to rest between Dean’s shoulderblades.

Dean swallows, eyebrows knitting together, and just *absorbs*.

Because they’ve never really been touched by a lot of people, not really. Not like this. In the soft ways, in the safe ways in the dark, just to touch, just for comfort and connection. Touch for Dean has always been about necessity, about violence or reaction to it, to sex and doing what he has to do to scratch the itch.

Except for them, for Sam.

And he recalls now the very last time he felt like this. Those days after Christmas, when he’d visited Sam at Stanford, when they’d put mattresses together and clung like twins, touched just to feel. It’s been since then.

Until now.
He pulls his bottom lip into his mouth and holds on as Sam’s finger starts the graceful glide down Dean’s back, moving in painterly sweeps across his spine and ghosting both of his flanks and nearing the too-sensitive nape of his neck. Sam leaves warmth in his wake like golddust, leaves still-felt trails over Dean’s neglected, cotton-covered skin, and Dean doesn’t pay a damn bit of attention, doesn’t care what Sam’s drawing, doesn’t care that he’s supposed to be picturing something because Sam’s touching him, because this is like balm on an ache so deep it makes his bones feel tight. He barely breathes, doesn’t move. Just sucks at his bottom lip and drifts.

“Dean?”

“Mm?”

Sam exhales, an amused, sleepy laugh. Dean takes a deep breath at the sound of it, air expanding his lungs and leaving him in slow seconds.

“Any guesses?”

“Mm. Do it again.”

Another exhalation, this one even closer to a laugh. But he doesn’t tease, doesn’t say anything. Just takes up drawing on Dean’s back with his finger again, moving in sloping swirls and careful drags of downward pulls. Dean shivers this time when Sam nears the back of his neck again, and he hears Sam shift behind him, feels his breath closer now.

“Feel good?” Sammy’s voice is nearly a whisper, just so quiet, almost like this is sacred, like they’re performing a solemn rite. The universe is going on behind Dean’s closed eyelids, stars and planets created by the feeling Sam’s touch is bringing, everything making him float and drift, drift. Calm.

He barely remembers to nod in response.

Sam does the drawing at least two more times, moving closer and closer to the back of Dean’s hair, fingers tickling up into the velvet soft, short strands of it. Dean knows he slips into sleep at certain points, knows he moves in and out of it until Sam’s hand finally slows to a stop, his voice right at Dean’s ear, closer than ever.

“It was one of Bob Ross’s paintings of a forest. Happy trees, happy clouds, happy water. Happy birds and bunnies and sunshine.” Hand rubbing over Dean’s back now, erasing it all, pushing all that drawn-out warmth into his skin forever. Dean smiles.

“Too good for me, Sammy. You win.”

He shifts on the carpet, rousing himself so he can turn and face Sam, meet his eyes in the barest of light from the parking lot seeping in through the thin curtains. Sam’s face is just barely showing from under the covers, just one eye and his nose and one side of his gently smiling mouth. His arm slides back under, goes back into hiding, and their eyes lock and hold for just a few beats, just long enough for Sam to give in, for him to tell Dean with one of the thousands of silent words in their language that this, whatever they are right now, whatever they’re doing, is right. Is good. Is helping.

“Scoot over. And turn around. My turn.”

Dean doesn’t stand up until Sam starts moving, until he scoots over to one side of the bed and turns his back to Dean, exposing it for him in a display of trust that makes Dean’s eyes burn. He lifts the blankets and slides into the bed, jeans still on, just like Sam’s.

He pulls the covers back up over them, hiding them both underneath, cocooning them in almost
suffocating warmth. He can hear Sam’s breath, smell the tang of his sweat, feel the damp heat of Sam’s body. It’s like heaven.

He spreads his hand out on Sam’s back and pushes in close to him, only leaving enough room between his chest and Sam’s back for his hand to move.

He starts drawing at the top of Sam’s spine, all his fingers coming into play now, absolutely no picture in mind. He doesn’t stop until Sam’s breathing so deep he’s practically snoring, but he doesn’t move his hand, doesn’t stop touching him even as he finally, finally lets himself fall asleep, too.

Sam doesn't know what time he wakes up, but the room is as warm as a cradle, the blankets tucked up all around him, and he's alone.

He waits for his eyes to adjust to the dark and the curled shape of Dean's body comes into view over at the table near the window, shoulders pulled in, head down, the whole of him a mystery of shadow and dim light from the streetlight outside. Something about the whole scene pulls at Sam, settles something painful right down into his chest, and for a split second, he feels young again, afraid.

"Dean?"

Dean's head lifts fast, like Sam startled him. Sam can just barely make out his features, can just see the soft curves of his face, the wetness in his eyes before Dean's lifting a hand to wipe at them, fingers dragging down his cheeks, like he's wiping away tears.

"Go back to sleep, Sammy."

Sam feels the dull thud of his heart in his throat, the sudden pain of this making it all seem unreal, dreamlike. Dean's head is back down, hidden under his tired, strong hands, and the little brother in Sam makes him listen to Dean, to close his eyes again. He's drifting back to sleep before he knows it, hand hanging off the edge of the bed, reaching out for Dean even in his sleep.
They leave Palo Alto without speaking a word exactly six days after they’d gotten back from Jericho. They don’t speak most of the way to Lost Creek because there’s still not much to say. Neither are sleeping much, and Dean is having just as many nightmares as Sam is.

Blackwater Ridge loosens something in Sam, lets some of the fury out. They leave town smelling like smoke once again, the smell of burning flesh caught once again in Sam’s nose just when he was starting to forget what it smells like.

Sam’s the one behind the wheel when they head out of the mountains with no destination in mind. It’s late and they’re both exhausted, Dean’s right arm practically useless. Sam glances over at him for half an hour without saying anything before he finally opens his mouth, taking the chance that Dean is feeling the same way he is when he says, “Wanna just find a motel and sleep?”

Dean’s barely awake, his eyes lowered into warm green slits, right arm curled in his lap, cradled by his left. He grunts, doesn’t answer but doesn’t glare at Sam either, which Sam has always taken as a yes.

The exit gives them a choice between a Motel 8 and a Family Inn, and Sam’s wallet chooses the Motel 8. They take turns showering, both in and out in five minutes. Dean’s knocked out by the time Sam comes out of the bathroom, taking away all possibility of maybe talking, of seeing if Dean minds Sam curled up against him one more time, like they ended up the night before in the woods, sleeping close out of necessity but pressing together out of an inherent, visceral need to be touching each other.

The nights in Palo Alto had been them in separate beds except for the one, and having Dean behind him in front of the campfire, both of them awake and listening, too fixated on the job to actually sleep, but the touch had been like a needle in a sore vein, had been like that first sigh when the drug
hits the bloodstream.

And he needs it again, needs it now, has never truly not needed it.

He dresses in the dark and stands between their beds, his fingers trembling the slightest bit as he weighs his options, as he tries to gather up every ounce of courage he might have, but his fear wins out in the end.

His empty bed is cold, Colorado early winter cold, and Dean is too far away. Sam’s used to not sleeping, used to the sinking silence of being alone at night now. It feels good, like a punishment, like the cigarettes used to, like a clawing, empty stomach. He makes it his penance and clenches his fists and waits for dawn.

They head south in the earliest part of morning, take the first highway out, searching out warmth. Sam’s fingers are red-tipped and frozen, and Dean is bundled up tight in the passenger seat, every bump making him tense up, making him cradle his arm even closer.

Sam stops at a Gas’n’Sip and gets them some coffee, even blows on Dean’s a little before handing it to him. Dean flicks a bemused look his way before he takes a drink, letting out a grunt of pleasure as the caffeine hits his veins.

“Think you pulled it out of socket?” It’s the fifth time Sam’s asked the question but the first time today, so Dean’ll just have to deal with it. People are milling around them, going in and out of the gas station on the way to work and normal lives. The sun is rising to Dean’s right, streaming across his face and making his eyes bright, too beautiful to look at. Sam glances away, stares down at his gas station cappuccino.

“Nah. Mighta just pulled some ligaments or something, who knows. Goddamn wendigo.” He sighs and settles back in the corner created by the seat and the door, eyes closing as he brings his coffee to his mouth again. Sam glances over at him, mouth drawn in worry.

“Take some Tylenol, at least.” Sam puts his coffee on the dash and turns around to rifle in the back seat for his new duffel, pulling out the pill bottle he has banging around in it and pouring out two pills for Dean.

He turns back towards the front, eyes finding Dean as he does and he’s amazed to see Dean’s eyes open and trained on his ass before they lift up and meet Sam’s own. Sam’s eyes widen, the moment so completely unexpected that he can’t hide his reaction. Dean holds his hand out for the pills, a very slight flush on his cheeks but he doesn’t look caught otherwise.

Sam hesitates, his own cheeks burning hot as he replays it over and over, the intent focus with which Dean was staring at him, zeroed in on his ass like it was a girl’s, like he was wearing a skirt, like Sam was trying to get Dean to look or something. He clears his throat and drops the pills into Dean’s palm, turning to face the front completely and snatching his cup up so he at least has something to do.

“Thanks, Sammy,” Dean mumbles after he swallows the pills down with a quick sip of coffee, the pause spreading out between them. Sam takes a too-big drink that burns his tongue, pulling himself out of it long enough to start the car up again.

“We’ll, uh. We’ll go get you one of those heat packs when we stop for lunch. Can’t risk fucking up your shoulder.” Sam pushes his cup between his legs so he can back out of the parking space, all of
his attention going to getting back out on the road and onto the highway but he feels a little different, a little lighter, a little sexier, maybe. He almost feels like smiling.

“Yeah, ‘specially my right shoulder. I hate jerkin’ off with my left hand.”

Sam bites down on his bottom lip, knowing that he’s blushing because he’s a fucking dork around his brother and Dean always draws the same reaction out of him, no matter how old they are, apparently.

“It’d suck to have to go find a girl to do it for you somewhere in New Mexico or wherever we end up.” He knows he emphasizes girl too much, but he wants to make sure they both know he’s saying it for a reason, that he’s giving Dean room to correct him, tease him a little.

“Not just any girl. I need resumes. I have specific needs. You gotta do some interviews first.”

Sam chews on the inside of his cheek as he eases back onto the highway, settling back into the seat, hand gripping the steering wheel hard. It’s so easy, slipping back into this with Dean. This weird, sexy, painful kind of flirting. He feels dizzy with it.

“Well, you better tell me what those needs are, so I know what to look for.” He keeps his voice light, eyes darting from the stretch of crowded highway in front of him to the cars in his rearview but all of his body focused on Dean, on every movement of him, every word he might say.

“Well, I like blowjobs better than handjobs, for one. Sloppy ones. And they need to be able to deepthroat for at least half of it. And they can’t ignore my balls. I hate that shit.” Dean sounds drowsy, like a lazing cat, all stretched out and dozing beside Sam like he’s describing his favorite burger, not like he’s telling his brother how he likes his dick sucked. Sam forces himself not to squirm, just keeps his hand on the coffee between his legs, the heel of it pressed against his stirring dick.

“Hmm,” he manages, his voice wobbly, weak. He’s driving way too slow now, cars flying past him, but he can’t keep everything straight, can’t stop picturing himself giving Dean exactly what he wants, exactly what he’s asking for. “I’ll, uh. I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Good. Good boy.” Dean sounds so self-satisfied, so fucking smug that Sam can barely stand it. He reaches up to turn the radio down, lowering the sound of Billy Squier so he can hear Dean’s answering to his next question.

“So, who’s the last person that did that?”

Sam glances over and catches when Dean cracks an eye open to peer over at him.

“Who did what?”

“Y’know.” Sam shrugs, both hands on the wheel now, holding on with a deathgrip. “All those things. Your specific needs.”

Dean’s laugh is low, gravely, and it makes a shiver slide up Sam’s spine.

“Girl back in New Orleans a couple weeks back. Shacked up with her for a few days. She took good care of me.”

Sam grits his teeth so hard his jaw pops. He wrings his hands on the wheel, not able to keep in either things but at least he doesn’t growl like he wants to. He takes a few seconds to get it together, to stop being so fucking irrationally jealous over his brother mentioning a girl before he replies.
“Took care of you, huh?” He sounds snide, even to himself, sounds just as possessive as he feels. He sucks in a deep breath as the humiliation burns through him, hand sliding over to put on his signal as he guns it past an 18-wheeler, going eighty out of annoyance.

“Hell, yeah. Kept me fed and fucked and showed me some Southern hospitality, you know? Worked my dick like she owned it. Shit.” Dean’s suddenly awake again, taking a gulp or two of coffee, a feline grin stretched across his mouth.

Sam scowls, letting the murderous fury glide through him. He cracks a window to let in a slice of ice-cold air. Hadn’t expected to care so much, after all this time. Asked to hear this and then reacts like a jealous girlfriend. Such a fucking loser.

“Hey, you can drop me off wherever, if you wanna get back down there to her. Don’t let me stop you.”

He feels Dean look over at him then, feels Dean register every emotion swirling around in Sam’s belly. Sam holds still and lets Dean see him, see all of it, for once. He’s too tired to hold any of it in, too unexpectedly upset to pretend he’s not.

“You think I wanna be down in New Orleans instead’ve in this car with you?”

The question brings tears to Sam’s eyes, but he refuses them. His chest is rising and falling in quick lifts, and he’s a little too keyed up to be driving right now. He shrugs, swallows hard, switching back to the right lane just for something to do.

“Kinda answered your own question there, Dean.”

Dean shakes his head, and Sam can feel when all the humor leaves Dean’s body, when his smile drops away. He watches him out of the corner of his eye, watches him look out the window at the snow-topped trees in the distance, watches him sift through his thoughts but Sam couldn’t guess what a single one is.

“Really, Dean. We can head back up north. Drop me off at Bobby’s. I’ll figure something out. Get a car running and--”

“Just keep driving, Sam.”

Sam’s throat tightens even more and the little brother in him, the fighter in him makes him find his voice again, push a little harder.

“Didn’t mean to drag you away from something good. Don’t let me stop you if--”

“Sammy, shut the fuck up and keep driving.” Dean’s voice is thin, like it’s stretched out across the flat of the road, like it’s been run over one too many times. His right hand is shaking in his lap now, shaking so hard that Sam can see the movement without even looking over.

He turns his attention back to the road, the tears still hovering. They don’t speak until nightfall.

They get Dean a heating pad at Walgreen’s and dinner at Taco Bell in Shiprock. The motel room is shittier than most and they eat and change with military efficiency.

Lights are out by eleven, both of them wide awake, anger tumbling around them, between them.
Dean’s voice is so unexpected in the darkness that it makes Sam jump.

“What about Jess? Did she take care of you?”

Sam’s eyes widen in the dark. He slowly turns to face Dean’s bed, only seeing the faintest silhouette of him in the light from the window, the orange light of his heat pad. Thinks maybe he’s dreaming.

“Yeah,” he finally says, no reason to lie. Because she did, from day one. They took care of each other.

“How?”

Sam rubs the pad of his thumb over his scar.

“What do you mean?”

“Tell me how. How she took care of you. What she did.” Dean sounds just as angry as Sam had hours ago in the car, sounds just as stung. None of it feels real.

“Made sure I ate when I had big projects. Dragged me to bed when I wouldn’t go on my own. Let me bounce ideas off of her. Let me bitch about my professors. Dragged me out when I wanted to stay home. I dunno.”

“What about sex?”

Sam’s heart is racing, the heat building up his chest to his cheeks. He pulls the covers tighter around himself.

“Sex?”

“Yeah, Sam, when you guys fucked. What did she do? How did she take care of you?”

“She…” Sam trails off, mind drifting, like he’s forgotten or something. Like it’s been a hundred years, and he’s being asked to recall details that have long since decayed. But all too suddenly he can feel her at his back, feel her pinning him to the bed, feel her sliding the biggest lubed-up toy she owned up his crack and nudge against his ass like she was truly impatient, like she really wanted inside. And she learned how to fuck him just right, learned just how hard he liked it.

He clears his throat, moving his feet out from under the covers, letting the cool air of the room hit them to calm him down a little. He finds the words but he only wants to say them to hurt Dean. And so he does.

“She figured out exactly what I needed and she gave it to me. Nobody else ever has.”

The silence that follows is so loaded that Sam swears he can almost see it.

“What does that mean? What did she figure out?” Dean’s sitting up now, away from his heating pad. Sam wants to tell him to lie back down but he figures that won’t go over too well.

And he can’t bring himself to say it, even now. Can’t bring himself to admit it because it’s too close to the truth, to what he really wants. It’s too close to telling Dean what he really wants, and he knows now more than he ever has that that’s never, ever going to happen.

“Night, Dean.”

He shuffles back over, faces the wall, tucking his feet back in again. Dean hasn’t moved a muscle, is
still propped up on his elbow, still watching Sam in the darkness. Sam can feel him, feel his eyes, feel all the questions. He wants Dean to ask them. Wants Dean to *make* him talk, to pry the truth from him with his bare hands.

But Dean doesn’t say another word, doesn’t do anything after he turns over himself, the sound of his breathing so far away that Sam knows he’s got his back to him.

He also knows that neither of them sleep again.

It’s almost December now, and Sam’s still shivering when they leave Lake Manitoc, Wisconsin. His shoes are soaked through and Dean’s mouth probably tastes like Andrea from where she’d kissed him, right in front of Sam and Lucas, like she had a right. Like Dean was a prize to claim, and her prize, to start with.

Dean has been flirting more than normal with every reasonably attractive girl they encounter, and Sam knows just like he knows every single nuance of Dean’s smiles, that it’s because of him. Somehow. They haven’t talked about it anymore, about the girl in New Orleans or about Jess in any sort of sexual specifics.

Sam glances over and eyes Dean’s profile, the plump sweetness of his bottom lip and his stomach knots up. She’d kissed him, and he’d liked it. It’s simple and unimportant, and they’ll never see her again. But it was just so easy for her to do, so easy between them. Just something Sam could never get away with. And he never will be able to get away with it, not with Dean.

Dean’s eyes slide over and find Sam’s, eyebrows quirking in question. Sam grits his teeth and looks away, squints into the mid-afternoon sunshine. Feels Dean’s gaze and hates how much he savors it.

“You hungry? Those sandwiches are back there, if you are.” Dean takes a hand off the wheel and tries to reach back for the plate of perfectly cut sandwiches Andrea made for them. Sam’s stomach lurches at the thought.

“No,” he says quickly, shaking his head and twisting in his seat to touch Dean’s arm, to keep him from grabbing the plate. “No, I’m not hungry, uh. Thanks.”

Dean stops trying to reach the plate but a frown has taken over his stupid, pretty face. Sam plays with the rip in his jeans and tells himself for the fiftieth time in nearly a month that he needs to get a book or a crossword puzzle or something to distract him while they’re in the car.

“Hand me the tape box, will ya? It’s under you.”

Sam holds in a sigh and leans forward, snatching the box under his side of the seat and pulling it into his lap. “What do you want to listen to?”

“I can--”

“Dean, you’re driving. I have hands and am literate. Just tell me what you want.”

“Part of the fun is lookin’ through ‘em,” Dean mumbles, an actual pout forming on his lips. Sam licks his own mouth and sighs, making sure it sounds real annoyed.
Give me a genre. Or a mood. For example, blues rock, cock rock, mullet rock, rocky rock, metal for wimps, or power ballad rock?

Dean’s eyes narrow into a glare and he turns it slowly over to Sam, amusement hidden under all the frowning. Sam raises his eyebrows, unable to keep the mischief out of his expression.

“What the fuck is metal for--”


Dean is smirking now, chewing on the inside of his bottom lip to hold in a smile.

“What if I said I was feelin’ romantic, you little shit? What do you got in that box that’s romantic?”

“Hmm…” Sam makes a show of shuffling through Dean’s tape collection, eyes darting over Styx, Zeppelin, Foghat, Dean’s ‘Kick ‘Em in the Dick’ mixtape he made when he was seventeen, and--

“Ah, here we go. Perfect.”

Sam ejects the Rolling Stones’ *Exile on Main St.* from the tape deck and tosses it into the shoebox before he slides the new tape in, not letting Dean read the label as he does.

“What? What’s romantic in that box? Nothing. There ain’t nothin’ sweet in that fuckin’--”

The opening notes to “The Flame” by Cheap Trick start up and Dean’s entire body reacts. He grips the wheel tighter, his mouth dropping open, cheeks firing up bright pink.

“Okay, that’s not fuckin’ fair. I made this when I was like, what? Fifteen?”

“Sap.” Sam’s openly grinning now, box replaced under the seat, and he’s sitting back and enjoying every single second of Dean’s embarrassment at the lovesick mixed tape he made when he was a teenager in lust with a cheerleader named Destiny who wouldn’t give him the time of day.

“This is a good tape! It’s fuckin’ timeless. I mean, this song? I could win anybody with this song.”

“Except Destiny Sanders.”

Dean’s eyes find him again, his entire being reeking of indignance.

“She never even listened to it!”

Sam shrugs, his grin absolutely gleeful now.

“Needed more R. Kelly, I told you.”

“Whatever. Sad bastards, don’t understand how important a love song this is.” Dean’s shoulders start moving, head getting into it, the car even swaying a little on the highway as Dean starts to listen to the song, licking his lips like he’s going to sing and oh--

“I’m goin’ crazy, I’m losin’ sleep, I’m in too far, I’m in way too deep over yooooooooooou!” Dean’s voice cracks on the long, high note, and Sam cringes, hands coming up to cover his ears but he doesn’t dare miss a note of this. “I can’t believe you’re gooo-oone! You were the first, you’ll be the last!”

“Dean, birds are dropping dead out of the sky. This is a new low even for--”

“Wherever you go, I’ll be with you!” Dean bobs his head to the keyboards and drums. “Whatever
you want! I’ll give it to you. WHENEVER YOU NEED SOMEONE TO LAY YOUR HEART AND HEAD UPON. REMEMBER AFTER THE FIRE, AFTER ALL THE RAIN, I WILL BE THE FLAAAAAAAAME. I WILL BE THE FLAAAAAAAAME.

He’s pointing right at Sam, going about twenty in the slow lane just so he can look at him almost the entire time he’s singing the chorus, all the long notes wobbly but emphatic. Their eyes meet and Dean’s face breaks out into a beaming smile, eyes bright in the sun.

Sam plays along, plays the straight man, just blinks at him with his eyebrows touching his hairline, incredulity schooled on his whole face. Dean spreads his hand out, eyes widening even more so he can look scared.

“Watching shadows move across the wall feels so frightening! I want to run to you, I want to call, but I’ve been hit by lightning! Just can’t stand up--oh, shit.”

Dean jerks back into the lane after he drives a little too far over the line, righting the car after a truck blows by them, horn honking, middle finger flying up out of the driver’s window when he passes. Sam laughs, a bright burst of a sound that makes Dean break character for just a second, makes him laugh, too.

Their eyes catch again and there’s an unexpected, easy affection there on Dean’s face that melts something in Sam, some of that ugly anger he’d gathered up not even an hour ago.

“Okay, fine,” Sam sighs, the sound louder than Robin Zander’s pleading voice. He scoots across the bench seat and lowers down until his temple is resting on Dean’s shoulder, the angle awkward but it’s worth it. “I guess Cheap Trick does work on me.”

Dean’s body is warm from the sun, and Sam can smell the lingering murk of that lake on his skin, the silt and dark water clinging to Dean’s body. Sam closes his eyes and imagines pushing Dean into a shower, scrubbing them both clean of it, all of the fear and bad memories and haunts washing down the drain.

“You’re just easy, Sammy,” Dean reminds him, his left hand cradling the wheel as he lifts his right arm and drapes it over Sam’s shoulders, pulling him in closer, pulling him in to stay. The guitar solo spills from the speakers and Dean sings along softly to the bridge that follows, his fingers slipping through the growing curls of Sam’s hair.

“Wherever you go, I’ll be with you. Whatever you want, I’ll give it to you.” His voice is soft now as he sings, a little more unsure, a little too heartfelt to be singing along to a power ballad. Sam blushes, letting the words sink in, indulging in the thought of Dean ever really singing a song to him.

“Destiny was a fucking idiot,” he murmurs just as Dean’s fingers spread out, nails scratching slow on Sam’s scalp. Dean hums in question, the sound rumbling in his chest.

“You think so?” Dean’s voice is so close, like his mouth is right against his ear. “Angel” by Aerosmith starts up, and Sam’s grin returns. He used to listen to this tape all the time in secret, even though he’d never tell Dean that. Always pretended that Dean made it for him, drew those awkward hearts in blue ballpoint pen on the label for him.

“Know so,” he finally replies, a sweet drowsiness washing over him, making him feel like he might actually sleep. Dean’s fingers keep up in his hair, brushing out every tangle just like he used to, at the exact same pace, with the same sweet deliberation, like not a second has passed between now and when they used to always be this close, always touch exactly like this. “Like she could have anyone
better.”

Dean’s thumb slips over the curve of his ear, tracing the shell of it and down to the lobe before sliding down Sam’s neck, easing just a little past the collar of his worn out t-shirt they’d picked up at Goodwill.

“Well. She was dating the quarterback-slash-class president.”

Sam tries to shrug but it’s an awkward move where he’s curled up against Dean’s side. He can feel every whorl of the pad of Dean’s finger on his clavicle. “Still. Nobody better’n you. Nobody.”

“Bet you tell all the boys that.” Dean’s voice is a little tight, almost wistful. His whole hand has invaded Sam’s shirt by this point, warm, gun-worn fingers and palm sliding over the curve of his shoulder and down his arm and back up, thumb tracing his collarbone. It’s so intimate, so specific of a place to be touched that Sam is breathing hard, dick aching into wakefulness in his jeans. Dean’s hand on him. Dean’s skin on his skin.

He arches his neck, freeing more space for Dean to touch, begging silently for him not to stop.

“Tell all the boys that nobody’s better than you? Mhmm. I do. Always have.”

There’s another rumble in Dean’s chest, this one leaving like a sigh, like a groan. Dean shifts beside him and Sam wants to reach over, to slide a hand up Dean’s thigh, to feel right between his legs, to rub at his dick here in the wide open afternoon. Dean’s arm tightens around him, hand sliding up to his neck that he cups possessively, fingers pushing in almost hard enough to bruise.

“Wanna hear you do it one day.”

“Mm? Tell a boy that you’re better?”

“Yeah.” It’s drawn-out, deep, and Dean’s thumb is stroking over the jumping pulse in Sam’s neck. Sam’s almost completely hard in his jeans by now, his eyes closed but his lashes are fluttering, and he’s soaring behind his shut lids, he’s fucking flying. “Tell ‘em you don’t need ‘em. Cause. Cause.”

“Cause I got you?” Sam finally lifts his head then, eyes slipping open just in time for Dean to look down at him, for them to stare right at each other and it burns between them, all these words, all these touches. Burns.

“Cause you got me.” Eyes hold for a second longer, a punctuation on the end of Dean’s statement and he’s looking back up at the road, fingers softening once again, pushing back up into Sam’s hair. “Go ahead’n sleep, Sammy. I got you.”

Sam closes his eyes again, body easing deeper into the seat, slouching as his long legs stretch out in the floorboard. He curls into the crook of Dean’s arm, breathing him in deep, and he can’t remember right here, right now, anything that’s ever been wrong.
By the time they get off the airplane and back into the Impala and on the road, Sam hasn’t slept for nearly fifty hours straight. His eyes are swimming, his entire body still thrumming with adrenaline even though they’ve been off the flight for hours, even though he’s finally lost the smell of sulfur with every inhalation.

Dad changed his voicemail.

With everything that’s been going on, around them and between them, Sam really hasn’t thought of Dad, not nearly as much as he probably should. It all comes back to him when he hears his voice, all the anger at Dad’s evasiveness, all the defiance of his every fucking word, all of the helplessness of being young and under Dad’s thumb and all of the desire to buck against him, to fight him every step of the way.

And he misses him.

He and Dean don’t say much as they fly through rural Pennsylvania, both with their eyes on their own horizon, minds closed off from each other. For the first time, Sam realizes how much they don’t know, how young they are in all of this. They’d gotten through this one, sure, and a few before that, but they don’t really know anything. Dad’s journal has turned into their bible and they’re shooting into the dark, hoping they hit what they came for.

They’re playing hunters, boys in Dad’s boots, and Sam realizes then, as the sun melts into the snow-tipped mountains the further north they go, that Dean is scared. He’s scared shitless, and he’s putting on a brave face for Sam.

Sam reaches down to unlace his shoes, prying the tongues of them up so he can slip his aching feet free. Dean groans in protest, reaching over to crack his window, letting in a sharp whip of icy cold air.

“Really? You’re gonna take your shoes off in here? Douche.” Dean makes a show of waving his hand around before throwing a weak glare Sam’s way. Sam ignores it, ignores him, gathering his shoes up and putting them to one side in the floor next to his feet. He looks over at Dean after a long moment, studying the side of his face. Dean waits a few beats, fingers tapping on the wheel.

“What?” Green eyes snap over to meet Sam’s, mouth pursed in impatience. He looks caught-out, guarded. Sam tries to offer a smile but finds he doesn’t have much of one to give.

“Want me to drive for awhile?”

Dean frowns, looks down at his hands on the wheel and up at the road, like he’s trying to find a reason why he’d need such a thing. His raised eyebrows ask the question for him, and Sam sighs in response.

“Nevermind,” he mutters, resting his head on the cold glass, eyes staring dully ahead.

The car falls silent again, except for the low strain of The Who from the speakers. Sam’s always felt safest next to Dean, always felt so sure that Dean could take care of everything when Sam couldn’t, but what if Dean’s always needed Dad, needed him to feel that same kind of assurance? It’s so fucking obvious, but it hits him now like a slap in the face. Of course Dean’s always needed Dad. Of course he’s terrified that something’s happened to him. More than Sam is, even. More than Sam could ever be, probably.

“When’s the last time you talked to him?” He doesn’t mean to ask it, doesn’t even realize he has until Dean looks over at him, his frown telling Sam that he knows exactly who he’s talking about.
“Already told you,” Dean starts, his voice low, eyes trained on the road. “Few weeks before I left for Louisiana. We split, and he headed to California. Haven’t heard from him since.”

“Since the voicemail,” Sam adds, soft, almost an afterthought. That message is etched into his mind, down to the last crackle of interference over Dad’s voice. Dean’s hands tighten on the wheel next to him and Sam lowers his gaze down to his hands, giving Dean a minute to process through whatever he’s thinking.

“Yeah, since…” Dean trails off, his features smoothing out into something too close to vulnerability for Sam’s liking. “Anyway, we just, uh. We need to call him, once we get stopped for the night. Let him know what we’ve been doing. Maybe we can meet up with him.”

Dean’s voice is laced with what can only be called hope, and it breaks something in Sam to hear it. Because Dean sounds young then, optimistic like a child, like meeting up with Dad will just magically fix everything. Like Dad’s going to have all the answers. And he realizes that’s another way he and Dean have always been different: Dean’s always thought Dad is the beginning and end of the truth, that he can fix anything, and Sam’s always known he can’t. Always seen right through to the fear in Dad, the fear that wore him down over the years like water over stone.

“Yeah, Dean,” he finally says, barely able to keep the sigh in. “Maybe.”

“We’ll find him,” Dean says, like a mantra, like it’s a fact. He nods, just a couple of times and to himself. He straightens up a little then, reaches to turn up the radio. Sam grits his teeth, jaw tensing, knee jumping for only a few seconds before he’s talking again.

“What if it had been me?”

Dean looks over at him, reaching up blindly to turn the radio completely off.

“What if what had been you?”

“The one who went missing, like Dad is.”

It’s a cruel question and he knows it, a selfish one. And he doesn’t even know why he’s asked it, if he’s being honest. He blames it on the days without sleep, on the distance that’s still between him and Dean, up to this very second, blames it on the fact that he’s an asshole who needs constant reassurance from his brother that he matters to him, even a little bit.

A smile tugs on Dean’s lips, but it’s not light.

“You mean like when you left Denver and went to California?”

Just the mention of Denver has Sam’s shoulders pulling in, has him sinking down deeper into the seat. This is what he gets, for trying to push this on Dean. But he barges ahead.

“You knew where I was the whole time. Knew I was on a campus, knew where to find me. This is different.” He’s facing Dean now, back against the door, eyes on Dean’s, on the lift and sweep of his eyelashes. He lets how beautiful he finds Dean sink in bone-deep before his absolute disgust at himself takes over. “What if we were on the road, and I just disappeared, stopped communicating?”

Dean is tense again, every line and curve of him tight, clutched.

“Why the fuck’re you askin’ me that? Why’re you throwin’ hypotheticals at me? Are you that bored already? Let’s play the license plate game, if you are.”
“I’m not bored. I’m just wondering. If--”

“Well, stop fuckin’ wondering! Christ, Sam.” Dean’s going nearly eighty on this abandoned, dusty highway, night finally starting to fall in around them. “I’ve got enough shit to deal with. I don’t need that fuckin’ thought hanging over my head, too.”

“I wasn’t trying to--”

“Why are you asking? Huh? You plannin’ on picking up and leaving, too?” *Leaving me, too* is what Sam hears, is what Dean doesn’t say. Sam sighs finally, turns his body back around to face the front, the tenuous connection broken. He regrets saying it at all now, hates himself for wanting the answer he did.

“No, Dean,” he says, his voice slow, clear. He lets the words hover between them alone long enough for Dean to really hear them before he keeps talking. “That’s not what I meant. Just forget it.”

“Done.” Dean reaches up and flicks the radio back on, Seger playing now, and loud. Sam lets his eyes go soft on the darkening hills ahead and prays for sleep that won’t come.

They stop a few hours later in Little Falls, New York, the snow falling steadily and already starting to cover the roads. Sam doesn’t ask why they headed into a forecasted snowstorm, doesn’t ask why they didn’t head south, into warmth.

Dean’s out of the car before Sam even gets his shoes back on, ducking into the yellow-lit motel lobby to get them a room. Sam zips up his jacket and savors the warm car for a few seconds longer before he forces himself out, gathering their bags from the backseat.

Dean comes back with a key and unlocks one of the rooms without a word, flicking on a light before disappearing inside. They undress in silence, clothes falling off in soft thuds on the carpet. Sam pulls on a clean pair of socks and glances over just in time to see Dean disappear under the blankets, wearing a faded red hoodie that looks instantly familiar.

He’s left staring at his brother’s back, mouth open. He’d never known what had happened to that hoodie. All the days after his stay in the hospital back at Stanford were blurry, a haze of things that he’s not in a hurry to remember. But his Stanford hoodie. He thought he’d lost it and never gave it much thought again.

“Dean--”

“How can you get the light?”

He stays still for a few beats before he finally blinks himself out of it with a couple of shakes of his head. “Uh, yeah.”

The room falls into nearly perfect darkness when he flicks the light off, and Dean doesn’t say another word. Sam slides down on the still-made, staring up at the ceiling that he can’t see but knows is there.

Hours later, just before dawn, when Sam’s eye has been twitching in exhaustion for 2,567 (sixty-eight, sixty-nine) seconds, when he’s still on top of the covers and his stomach is growling and he can somehow tell that it’s still snowing outside, Dean’s voice breaks into the silence, like he’s been awake this whole time, too.
"I'd lose my goddamn mind, Sam. That's what I'd do. I would lose my fucking mind."

Everything falls quiet again after he says it, his voice so thick with emotion, so stripped to the bone that Sam’s throat tightens, makes an audible sound when he swallows. He wants to apologize, wants to look over at him, wants to slide his hands over Dean’s warm, soft-hard body under that stolen hoodie, wants to hold him and let that say all the things he can’t with his fumbling, misplaced words.

But he stays where he is, cowardice and the gut-deep fear of the slightest bit of rejection from Dean keeping him stark still, mouth closed.

He seems to collect missed chances.

“Just hold still.”

Sam sighs, closes his eyes, and finally stops moving. The rain finally stopped before dawn, the sky bright, the air ice cold. It’s the last day of November, of the worst month of his life, and he shivers when he feels Dean’s wide palm spread out on his cheek as gentle as he’s ever been touched.

“Feel like my head’s gonna explode,” Sam murmurs just as a warm washcloth touches just beneath his eye, wiping away the first bit of blood. He tenses under the touch, his entire face still hurting, still tender, like he was seconds away from liquefying in front of that mirror.

Goddamned Bloody Mary.

“I’ll get you some Tylenol or somethin’ in a minute. Lemme just get you cleaned up first.” Dean finishes under one eye and moves to the other, wiping with the clean side of the cloth now, getting into the very corners of his eyes and all around them, wiping away every trace.

The air is humid between their faces, the moment almost sweet in its quiet. Dean’s thumb starts stroking over the high point of his cheek, and Sam can feel Dean’s eyes traversing his face, studying him. Sam just lets him, leans into that touch even though it hurts a little. He can’t stop thinking about how there’s blood on Dean’s face, too, how there’s maybe a secret that Dean has from him, one that invited Bloody Mary to hurt him just like she did Sam.

“Why’d she come after you, Dean?” He opens his eyes finally and God, Dean’s so close, just inches away. Sam keeps his hands in his lap where he sits on the bed, doesn’t reach out for Dean, doesn’t hold onto him, keep him where he’s knelt between his legs on the floor. So of course Dean moves, stands up, making Sam crane his neck to look up at him.

“Gonna go wash up,” Dean sighs, like he hadn’t even heard Sam, the bloody cloth clutched in his hand. Sam stares after him, stays slouched where he is until Dean turns on the bathroom light and then he’s up, following him, steps in right after him on the faded tile floor.

“Tell me?” His voice is soft, tired, worn down. He leans against the door frame and watches Dean rinse the cloth out, watches his own blood swirl down the drain and stain his brother’s thick fingers before they come clean. Lets his eyes travel up Dean’s arm and across his tensed shoulders, up his graceful neck and finally up to meet his eyes in the mirror.
He knows Dean saw him looking, felt it, maybe. It’s there between them, in the weight of their held gaze. Dean finally looks away, looks back at himself in the mirror, starts to wipe at his face with the stained cloth, not doing it nearly gentle enough, not to Sam.

Dean shrugs, his lip curling in dismissal, in a completely guarded move that tells Sam before Dean even opens his mouth that he’s not going to get any answers out of him tonight.

“Could be lots of things. This job ain’t exactly without risks.” He scrubs his face dry with a cheap, scratchy towel before he turns to Sam, his expression a careful mask.

Sam stays where he is, blocking Dean’s exit, standing so close in the tiny bathroom. All the reflective surfaces in the room are still covered, all but the mirror behind Dean, the one that’s showing Sam his own face, the conflicting annoyance and lust and exhaustion in his features as he looks at his brother.

“But you have a particular one in mind, don’t you?”

“It’s too fuckin’ late for this, Sam.” Dean ducks his head and pushes away from the sink and clean past Sam, nudging him out of the way and stepping back into the main room. Sam spins on his heels and follows him after reaching into the bathroom to flick off the light, leaving their world nearly dark except for the low-watt bulb between their beds.

Sam shuffles over to his bed and sinks down on it, watching Dean stomp around the room, dig through his bag with impatient aggression, watches him open a pill bottle and tap some pills into his palm.

There’s a knock on the door, and it makes Dean startle, makes him reach into the back of his jeans for his gun before a timid, tired voice comes through the wood.

“It’s me, guys. Charlie.”

Dean relaxes immediately, a laugh bubbling up in relief from his throat. He walks over and opens the door, the early morning bright behind her before she steps inside.

“Sorry, I just needed to make a couple of calls.” She shoves her phone down into her pocket before scrubbing her hands over her face, the thick sleeves of her sweater falling down past her wrists. “I just. Want to go home.”

Dean cuts his eyes over to Sam and Sam just smiles, a small twitch of one side of his mouth, lifts his shoulder in a shrug. Might as well leave now. No reason to stay.

“We’ll drop you off,” Dean replies, his eyes still on Sam. “We need to head out anyway.”

His face is drawn, his blood feels pale in his veins. Jess had been there on the sidewalk in Toledo, real as anything around her; hair lifted in the breeze, skin glowing under the winter sun. Blue eyes knowing, hurt. Accusing.

He’s still shaken even as they trudge inside of this new motel room, still trapped in his mind with her, with all of his countless nightmares that just keep piling up, that just won’t leave him.

“Sammy?”
She’s asking why in the new dreams, why, Sam? like there’s an answer he can give her, like anything he could’ve said would have made sense, would have made a difference. Like she wasn’t marked for this the second she introduced herself to him at that party, in that other lifetime.

“Sam.”

He wonders suddenly if she’s haunting him, if she’s bound to him now, stuck. He turns around, a gasp caught in his throat because he thinks he sees white in the corner of his eye, thinks he smells her.

He finds himself face-to-face with Dean who is suddenly right there next to him, a strong hand grabbing hard at Sam’s arm.

“Sammy, what the fuck’s going on? What’s wrong? Look at me.” Both of Dean’s hands on him now, holding him up, shaking him a little. Sam is panting, his eyes flying wild over the room behind Dean, looking for her, convinced she’s here. Can smell her, white flowers, powdery soap. Can smell--

“Hey, hey, man, c’mon,” Dean’s saying, hands loosening on Sam, stroking up and down his arms now. “Just calm down. Breathe for me. Sam, look at me.”

He finally meets Dean’s eyes, burning green in the middle of the dark, an anchor. He holds onto the gaze, sinks into it, his whole body going lax.

“I’m so tired, Dean,” he says after a few tense seconds, a tremor settling fine over his skin, driving a shiver up his spine. “I’m just so tired.”

“Shit, Sam,” Dean sighs, hands coming up to hold onto either side of Sam’s neck, his eyes relaxing into focused worry. “You need to sleep. You’re sleeping tonight. You hear me? You’ve got to, man. This is killing you.”

Sam nods, doesn’t really hear the words but he knows what Dean’s saying. They step back from each other, and Dean keeps his eyes on him for a minute, eyebrows drawn, mouth tight, frowning.

“Let’s get ready for bed, alright? Just like we used to. ‘Member? Dad would give us seven minutes before lights out.” Dean tries to smile but it doesn’t reach his eyes. He takes the bag Sam’s still got hanging from his shoulder and puts it on the bed, opening up to dig around in it. Sam just watches him, eyes blank, doubt still clawing at his mind, telling him that she’s here, she really is here. Somehow.

Dean stands up back up with Sam’s toothbrush and a pair of pajama pants, the good, thick flannel kind that Dean had splurged on at Wal-Mart for him even though Sam told him not to. Sam takes them, holds them to his chest, stuck there watching Dean go to his own bag and rummage out a t-shirt and green toothbrush and giant tube of Crest they share.

Sam follows Dean into the bathroom, squinting in the over-bright light above the sink. He can still smell the cleaning supplies used to clean this place, the faint scent of bleach. Dean takes the pants from his arms and squeezes some toothpaste onto Sam’s brush.

“Brush,” he instructs, his big brother glare firmly in place. Sam sighs, running his toothbrush under a little water before sticking it in his mouth.

“Not a kid,” he mumbles around it as he starts to brush, white foam gathering on his lips. Dean keeps his eyes on him, like he’s making sure Sam still remembers how to brush his damn teeth before he’s following suit, shoving his toothbrush in his own mouth and facing forward to brush them.
Sam lifts his eyes, watches Dean’s reflection in the mirror, watches the way he brushes his teeth with almost military precision and effectiveness, like he’s being timed. They brush exactly the same way, switch sides at the same time, lean over to spit at the same time, their heads brushing. Just like they used to.

They both move to cup their hands under the running water, trying to push each other out of the way to get to it. Sam bites back a smile as they shove and smack, both getting completely wet and not managing to hold onto any significant amount of water.

“Oh, fuck no you didn’t.”

Sam takes advantage of Dean’s shock to cup his hand again and get a good palmful of water. Just as he’s about to lift it to his mouth, Dean’s hand is there like some kind of ninja and smacking the underside of Sam’s hand, sending water splashing Sam’s face, mostly up his nose.

“Go ahead, Sammy.” Dean makes a grand, sweeping gesture toward the sink, and Sam just rolls his eyes, glancing over at Dean a few times distrustfully before he rinses his own mouth out, swishing water around and spitting it out. Sam just stands there, staring at Dean from under dripping eyelashes, and Dean raises his eyebrows at him, a smirk pulling at his lips.

“Where’d you get that?” Dean nods at him, and Sam looks down at himself, his heart skipping a little as he tries to find what Dean’s talking about.

“Get what?” He grabs his pants and tugs them on quick, hiding his brief-covered dick as fast as he can before his love of Dean’s attention becomes a little too obvious, before Dean sees the faint lines of scars on his thighs.
“Those muscles, He-Man.” Dean’s not looking at him anymore, concentrating on pulling his own shirt off and another, softer one on, and so Sam lets himself preen a little for the words, stands up a little straighter.

“Oh,” he laughs, a weak huff, eyes down on the drawstring of his pants that he tightens and ties off, glancing up through his lashes at the way Dean’s arms flex as he pulls his shirt on, chest tightening for the way he fishes his amulet out and makes sure it’s laying on top instead of underneath. “There was a gym on campus. Good way to blow off steam.”

Dean looks up at him again, both of them dressed for bed, Dean in his boxer briefs and t-shirt and Sam in nothing but his pants, but they stand there still, look their fill of each other.

“Yeah, well,” Dean replies finally, reaching up to scratch the back of his head as he clears his throat. “Not bad.”

Sam smiles, shakes his head before turning to walk out of the bathroom that feels a little warmer than it did when they went in. “Anything’s an improvement over the scrawny thing I used to be, right?”

He moves his duffel from the bed and pulls down the covers, not looking over his shoulder but he knows that Dean’s gathering up their clothes like he used to, that he tosses them into a lazy pile in the nearest corner to deal with in the morning. Dad’s not here to lecture them over it, to make them put everything away. Dad’s not here to lecture them about a lot of things.

Sam notices then that Dean hasn’t said anything back to him, that he’s checking his gun before putting it on the nightstand, that he’s double-checking the locks on the door, on the window. His smile disappears and he goes back into himself a little, now that Dean’s closed himself off.

He pushes his feet under the blankets and pulls them up to his shoulders as he turns on his side, away from Dean.

“Can you turn the heat up just a little?” He makes it the last thing he says before he closes his eyes, taking a deep breath of the stale air in their room, all the flowers gone.

The light goes out behind him and he hears Dean moving around a little more, some rustles and shuffling and Sam takes a deep breath, holding it in for as long as he can manage before he lets it out.

He feels fingers brush his shoulder, curling in at the top of his blanket and pulling down.

His eyes fly open, breath drawn to ask what the hell, to say Dean’s name in the most annoyed little brother way he has the energy for, but Dean just keeps tugging at the blankets, pulling until there’s cool air all along Sam’s back where it’s exposed and then the bed dips and, God. God, he’s.

Dean sinks into the bed behind him, his chest molding right up against Sam’s back, the shivery cold replaced with immediate, solid heat. There’s some more movement, some tugs on blankets and Dean shifting around behind him before he finally settles in, Dean’s mouth so close to his ear, the minty burn of his breath all over his nape.

“This okay?” Dean’s voice is petal-soft, like Sam’s fragile, like he’s already asleep. Sam blinks into the dark, his heart thudding against his ribcage. He nods, hair falling in his eyes as he does and he has to close his throat off around the whimper that wants to escape when Dean’s arm finds its way around him, slides around the small of his waist, bare skin on bare skin.

He closes his eyes again so he can concentrate, so he can feel the scratch of Dean’s gun callouses above his navel, so he can draw in a deep breath when Dean shifts even closer, when he can feel his nose pressed right up into his hair.
His lips part to suck in the next breath, and it tumbles back out in an audible sigh. Dean’s arm tightens the tiniest bit, just snugs Sam back against himself, one of his naked knees bumping between Sam’s.

“Don’t think you know how much I hate that I can’t protect you from everything,” Dean whispers right against his scalp, the words sliding across his skin. “How bad I wanna just keep you right here forever.”

Sam swallows, the sound obscene and loud in the dark room. He pauses, just a split second, before he slides his hand down Dean’s arm and lays it right over Dean’s hand, fingers slipping in between and holding on.

“Please,” is all he can think to say, is the only word slipping off the tip of his tongue. He feels Dean move in even closer somehow, his leg lifting to curl over top of Sam’s, to wrap around him, the other one pushing between his knees now, effectively cradling Sam almost completely.

“Want you to sleep, little brother. Please. Please just sleep. I’m not goin’ anywhere. Not lettin’ you go.” Sam lets Dean guide their hands up until they’re resting right over his heart that’s racing wild in his chest, pounding right against Dean’s palm. Sam curls in harder on himself, forcing Dean to come with him, to burrow them down into the bed, to practically cover him and God, of course they’re in Indiana. This could only happen in Indiana.

“Hold me tighter,” Sam whispers, lets himself say. His skin feels lit up, like it’s blazing everywhere Dean’s touching. Dean’s body tightens around him, the long press of his arm right against Sam’s sternum and it pushes the breath right out of him, leaves him with soft, uneven pants, with swallowed whimpers.

“Like this, Sammy?” Dean’s lips are right at the back of Sam’s ear now, brushing with every syllable. Sam nods, quick and emphatic and he wonders what they look like right now, what they’d look like to anyone who walked in, what they’d look like to Dad.

He can feel the heft of Dean’s cock on the meaty curve of his ass, can feel the dig of it, can feel the ridge of the head through thick flannel and he arches back a little, making Dean press in even harder, even closer until Sam can feel every inch of him, can feel Dean’s pulse in it.

“God, your heart’s racin’,” Dean murmurs, his lips now touching the top of Sam’s spine, pressing there. “It’s okay. Shh, just go to sleep.”

Sam nods again, not trusting himself to say anything else. He feels it when Dean relaxes behind him, both of them melting down into the bed. Dean’s sigh washes over his skin and he shivers, tightens his fingers around Dean’s hand just for a second, just a squeeze before he lets himself drift.

In the middle of the night, Sam’s eyes open like he’d just been blinking, not sleeping. Dean’s still on him and around him, still burning warm at his back, arms and legs wrapping Sam up tight.

“Did you ever dream about us like this? Being like this?” The room feels thick with heat, muggy with their damp skin. Sam can smell them, salty sweat and boy, dirty armpits and unclean fingernails. He drags the pad of his thumb over the tip of Dean’s forefinger, letting the jagged nail scrape him.

Dean takes a deep breath, awake because Sam’s awake, moving because Sam is moving. Sam feels the press of his nose in his sweaty hair and he wants to melt into a single body in this hot room, wants to have every excuse in the world to be this close.
“Only after you left,” Dean replies, finally, his voice lower than normal, scratchier, like the edge of a knife over rock. “Never had to dream about it before that.”

“What about the last few years?” There’s a hard lump in Sam’s throat, and he can’t seem to swallow past it. His chest aches, and Dean hugs him tighter, like he knows, like he can feel it. “The last few years I was with you and Dad, we. It was different.”

Dean’s quiet again, thinking. They don’t move, don’t stroke and rub, don’t shift or smell each other. Sam nudges his cheek into the pillow again, eyes drifting open to stare at the pile of their clothes in the corner, his own shirt tangled up with Dean’s jeans.

“Didn’t think you wanted me to anymore. Didn’t think you really needed me like that anymore.” Dean’s voice is strained, forced, like he’s saying what he knows he should instead of what he’s feeling.

“I needed you more than ever,” Sam whispers, wanting so badly to turn around, to curl up against Dean’s chest like he used to, like he did when he was little, before he fucked this all up between them. There’s still a wall up in him, still something keeping him from just giving into this completely, something in him that’s so terrified of what he’s feeling. Because Dean can’t be feeling this, not the way he is. It doesn’t mean the same thing to Dean. It never has.

“I remember the first time you pushed me away. It was a couple of weeks after my birthday. Just turned eighteen. I came to pick you up at school. We were in Mount Gilead, Ohio. You remember?” Dean pushes himself up onto his elbow so he can look down at Sam, but Sam can’t make himself open his eyes, face him. He feels Dean’s breath wash over his face but he shakes his head, lying, and they both know it.

“It was snowing, icy. You fell down,” Dean continues, his eyes on Sam’s face, their hands still clasped tight on Sam’s belly. “On the last step out of the school, books everywhere. You were so embarrassed. And I saw you, and.” Dean’s fingers flex between his own, thumb stroking up over Sam’s.

“I had to come over and help, Sammy. Had to. Couldn’t just see you like that, and.” Sam opens his eyes finally, turns a little on the bed until he’s looking up at Dean, watching Dean shake his head, like he’s shaking himself back into the present. “And I get over to you and help you pick up your books, and I help you up and you just kind of shoved me away. Said ‘quit embarrassing me, Dean.’ I mean, there were other kids around, and I. I mean, I get it now. I do. But then? It just fuckin’ hurt. Because you’d never said that to me. Dad? Yeah, all the time. But not to me. Never to me.”

“I didn’t mean it, Dean,” Sam replies in a rush, pushing over until he’s on his back, looking right up at his brother. His eyes are big in the dark, pleading and he tugs to keep Dean’s hand in his own, to keep it on his chest. “I was just an angry kid. I was an asshole. Hated myself and took it out on everybody around me.”

“It doesn’t matter. Doesn’t matter anymore. I didn’t mean to bring all that up. I guess I’m just.” Dean takes a deep breath that lifts his chest, draws Sam’s eyes down to the amulet there before he looks back up at Dean’s face. “Kind of overwhelmed right now.”

“Overwhelmed by what? Me?” Their grip on each other’s hands loosen but only so that Dean can flip his, their palms sliding together now, fingers tangling back together. It feels so good, so fucking beautiful, and the twelve-year-old in Sam is trembling with it.

“You. This.” A slow squeeze of Sam’s hand. “Just. Just not being alone again. But. But it’s more than that. I guess it’s more not being alone and with you again.”
“Is that good? Or bad?”

Dean meets his eyes and a smile pulls at his night-pale lips, and Sam barely resists the urge to touch them with his fingers.

“What do you think?”

Sam fights the blush that heats up his cheeks, grateful that Dean can’t see it in the dark.

“I think you’re really sweet in the middle of the night. I need to wake you up more often.” Sam can’t help but grin when Dean smirks at him, when he pulls on Sam’s hand to guide his arm around him. Sam lets go of Dean’s hand to slide his arm around, hand splaying over Dean’s back just as Dean settles down again.

“Not sweet,” Dean mumbles, breath hot on Sam’s face as he huffs. “Sleep talkin’.”

“Sleep sweet-talking,” Sam retorts, a yawn catching him off guard and startling Dean a little.

“Night, Sammy.” Dean edges closer on the pillow, their hair brushing, noses nearly touching. Sam watches Dean’s eyelashes shiver, watches the secret movement of his eyeball under the paper-thin skin of his eyelid. Breathes in the taste of Dean’s breath. Rubs at the notches of Dean’s spine. Feels every single time he inhales and exhales. He’s almost sure that he’s just dreaming now.

“Night.”

Sam’s still asleep when Dean gets out of the shower. He’d tried to make as much noise as he could, sang in the shower, let himself grumble when he stubbed his toe on the door frame. But Sam’s curled up right over the empty spot Dean had left when he got up, hair an untamed mess all over the pillow, face a little scruffy, sleep-soft.

Dean pulls on a pair of mostly clean underwear and tosses the towel toward the bathroom before sitting down on the side of the unused bed.

Last night had been… different. Different than all the hundreds of nights before when they’d fallen asleep in a bed together. Different than all the other nights they’ve been on the road together the last couple of weeks.

He can still feel the heat of Sam’s skin under his palms, can still hear the quiet of his breathing in his ear.

And he wants to get back in bed with him. Say fuck it and not get back out on the road, just get back in the bed with Sammy, under the covers that he knows are still warm. It’s cold out, truly winter now, first day of December. And Sam has the softest skin.

“Sammy,” he whispers, leaning forward to trail the crook of his finger up along Sam’s exposed forearm. So soft. He slips from the bed and onto his knees, water still dripping from his hair down his chest, down his back, bare knees digging into cheap carpet. He touches Sam’s arm again.

“Time to get up, sleepyhead.” Two fingers trailing down to Sam’s wrist, over the back of his hand, bumping over Sam’s long fingers. “C’mon, it’s Christmas morning.”

Sam makes the tiniest sound, one with a question mark at the end which Dean knows means he wants to be left the fuck alone, just wants to sleep. Sam’s hand wakens under Dean’s touch, fingers
loosening in their grip on his pillow. It lowers down to the mattress, palm splayed wide, fingers
sleep-curlved. Dean strokes over the inside of that hand, over life and heartlines, down over that
strange little full moon of a scar just on the inside of Sam’s wrist, like a brand.

He remembers that morning, that terrible morning in Tennessee when he’d found Sam sleeping in the
bed of Bobby’s truck. Remembers when that scar was still fresh, a perfect, horror-colored circle. A
burn. Sam probably thinks Dean’s forgotten, that he hadn’t noticed, hadn’t thought about it, maybe.
Maybe he’s forgotten that they’d almost talked about it once, that nightmare of a last night in Denver
all those years ago.

He circles the scar with the wide pad of his thumb before stroking over it as tender as he can, like it’s
a rose petal. Like it still hurts.

He glances up into Sam’s open eyes, caught.

“Did you do this?” He knows he shouldn’t ask, that it’s pretty much a guarantee that Sam’s going to
ignore him for the rest of the day because of it, but it just comes out. He keeps his thumb over it,
covering it, feeling the thrum of Sam’s heartbeat underneath.

Sam doesn’t blink, his expression staying smooth, almost serene. Keeps his eyes open when he
finally nods, just once, yes.

Dean nods, too, an echo. He rubs his thumb back up into Sam’s palm, revealing the scar to himself
again. He leans forward, bare belly against the side of the bed so he can get closer, really look at it,
almost like he’s been given permission.

“Why?” He’s whispering, like he’s afraid someone will hear him. He meets Sam’s eyes again,
searching them, looking for an answer there in case Sam’s words are a lie.

“Punishment.”

Sam’s voice is low, scratchy, reminding Dean that Sam’s an adult now, just like him. He’s not that
skinny heartbreak of a boy he found that morning, sleeping in the bed of Bobby’s truck like an
abandoned dog. He survived that and he’s here now, giving real answers. Dean swallows, his throat
clicking.

“Punishment for what?”

The corner of Sam’s mouth twitches, a flash of a smile, of a dimple, then gone. Dean searches his
eyes, counts the colors in them like he always does, finds three, maybe four in the light pushing
through the curtains.

“It’s not Christmas morning.” Sam sighs, sliding his hand down until it twins with Dean’s, fingers
lacing together just like last night.

Dean frowns, lost for a second before he picks up the thread of the conversation. He pushes up off
the floor in a single movement, turning to sit on the bed next to Sam, not letting go of his hand.

“Punishment for what, Sammy? Tell me?” He’s not demanding, not pushing him. Just asking, almost
begging. He watches Sam’s eyes trail over his body, over the water still clinging to him, making his
nipples hard, making goosebumps fly all up and down his chest, his arms.

“Maybe punishment’s not the right word.” Sam sighs, shifting closer to Dean on the bed, his free
hand coming out from under the covers to touch Dean’s knee, warm palm against his cool, clean
skin, fingers playing with the hairs on his leg. “More like keeping myself in line.”
Dean muses over that, watches Sam’s fingers stroke over his knee cap, thumb rubbing at the bony jut of it. Maybe lets his thighs spread a little, moving into it when Sam’s hand ventures ever so slightly toward the inside of his thigh.

“Control.” It’s not a question, but Sam nods anyway. Their eyes lift and meet again, and Sam’s hand shies away, slips down Dean’s shin. “What else did you do to keep yourself in line?”

Sam hums, chest rising quick and big before he lets out a heavy sigh. He blinks, and just like that, the spell’s broken, all the softness leaving him, all the sleep falling away. He sits up a little, takes his hand back from Dean’s leg to rub at his eyes.

“I need to take a shower. I smell like shit.” He sucks in a yawn and lets it out in a rush before pushing to sit up completely. “What’re we doing today? Heading back out?”

Dean shrugs, the disappointment of almost hearing a confession taking away his smile, pulls his shoulders down once again.

“Dunno. Thought we could just take it easy today. Maybe go see a movie or something.”

Sam raises his eyebrows, a hopeful light flashing through his eyes before it disappears behind a wall again.

“Really? Just, a day off. No hunting at all.”

Dean laughs, standing up so Sam can move finally. Sam’s eyes slide down his body again, gaze dragging hard, and Dean just pushes his shoulders back, pulls in his stomach a little, and lets him.

“I can go twenty-four hours without gutting something, if you can believe it, Sam.”

Sam stands up, clothes rumpled, his entire body so warm that Dean has to force himself not to lean into it.

“Guess you’ll just have to prove it,” Sam smiles, looking up at Dean through his eyelashes, a fucking flirty look if Dean’s ever seen one. His heart jumps just once in his chest.

“If you hurry and go wash that funky smell off of you, we could get the hell out of here and get some breakfast.” He shoves Sam toward the bathroom, fingers seeking a little as they connect with his chest and let go just as fast. Sam stumbles back toward the bathroom, his grin out completely now, bright as his little laugh.

“Gimme ten.” He looks at Dean just a few more seconds, eyes caught up on Dean’s chest before he disappears into the bathroom, door pulled closed behind him.

Dean exhales in a rush, two bright spots of color on his cheeks.

“I-I’m givin’ you seven and I’m leaving without you!”

He hears Sam scoff and he has to smile. They both know Dean would never leave him there, not in a million years.

They track down a Cracker Barrel and Dean gets the Country Boy Breakfast with a big smile at their waitress and makes a show of rolling his eyes at Sam’s Fresh Start whatever, with its granola whatever and fresh blah blah.
Sam only smiles at him when the waitress walks away and it makes Dean squirm, makes him fight every muscle in his face to keep in the dorky grin he just knows is dying to come out.

“Chilly in here, isn’t it?” Dean tugs his jacket tighter around him, frowning around the restaurant, eyes narrowing on the unused, gigantic fireplace. “Seriously? Man, if I had a fireplace, I’d have it on all the time. Remember that one in the shack Dad left us at here in Indiana that one winter, Sammy?”

He turns to face his brother again who’s playing the golf tee game on every Cracker Barrel in every small town on the planet, whose smile is soft and faraway and Dean questions for a second if Sam even heard him.

“Believe me, Dean. I’ll never forget that winter.” Sam lifts his eyes and they fix on something behind Dean. “Uh, excuse me, sir?”

Dean cranes around and sees a man in a uniform with a nametag headed straight for their table. He cringes, like he’s in school and the principal’s coming and he’s got a lit cigarette in his hand (what? he never did that). “Sammy, what the hell—”

“Can I help you?” The guy is greying and small-town politeness, and it calms Dean slightly. He looks up at Sam, eyebrows raised, completely curious as to what’s gonna come out of Sam’s mouth.

“It’s chilly in here. Is there any way you can get a fire going in that fireplace?” Sam is decidedly not looking at Dean now, his neck and cheeks a little flushed. Dean sinks down into his seat, equal parts touched and annoyed. He’s not that cold. Just chilly, is all.

“Sure thing, son! You’re the second one to ask in the last few minutes. It’ll be up and blazing in no time.”

Dean rolls his eyes.

Sam’s grin is little-boy wholesome. “Thank you, sir.”

The guy walks away from their table, and Sam goes back to his game, hair falling in his eyes. Dean smirks.

“Didn’t have to do that, you know.”

“You’re welcome,” Sam mumbles, a smile ghosting his lips.

“Not that cold,” Dean’s voice is soft, can’t help it, his eyes matching. Sam looks up through the long strands in his eyes and his smile widens, every single bit of him trained on Dean, nowhere else. Dean shifts closer to him.

Dean feels Sam’s fingers brushing his own where they’re spread across his thigh. He tips his fingers up, lets them slide over Sam’s, hands tangling together for the third time in less than a day. But this time is different, it’s in public, in Smalltown, USA, and they both know it.

“Fingers are freezing,” Sam murmurs, rubbing his thumb over and over Dean’s scarred knuckles. Dean shifts again in the seat, ribs pressed hard into the side of the table, as close as he can get. His cheeks are hot now, and the fire hasn’t even been started yet.

“You do this for all your girlfriends?” Dean’s going for flirty, but he realizes what he says after he’s said it. Sam’s face shuts down, smile disappearing like it was never there. He pulls his hand away before Dean can even react, before he can stumble back over his own stupidity.
They can’t talk about Jessica in everyday conversation, not yet. Not even hint at it, not without Sam reacting exactly like this.

Sam turns back to the game, moving the tees from one peg to another until he ends up with only one. He pushes them all back into place and shoves the game toward Dean.

“Your turn.”

Dean knows he should apologize, but he also knows it’ll just make Sam more angry. He holds in a sigh and reaches for the game, staring at all the tees before he starts to move them.

“You think, uh, think maybe we can stop back by the motel on the way to the movie theater so I can borrow your hoodie for the movies? Gets even colder in there, and this jacket’s not exactly snuggly.”

Sam looks up at him, looks him full in the face, mouth parted, eyes wide with surprise. Dean’s just relieved Sam’s not ignoring him.

“You wanna wear my hoodie?”

Dean hesitates, chews on his bottom lip, thinks over his words. Tries to figure out if this is some kind of trap.

“Yeah?”

Sam’s smile is so sudden and so bright it’s nearly blinding. He ducks his head, tries to hide it, but the damage has already been done. Dean laughs, a short bark, relieved.

“That okay? Think you can share with me, little brother? I promise I’ll wash it after I wear it.”

Sam’s hand is back on his knee suddenly, seeking out his hand. Dean stops playing the stupid game and rushes his hand back under the table, letting Sam’s lace with it, clutch at it. Sam’s eyes are burning into his.

“No, you won’t.”

There’s a heat in his words, one that’s so thick right here between them, right now. Dean licks his lips, body thrumming low for the way Sam watches it. Watches him.

“Okay,” Dean says, soft, only for Sam, not for the middle-aged couple at the table next to them who have been eyeing them a little accusingly ever since they sat down. “I won’t. Kinky bastard.”

That draws a laugh out of Sam, a shy one. There are serving trays carrying plates just above their heads suddenly, the smell of bacon permeating Dean’s brain, making his stomach growl.

They let go of each other’s hands, but Sam’s still watching Dean as plates are lowered to the table, filling up the tiny space. The fire’s going now, a welcome heat at Dean’s back, truly warming his cold fingertips. And he’s used to being cold, being hot, being rained on, being sunburned, being stabbed, being stitched back together, but this feels good. Really good. Like a luxury. Like it’s okay to want to just be warm.

“Eat up, Sammy,” he says finally, after the servers are gone, as he unrolls his silverware from the napkin. “Don’t let your granola get cold.”

Sam smirks, just like Dean knew he would, and Sam’s foot kicks out at his shins just as Dean laughs. Sam keeps his foot where it lands between both of Dean’s, and Dean tightens his legs just to cradle it
They argue about seeing *Syriana* or *Walk the Line* for ten minutes outside the theater just to waste some time. Sam knows he’ll give in and see *Walk the Line* because Dean wants to see it, knows he doesn’t give a shit what they see because all that matters is that today isn’t about a hunt, or about driving, or about the nightmares he can’t stop having. It’s about the way Dean keeps looking at him out of the corners of his eyes, like some shy kid on his first date, the way Sam can still feel the ghost of each whorl of Dean’s fingertips on his skin where they’d held hands—*held hands*, like teenagers, like children, like a lovesick couple of saps who can’t stand to not touch even while they’re eating their breakfast.

So, yeah, he forks out the nearly twenty dollars to see some Johnny Cash flick, near the last of his money from his part-time job in the bookstore back at school.

The little smile on Dean’s face as he pockets their tickets makes it worth it. All of it.

Dean’s wearing his hoodie, his brown one. It’s a little long on his arms, a little big across his shoulders, hiding the tight of his body under too-soft cotton but, for Sam, it’s almost better than having Dean naked. It’s Dean in something that’s his, something he’d asked to wear. It’s Dean looking a little claimed, at least to Sam.

He heads for the boy waiting to collect their tickets and stumbles a little when he feels Dean grab hold of his arm.

“Dean, what the--”

“Whoa, whoa. Sammy, it’s like you don’t know me at all.” Dean looks dumbfounded, like Sam is the most absurd human being on the planet. Sam just stares at him, eyebrows raised, waiting for an explanation.

Dean sighs, his shoulders falling, the picture of disappointment but they’re both still almost smiling.

“Popcorn, man! Those gummy frogs! Nestle Crunch! Cherry Coke! Cookie--”

“Okay, okay, I get it. Jesus, you don’t have to name off everything on the menu,” Sam mutters, reaching for his wallet again as Dean walks right up to the girl at the counter with a big grin on his face.

Five minutes later, they’re feeling their way into a nearly empty theater, weighted down with way too much junk food.

“Sorry they didn’t have any carrots, Sammy. You’d think they’d have a hippie section.” Dean slides down into a seat in the very last row in the back of the theater, where only the bad kids or the horny ones sit. Sam wonders which ones they are as he sinks down next to his brother.

“You just had breakfast,” Sam points out as he passes Dean the popcorn and the weird gummy frogs. Dean pokes a straw into his drink and takes a sip before he blinks over at Sam thoughtfully, like that hadn’t really occurred to him.

“Yeah, well. That was like half an hour ago.” He gives Sam his best little boy grin as he rips into the package of frogs, popping two in his mouth right alongside a handful of popcorn. “Hey, Sammy,
you ‘member that summer we lived next door to that dollar theater? And we saw a movie every damn day?’

Sam snorts, twisting the cap on and off his bottle of water. “When we saw *House Arrest* nine times?”

“Yeah! Oh, shit. We need to find that movie. I bet we still know all the words.” Dean munches and crunches and opens his other candy, offering Sam each one as he does and not reacting when Sam shakes his head every time.

“Haven’t been to the movies in a long time.” Sam lowers his voice just as the theater goes dark and the previews start up, but there’s only two more people in here, down near the front.

“Didn’t go back at school?” Dean pushes everything aside but his gummy frogs, turned a little toward Sam, like he’s here to listen to Sam in a huge dark room instead of here to see a movie. Sam smiles, angles a little toward Dean in return, not really able to meet his eyes.

Sam shakes his head, chewing on his bottom lip. “ Couldn’t really afford it. Plus I was always too busy studying. And Jess and I just liked to watch TV.”

It hurts to bring her up, but he does it on purpose, to give Dean a hint into how he’s feeling, that he’s doing better, can bring her up without falling apart. Dean gets it, he can tell, can see it in the flick of his eyes, in the way he straightens his shoulders a little.

“I haven’t been in awhile either. Not like I’m gonna take a girl out on a date or anything. And I haven’t been to the movies with Dad since the second *Ghostbusters* movie came out. He almost got us kicked out because he wouldn’t stop pointing out every fucking thing they were doing wrong in it.” Dean offers Sam a frog again, and Sam takes one just for something to do, just for a reason to reach out for Dean for a second.

They both grin at the thought of Dad and his hatred for the *Ghostbusters*, at all his lectures about the movies over the years.

“He’s such a dick,” Sam says with a quiet laugh and a shake of his head, the frog squishing in his mouth.

“He’d never go see this movie with me.” Dean’s voice is soft, his way of saying thank you. He’s looking down at his half-eaten bag of gummies, looks so much like a little boy in the hoodie with his candy that Sam’s chest aches.

He sinks back in his seat, heart racing for the words he wants to say, that he’s working up to. He leans over, mouth close to Dean’s ear, eyes turned toward the screen showing a preview for some action movie about cars.

“Look good in my hoodie.” He sounds much more confident than he is, his nose brushing against the curve of Dean’s ear. He pulls away and busies himself with his water, unscrewing the cap and taking a big drink, ignoring how hot his cheeks feel. He can feel Dean’s eyes on him, feel his smirk.

“Yeah? Would it look better on your floor?”

Sam glances over at him, his eyebrows raised.

“...No. Cause, I mean. Then it’s just my hoodie on the floor. Not that hot then.”

Dean’s face lights up, even in the dark, a grin taking over.
“Think I look hot, huh?”

Sam’s definitely blushing now, and he nudges Dean with his shoulder.

“Shh, movie’s starting.”

They’re quiet for awhile, Dean probably watching the movie and Sam just staring at the screen, his mind and focus on the boy beside him, thinking about how Dean’s fingers probably taste sweet with candy and salty with popcorn, thinking about how soft he probably feels if they could curl up somewhere right now, how good he’d feel to hold, about how good it feels to sit next to his brother and they aren’t heading anywhere, they aren’t fighting, they aren’t threatening or being threatened.

Just when he’s about to turn his attention to the movie, to try and catch up with the plot, he feels Dean shift beside him, feels his mouth right up against his ear, just like Sam’s had been on him earlier.

“Used to feel like that when you wore that Zeppelin shirt of mine. Loved seeing you in it, ‘specially at school, around all those people, around your friends. Like you were mine, no matter where you were. Like everybody knew it or somethin’.”

Sam’s eyes are stuck on the screen, glued there, unblinking, his breath stuck in his throat, his entire face on fire, heart stampeding in his chest. He can’t believe it, can’t believe Dean just said that, can’t believe it could be true, that Dean felt like that back then, back when. When.

“Didn’t take a shirt to make me yours,” Sam murmurs, eyes lowered finally, staring down at his hands trembling a little in his lap.

“What would it take to make you mine again, Sammy? Tell me. Just tell me.” He feels the slide of Dean’s pinky against the side of his hand, feels it stroke across his palm and his eyes fall closed, forcing himself to breathe normally, slowly.

He wants to get on his knees right here, in a movie theater in the middle of the day in some tiny town in Indiana, wants to show Dean that nothing’s changed even though everything did change, that they’re still who they were back then, when they were young, when they were already dancing around each other, eyes always on each other.

“Watch the movie, Dean,” he says softly, unable to keep the plea out of his voice. Dean’s whole hand is stroking over his own now, spooned on top of it, fingertips stroking over Sam’s fingernails, his knuckles.

“Can’t believe you’re here with me.” Dean’s voice is so soft Sam feels like maybe Dean isn’t talking to him, that he wasn’t supposed to hear that. Dean’s forehead rests against his temple and Sam’s eyes slip closed as he leans on Dean, nuzzles toward him, his throat too tight to swallow. “God, just can’t believe it sometimes. Feels like I’m dreamin’.”

He doesn’t say anything back, couldn’t possibly find words right now. His eyes are stinging with tears and he’s clutching at Dean’s hand on his thigh, gripping it tight, his lifeline. He tips his head up so that their noses graze each other, just for a second. There’s a song playing right now in the movie, some slow heartache of a song, and Sam feels like he’s in a movie himself, like this is the breath before the plunge.

He sighs when Dean’s mouth slides over his jaw, when his soft lips brush down over the line of his neck, damp heat of his breath everywhere. There’s a rhythm between them even now, a cadence to their movements, to the give and take of breath, to the clutch of their hands, to the ghost of Dean’s
mouth on his neck, to the way he strains toward it, begs for it, begs for it.

“Did it used to be like this? Has it always been like this?” Dean sounds like he’s in a trance, like he’s not himself, like he’s wondering out loud. Sam nods then, knows the answer to those questions, knows the truth. Yes, it’s always been like this, always felt like this, at least for him. Even when he was young, too young, he always felt the ache of being close to Dean, close but not close enough. Never close enough.

They’re still never close enough. He realizes now that there’s no such thing.

They’re quiet when they leave the movie theater, a good kind of quiet like they’re on the same page, like they don’t really need to talk because they’re riding the same wave.

Dean drives Sam to a chain bookstore and sticks close by him while Sam browses, while he pokes at the classics section and the plays, while he digs around in the reference books and skims through sexuality. He pulls a beginners guide to gay sex out and smiles a little to himself when he sees how red Dean’s cheeks are, when Dean turns away and looks way too interested in the astrology books.

“Hm,” Sam finally says when he’s done looking through it, when he’s seen some interesting positions and actually read a paragraph about which one is best for both partners. He sticks the book back on the shelf and pretends he doesn’t see it when Dean pulls it back out and slides it into the pocket of his hoodie.

They venture around awhile longer, and Sam buys a copy of *On the Road* and a couple of Americanos from the little cafe inside before they leave, walking out into the late afternoon of a cloudy day. Dean tosses Sam the keys without looking at him and Sam doesn’t question it, just unlocks the car and climbs in the driver seat.

“Your jacket’s a klepto,” Dean announces, pulling the book out of his pocket and squinting down at it as Sam snorts and starts the car up. “*Bend Over: The Complete Guide to Anal Sex.*”

Sam blushes but he manages to keep his dignity as he backs out of the parking lot, very purposefully not looking over at his fucking stunning, beautiful brother looking through a book about gay sex.

“Huh,” Dean grunts, turning the book over on its side as he stares at one of the pages. “Doesn’t look all that different than fuckin’ a chick.”

Sam licks his lips before drawing the bottom one into his mouth to chew on it. He’s not going to start campaigning for gay sex, spouting off reasons a guy can and would do it so much better. Not in broad daylight, not while he’s driving, and not to his brother.

“Don’t know why you’d need to look through this anyway,” Dean continues, finally glancing over at Sam. Sam raises his eyebrows out at the car in front of him, not looking at Dean, absolutely refusing. “I’m sure what’s-his-name gave you plenty of pointers himself.”

Sam’s eyebrows go a little higher. “Who?”

Dean’s flipping through the book more aggressively now, not really looking at anything before he turns the page. “That dick, the one who wouldn’t keep his hands offa you.”

Sam finally glances over at him. “You mean Dom?”

Dean shuts the book with a hard slap, tossing it in the floorboard and slumping back in the seat.
“Yeah, I guess. Whatever his fuckin’ name was.”

“You know what his name was. He was your boss,” Sam reminds him, coming to a stop at a redlight. He’s maybe enjoying this a little, Dean still scowling and getting pissed over something that happened years ago.

“Yeah, well. You knew him better. He didn’t fuck me.” Dean’s jaw is set, a scowl taking over his entire face. Sam just stares at him, mouth parted. A car horn blasts behind him and he slams on the gas, turning his attention back to the road.

Well,” Sam starts, licking his lips nervously. He glances in the rearview, hands tightening on the wheel. “He didn’t really fuck me either.”

They’re quiet for a few beats, both of them still but then Dean’s looking over at him, confusion coming off of him in waves.

“What are you talking about? You spent the weekend at his place. You came home that day, and. And you told me. Y-you told me what he did to you. You told me.”

Sam pulls into the parking lot of the motel, sliding the car into a space and killing the engine. The world falls so quiet around them that the air is thrumming with it, with the silence that Dean’s waiting in, watching him in. Sam keeps his hands on the wheel, eyes trained on the yellowed curtains in the motel lobby.

“Maybe I lied.”

A few more beats and Dean leans toward him, moves closer. The heat of him is so good in the still-cold car, the smell of him enough to make Sam’s eyes flutter.

“Why would you lie about that? Why would you tell me that when it wasn’t true?”

“Doesn’t matter now,” Sam mutters, hands falling from the wheel and landing in his lap. “Does it?”

“Yeah. Yeah, it does matter, Sam. I fucking broke that guy’s nose. I. It was all I could think about for weeks. It was my fault that you left when you did. Because I got pissed at you for that. I could have had you there a little bit longer, if I hadn’t’ve. If.”

“I didn’t know all that was going to happen, Dean,” Sam laughs in a breathless, humorless huff, still not daring to look over at his brother even though he can feel those eyes burning on him. “It’s over now though. That was years ago. There’s nothing we can do about it now.”

He opens the door and steps out into the cold afternoon, the grey of it pushing down all around them. He pulls his jacket closer around him and closes his door just in time to see Dean climb out, too, the book getting shoved back in his pocket.

Sam walks to the door of their room and waits there for Dean. Dean’s hand closes around Sam’s arm for the second time that afternoon and he pushes Sam this time, shoves him back against the door and Sam goes, falls back against it, eyes lowered, not meeting Dean’s gaze, not even now.

“So he didn’t fuck you? Answer me, yes or no.”

“No,” Sam grits out, his teeth grinding together.

“Are you tellin’ me you’re still a virgin?”
Sam looks up at him then, looks right up into his eyes in surprise.

“Dean, I had a girlfriend for—”

“I mean,” Dean starts way too loudly, realizing it with a start when he hears a car door close nearby. He steps closer into Sam’s space, voice dropping low. “I mean. With guys.”

He doesn’t want to tell him about Jess, about what she’d done to him, what they’d done together. It had been different and Sam had known it then, knows it now. Letting Jess f**k him in the ass is much different than if he’d let Dom. Let any guy. And he knows what Dean is asking.

“Yeah.” He feels a little embarrassed, like it’s something to be ashamed of. He feels Dean’s eyes on him, studying his face. Hates the way his cheeks are burning red.

He makes a soft noise when Dean steps in against him, their chests brushing and then digging together, and Sam has no choice now, has to look up at him, has to meet Dean’s eyes. Dean is completely unreadable right now, looking pissed off and pleased all at the same time.

“Don’t lie to me again,” he huffs out right against Sam’s mouth, the words a growl against his lips. He nods, a shaky jerk of movement, the rest of him frozen, too afraid of messing up, of ruining this, to move.

They stay there for another few seconds and Sam lets his eyes fall closed, lips going slack because it feels so close, feels like maybe Dean wants to kiss him, like maybe--

Dean pulls away, hands dropping away from their grip on Sam’s arms. He tugs the keys out of Sam’s grasp and steps back toward the car, his back to Sam before he speaks again.

“Goin’ out. I’ll be back later.” He doesn’t glance back at Sam, doesn’t even pause as he climbs in the car and pulls the door shut behind him, the engine firing up only a second later. He pulls out just as the snow starts up again, and Sam turns back to the door, moving on autopilot as he digs the key out of his pocket.

There’s a *Law and Order: Criminal Intent* marathon on cable, and Sam watches every single episode. It goes off at midnight, makes way for infomercials.

Dean’s still gone.

Sam had called him once, braved being yelled at, being told to fuck off, but Dean hadn’t answered.

He has his laptop out, fumbling around on the internet, catching up on some online comics and checking his email. He has a few porn videos stowed away in a folder on his desktop, but even when he clicks on the folder and looks through them, nothing sparks his interest. He scrubs a hand over his face and shuts the computer.

He climbs into bed in just his sweatpants, pulls the covers up to just beneath his nose. The sheets still smell like Dean.

Dean who’s been gone for nearly seven hours now, who’s still wearing his hoodie, who is furious at him for something that *didn’t happen* four fucking years ago.

He thinks very cruelly about calling Dom, telling him everything that’s happened, let him know he’s okay. It’s only then that he realizes he’ll never talk to Dom again, that he can’t drag him into
whatever his life is now. That it’s the only real way to make sure somebody stays safe.

And anyway, Dom has a boyfriend now, some college boy named Zach, some pert and perky dimpled thing with a careless smile, or at least he has one in the pictures on Dom’s Myspace. And good for them. Good for them for being happy. Good for Dom for finding someone who will love him.

It’s not wrong to want someone to love you. It’s not wrong to know who you want to love you.

Sam turns over with a sigh, facing Dean’s empty bed and thinks just as his eyes slip closed that this bed he’s in had felt like theirs, even if it had only been true for one night.

His eyes snap open when he hears a key in the door.

He doesn’t know how much time has passed, doesn’t know what time it is, just knows that he’s completely awake, that he feels like he’s been waiting more than sleeping.

“You gonna keep suckin’ my dick, or’s your jaw hurt yet?”

Dean’s slurring a little, just a little, talking louder than he probably realizes. Sam hears the wet sound of kissing and his stomach lurches hard, painful. A girl. He’s brought a fucking girl to their room.

“Want you to fuck me.” Her voice is soft, annoying flower-dainty girl soft, plenty whiskey-soaked itself because she giggles at the end. Sam’s eyes adjust to the dark and he sees them, sees a long spill of brown hair and Dean’s hands on her ass, yanking up the flower-printed dress to reveal it, giving both cheeks two hard slaps. She gasps, whines a little, and all Sam can see is the wild, wet look in Dean’s eyes as he walks them back toward the bed, closer to Sam.

“What’d you say? Hm? Get my dick out again.”

The back of the girl’s knees hit the mattress and she sits down immediately, too drunk to react fast enough to stay on her feet. Her little hands yank at Dean’s zipper, the button already undone. He’s looming over her as she pulls his pants down and reaches into his underwear, shoulders broad, jaw set, eyes focused completely on her, like Sam’s not even there, like Sam’s getting a view into Dean’s life alone, what it had been like while he was at Stanford.

Except he’s here now, and Dean knows it. Knows exactly what he’s doing.

“Said I want you to fuck me.” She sounds like she means it this time, and Dean’s dick is out now, grasped in her hand as she starts to jerk him off and god it’s beautiful, Sam can see how fucking gorgeous it is even when he feels the bile burning in the back of his throat. He has to get up, has to leave, has to get out of here somehow.

Dean moves suddenly, gets his arms underneath the girl’s legs and he lifts them as he shoves her back up on the bed, the blankets dragging up with her. He shoulders Sam’s hoodie off and tosses it on the floor, like it’s nothing before he crawls up after her, pulling her legs up onto his shoulders. There’s the tell-tell crinkle of a condom packet and a tight look on Dean’s face as the girl apparently fits it over his dick.

Sam closes his eyes the second Dean pushes in, right when the girl lets out the first gasp, the first whimper.

The bedframe starts to snap against the wall immediately, the bed whining and squeaking under their
weight, under the rut of Dean’s hips. He doesn’t make a sound, doesn’t grunt or pant, and all Sam can hear is her, her little cries, the wet sounds of her pussy, all her.

“What—what about him? Wh—what if he wakes up?”

The sound of the bed gets even louder then, even more frantic, and Sam hears Dean growl, a low, warning sound.


Dean apparently hits something perfectly right because she’s moaning now, long, keening sounds that have Sam nearly hyperventilating, unable to breathe. He can’t process it all, doesn’t know what to feel, doesn’t know what to focus on other than no, no, no, not this, please not this, have to leave, can’t be here have to get out of here.

It doesn’t take long for her to come for the first time, the rhythm getting even more violent, even deeper, the wet, sucking slap of their bodies overpowering nearly everything else and Dean’s panting now, the air smelling like salt and sweat and Sam’s nail is digging so hard into his scar that he breaks skin, blood smearing all over.

“Gonna come,” Dean grits out, the rough slaps slowing down, get even harder. “Gonna come in that pussy.”

Sam’s frozen, his muscles tense and shaking and he feels light-headed, like he’s never going to take a full breath again. He thinks stupidly, childishly of Dean’s hand in his own when Dean finally comes, thinks of the way they’d practically cuddled in the movie theater, thinks of how naive he’d been only a few hours ago that maybe it meant something, that maybe they were heading for something. But now.

Now Dean’s finishing her off again with his hand, more wet sounds and she’s practically screaming just like Dean always gets his girls to do. Sam’s got his face buried in the blankets, chest lifting and falling erratically. Maybe this isn’t really happening. This can’t really be happening.

He doesn’t hear them kiss, not even once. Just hears a few movements and then her voice is away, closer to the door.

“So, if you wanna do that again, I’ll—”

“I don’t aim to be here longer than tonight.” Dean sounds sluggish, like he’s not even really listening, like he just knows what most girls say at this point. She says something else, something a little sad, like a goodbye. The door opens again and it’s freezing cold out there, more snow on the ground. And then she’s gone.

The quiet that settles in is awake, knowing.

They’re listening to each other, listening for each other.

Sam wants to be a child again just so he can cry, just so he can throw a tantrum. Just so he can say how could you? and deserve an answer.

Dean shifts around on the bed and then he’s standing up, shuffling toward the bathroom. The light from it floods the room before the door closes, leaving Sam alone in the dark once again.

The shower comes on.
He thinks about leaving. About gathering all his shit up and taking off, hotwire a car in the parking lot, hitchhike. Hell, maybe he will call Dom.

But he won’t. He won’t, and he can’t, and he feels deep down, somewhere, that he deserved that. That he earned it. He can imagine what Jess would say to that, what Dom would say, if they knew. If they really knew Sam and knew what he thought when he looked at his brother. They’d both call him a fucking idiot. Call him obsessed. Tell him how unhealthy it is, that Sam didn’t do anything wrong.

But he did, and he knows he did. Even if it was years ago. He’s paying for it now.

And that’s why he stays where he is.

Dean comes out just a couple of minutes later, towel around his waist like an afterthought. He smells so fucking good, like soap and wet and he’s tugging on a pair of boxers and ripping all the sheets off the bed, Sam watching all of it through barely-open eyes, through his lashes.

Dean falls down into his bare bed and turns over on his side away from Sam, and that’s that. Punishment dealt, punishment taken. Like Dean’s some kind of emotionally blackmailing vigilante.

Sam hates Indiana.

They don’t talk about it.

They head to St. Louis, meet up with Sam’s friend Becky from college, and walk right into Sam’s nightmare.

He’s the one who takes the necklace from Dean, the one who ties a new knot in it and only really breathes when Dean slips it back around his neck, the amulet hanging heavy against his chest.

Sam keeps looking at him, looking into his eyes, looking for the flash of silver to give Dean away as a shapeshifter again. Dean looks shock-pale, drained, even under the sweat. Sam knows Dean keeps picturing the shapeshifter-Dean slumped over, unmoving, two bullets in him.

Sam can’t unsee it, can’t unknow the fact that he’s now seen what Dean would look like dead. It’s enough to make tears rise in his eyes, to make him look over at Dean in the passenger seat when he yanks the door closed, Becky climbing into the back.

“What?” Dean’s looking straight ahead into the damp night as he starts the car up, not over at Sam even though he knows the answer to his own question. They both do. Sam reaches over, fingers a trembling silhouette in the streetlit dark before they light on Dean’s neck, touch at the knot in the cord of his necklace.

“What?” Dean’s looking straight ahead into the damp night as he starts the car up, not over at Sam even though he knows the answer to his own question. They both do. Sam reaches over, fingers a trembling silhouette in the streetlit dark before they light on Dean’s neck, touch at the knot in the cord of his necklace.

“Just,” Sam whispers, knowing that Becky is listening to them, watching them, doesn’t understand. His fingers tumble over the necklace and push at the sweaty strands of Dean’s hair, just a reminder, just real quick, that Dean’s okay, that he’s alive, real, right here.

Dean looks over at him, the hunter-mask slipping as their eyes meet and it’s all right there, all in the vulnerable soft of his expression. Sam wants to press in close, to move next to him, to tuck up under his arm, to smell Dean, just to make sure. The shapeshifter had smelled different, a weird, metallic
smell, like something artificial. He just wants to make sure.

“It’s me, Sammy,” Dean says soft, quiet, just over Queen playing from the radio, hopefully muffling the words from Becky because they aren’t for her.

“Just. Let’s take her home.” Sam lets his hand fall away, fingers sliding across as much skin, as much of Dean as he can before he curls back up on himself. He’s bleeding, lip busted, hurting all over but there’s a weird, liquid relief pulsing through him, like something right has happened, underneath it all.

They drive through the afternoon, stopping when Dean’s stomach can’t handle being empty anymore. They share a bag of Krystals and a huge Coke and check into a motel that’s just been cleaned right before they show up, the sheets still fresh-smelling and warm. Dean showers with the door cracked and Sam sits on the bed and listens to it, the sound of the water over Dean’s body, the sound of Dean being here.

He still feels a strange need to cry, like he’d been holding his breath and can now let it go. His elbows dig into his knees as he buries his face in his hands and sighs into his palms, fingertips pushing hard at his eyes. He wants to be shaken, to be pulled out of this like being yanked out of the water when you’re drowning. He knows Dean’s okay. He just needs to feel that Dean’s okay.

“Sammy?”

Sam lifts his head, his eyes red and sore and Dean’s standing in the doorway of the bathroom, his hair sticking up in crazy ways, amulet resting faithfully on his bare chest. He’s wearing the same kind of black boxer briefs that Sam had gotten him years ago, and Sam gives Dean the barest hint of a smile.

“You need to shave, Dean. You’re gettin’ a nine o’clock shadow now.”

Dean frowns, all the real concern leaving his face as he reaches up and rubs over his scruffy cheeks. He looks infuriatingly adorable as he crinkles his eyebrows.

“Really?”

Sam’s smile is tired but he pushes himself up to his feet, his body loose as he walks toward his brother.

“Yeah, a little.”

Dean takes a step back into the bathroom, like he’s luring Sam there. He’s smirking now, almost like he knows how sexy he is.

“You wanna shave me? Since apparently I’m so shitty at knowin’ when I need to?”

Sam feels warm all over at the thought, at the glimpse of what could be his immediate future. Apparently the answer is all over his face because Dean is grinning, all timid and cute, taking a few more steps back until his butt hits the sink.

“My razor needs a battery,” Dean finally admits, looking a little sheepish about it when he meets Sam’s eyes again. “Forgot to get one in St. Louis.”

“We were a little busy.” Sam smiles, not a full one, not one that reaches his eyes. He pictures him
again, the thing that pretended to be his brother, that made his brother frightening, a threat. “We can, uh. We can use mine? I’m old school.”

Sam manages to leave the bathroom again and dig through his duffel for his razor and shaving cream, coming back to find Dean in the same spot, looking a little tired, maybe a little haunted.

“Hop up.” Sam instructs him, nodding up at the sink. Dean turns and glances at the sink before looking back up at Sam, his eyebrows lifting.

“Dunno, Sammy. Thinkin’ my fat ass’ll break that thing.”

Sam snorts, shaking his head as he tugs off his hoodie so he doesn’t get it wet. “There’s nothing fat on you, Dean. Go on.”

Dean hefts himself up, and the sink moves a little under his weight but stays, predictably, intact. “Gotta fat dick,” he retorts, lifting his eyes to smirk at Sam.

Sam flushes, can’t fucking help it, feeling it go all the way to the tips of his ears. He plugs up the sink and runs hot water in it, turning his gaze to Dean while it fills.

“Scruff McGruff,” he mumbles, letting his eyes rake over Dean’s face from this close, where he can see every individual hair, every tiny color in his eyes. Dean huffs a laugh but doesn’t say anything in reply, looking shy, of all the things in the world for Dean Winchester to be.

He shuts off the water and grabs a clean towel off the back of the toilet, wrapping it around Dean’s neck. He steps between his bare thighs as he squeezes some shaving cream out onto his fingers, getting in probably closer than he needs to while he spreads the cream out on Dean’s cheeks.

Dean takes a deep breath, his eyes falling closed while Sam gets some water on his fingers and rubs back over the cream, slicking it up a little, keeping his touch light, all gentle, careful. He grabs the razor and lets his mind shut down as he focuses on the task at hand, eyes zeroing in as he starts on one cheek, dragging the razor down as he holds Dean’s head in place with the other hand.

Dean doesn’t tense, doesn’t open his eyes, doesn’t react at all. He’s utterly docile, moving how Sam wants him to, trusting him so much that it makes Sam ache. He tips Dean’s face up with a crooked finger under his chin, shaving up his throat and the sharp lines of his jaw, all the places that he’s wanted to kiss since he was in grade school, all the places that are tender and exposed to him, just to him right now.

“Didn’t know somebody so tall’n goofy could have such a light touch.” Dean’s just barely smiling, hardly moving his mouth to speak, and Sam can’t help but grin.

“Shouldn’t make fun of somebody who’s got a razor to your throat,” he reminds him, stroking his fingers over Dean’s Adam’s apple just as Dean tightens his legs around his waist a little, the insides of his knees catching on Sam’s hips.

“Not makin’ fun. It was a compliment.” Dean’s hands are on his own thighs but his fingertips are touching Sam’s belt loops, forefingers tugging on the ones closest to the button on his jeans. Sam pauses, raises his eyebrows at Dean even though his eyes are closed.

“Goofy is a compliment?”

“Goofy’s my favorite of Mickey’s friends,” Dean mumbles as Sam shaves his upper lip, pulling his lips down a little so Sam can get to it before he continues to the other cheek. “Total stud. Badass.”
“So you think I’m a tall, badass stud?” He rinses the blades out before he starts in on Dean’s sideburns and continues over the wide part of his cheek, so close to being done but he doesn’t want this to end.

“Maybe,” Dean shrugs, all coy but he’s smiling, smiling in a way that Sam can tell means Dean’s probably actually thinking of Goofy, probably thinking of a hundred lame jokes before he settles on one. “Or maybe I’m just bein’ nice because you have a razor to my throat.”

Sam sighs, so put-upon, rinsing out the razor one last time and lifting the towel around Dean’s neck to dab at his cheeks until they’re dry.

“So sweet, Dean.”

Dean reaches up and touches his smooth cheeks, his eyes bright when they find Sam’s, grin lighting up his whole face. “Gawrsh, Sammy! Thanks.”

Sam lets the water out of the sink, rinsing it clean, all without moving from the warm hug of Dean’s thighs. “Jerk,” he mumbles, drying his hands off on the towel, strangely timid about meeting Dean’s eyes again.

“Pretty good at that, little brother.” Dean’s voice is soft and feels closer now, like he’s looking right at Sam, wanting his eyes on him. “Might have to keep you around. Get you to do that every once in awhile.”

Sam shrugs, blushing again, taking a step back before he can look up and catch Dean’s eyes. “If you want.”

Dean holds his gaze, not letting go even when he slides down from the sink. “I do.”

He turns around and faces the mirror, examining his newly-shaven face, stroking across his cheeks like he knows how beautiful he is. Sam steps up again, can’t help it, his hands feeling so big as they light on Dean’s hips, nearly spanning his narrow waist. He dips down just a little, eyes closing in some kind of reverence as he presses a kiss to Dean’s cool, clean shoulder, right over a particularly favorite smatter of freckles.

He keeps his lips there for just a second, just so they both know it wasn’t an accident, that he doesn’t regret it. He’s not brave enough to look up though, to meet Dean’s eyes in the mirror before he leaves the bathroom, stepping back out into the main room, busying himself with putting his bag away.

They stay quiet for a few minutes, a waiting kind of feeling in the air. Sam checks his gun, sets it on the table next to Dean’s. Checks the locks on the door. Checks the windows. Dean steps out of the bathroom, wearing jeans now, two bright points of red on his cheeks.

So, uh,” he starts, clearing his throat gently. “We’re in Kansas.”

“I know, Dorothy,” Sam smiles, shoving his hands in his pockets, eyes on his own feet.

“Know what that means?” Dean’s pulling a shirt on now, and Sam sighs as all those long, lovely muscles disappear underneath.

“Um. Lots of flat land and Wal-Marts and bored people?”

“Flat land, yes,” Dean points at him, eyes light up. “Lotsa fields. Think maybe we should. I dunno. Go find one and look at the stars. Gonna be a clear night.”
Sam bites on his bottom lip to keep in a smile. “It’s January. It’s cold out.”

Dean lifts a shoulder in a lazy shrug, careful not to meet Sam’s eyes. “We can keep warm somehow.”

Sam’s heart skips, breath trembling a little as he exhales. “Yeah. Somehow.”

It’s so cold that Sam sees his breath as he climbs out of the car.

Dean had driven them out of town and into a place called Swamp Angel that is nothing more than a few houses strung together loosely between wide gulps of fields. It sounds like the ocean as the winter wind sweeps through, dragging against all the tall grass. Sam shivers, closes his eyes and lets the wind push his hair back from his face, let it rush all around him and he breathes it in, the bite of freezing cold sucked deep into his lungs that he lets out in a sigh.

“Gorgeous out, idn’t it?” Dean shuts the trunk, the two comforters from the beds at the motel draped over his arms along with a couple of Dad’s old military blankets. Sam opens his eyes and smiles at him before looking up at the sky. He has to lean back against the car as he does, has to brace himself to look up and see the explosion of stars overhead, the sky absolutely clear, unforgivingly cold, the moon a sliver of bone among them.

He shuts the car door and zips his hoodie up before wading through the grass toward Dean. They spread one Dad’s blankets and one of the motel ones out on the ground before crawling on top of them, the remaining two piled up so they can cover up with them when they finally get situated.

“Jesus, it’s been awhile since we seen a sky like this, huh, Sammy?” Dean’s voice is quiet with awe, his jacket zipped up as high as it’ll go, his cheeks already pink from the cold. Sam shuffles a little closer to him until they’re sitting side-by-side as close as they can be, their thighs touching, legs nearly tangling along the makeshift bed.

Sam hums in agreement, turning his attention back to the sky.

“Amazing when you can actually see the Milky Way.” It’s streaming out above them in cluttered swirls, cutting through all the stars like a river. Sam is suddenly so aware of Dean, of how close he is, how warm he is, how they’re practically even breathing in sync.

“Remember that one house we stayed at in Wisconsin for awhile when you were little? You were probably six, maybe seven.”

“Six,” Sam agrees softly, a smile already tugging on his lips.

“Yeah, and,” Dean laughs, a little laugh tumbling out of his mouth in a white puff, “And you were obsessed with *Swiss Family Robinson*, so you wanted to live outside. And we did it.”

“For about a week.” Sam grins, shaking his head at himself, at his tiny self’s lofty aspirations for roughing it, Disney-style.

“Eh, we coulda lasted longer. We had to leave though. You had your little flashlight and always made sure we had a book to read, and lots of water.” Dean nudge him with his shoulder and keeps it there, pressed in tight, head tipped to the side so he can look at Sam.

“And Fruit Roll-Ups. And a slingshot.”
“Remember when you tried to kill that grasshopper?”

Sam shudders. “God, don’t remind me.”

“Eh, I fixed it. Made us some bologna sandwiches instead.”

“Much less traumatizing.”

Dean snorts. “The grasshopper probably woulda been better for you.”

“And we used to watch the stars,” Sam continues, bringing it back around just to watch Dean’s face soften again. “And you used to make up names for them. And stories.”

“Oh, yeah.” Dean shakes his head, his shoulders pulling in a little, like he’s embarrassed by it. “Too lazy to learn the real names. Sorry about that.”

“I loved your stories so much better. The one about the fox and his hunt for mice and how he got enchanted by a witch? You remember?” Sam reaches over and runs a finger over the leg of Dean’s jeans, letting it slip into a tiny hole in them, touching the warm skin underneath. “So he thought he was a mouse? So he ran with the mice and protected them at the same time.”

“I was an idiot,” Dean mumbles, shifting around, somehow getting even closer to Sam. “Good thing you weren’t homeschooled. You’d still be walkin’ around countin’ on your fingers and toes.”

“You were amazing,” Sam whispers, turning toward Dean now, tugging his legs up Indian-style, both his knees pressing along the length of Dean’s thigh. “You made everything magic. And fun. You made me dream.”

“I tried,” Dean admits, and it’s so fragile, so obvious to Sam how much Dean really means it. Sam swallows, his eyes burning, always such a soft spot for Dean, for what Dean always did for him, has always done for him. It’s always meant so much. It’s why Sam can’t help but be in love with him, even now, up to this very night.

“There are constellations that are only visible in winter. Did you know that?” Sam moves now, slides down on the blanket until he’s lying back, staring straight up at the sky. Dean follows him, reaching down for the blankets and pulling them up around them, making sure Sam has plenty to tuck into his side before he settles in.

“Hm,” Dean replies, head tipping a little to the side until it rests against Sam’s. “I don’t think I did. Which ones?”

“There are a few.” Sam reaches over for Dean’s hand, cover it with his own and tugging Dean’s finger up until it’s pointing. Sam closes one eye and guides Dean’s hand around until he’s pointing to the right spot. “See the three stars lined up right there? That’s Orion’s belt. Orion’s one of the winter constellations. He’s the hunter.”

“Oh, yeah, I see it. Huh.” Dean curls his fingers around Sam’s, keeping them where they are. Sam smiles.

“Those two really bright ones right above those three? Those are his shoulders. And there are two under them that are his knees. And his head is--”

“That one right there.” Dean runs their fingers up until they’re looking at the same star, and Sam can’t help but grin at how happy Dean sounds.
“And he’s wearing a sword on his belt. Coming down from the star on the right, see it? It goes down one-two-three. There. And Orion Nebula is this bright cluster that--” Sam pauses, shaking his head with a laugh. “Nevermind. Sorry, I’m being lame.”

Dean lowers their hands and turns on his side so he’s facing Sam, keeping their fingers tangled. “Why is it lame? I didn’t know any of this stuff. I think it’s kind of amazing.”

Sam follows Dean’s lead, turning on his side until they’re face-to-face. He pulls the blankets up until they’re covering their shoulders, the tips of their noses red with cold.

“I got really into astronomy back in school. Just kind of a hobby, I guess. Jess had a telescope, and we’d--” He stops, swallowing hard, searching Dean’s eyes from this close. Dean’s watching him, listening, really listening, like he actually wants to hear. Sam braves on. “We’d go on the roof of one of the buildings on campus sometimes. It wasn’t as clear as this, but it was fun. I told her all the stories you used to tell me. About the stars.”

Dean’s lips curve into a smile. “She tell you I was crazy, too?”

Sam tightens his hand in Dean’s. “She said it’d make an amazing children’s book.”

Dean’s smile softens, his face easing into something thoughtful. “Did you tell her about me?”

Sam wants to look away but he can’t, not now, not when they’re this close. There’s nowhere else to look, nothing else but Dean now. “Not. Not really. Not a lot.”

Dean nods a bit, like he was expecting as much. Sam doesn’t know why but it hurts.

“No,” Sam shakes his head, his voice a little stronger, clearer than it has been since they stepped out of the car. “No, that’s not it. It’s. It’s the opposite, really.”

Dean doesn’t speak for a minute, looking doubtful, like he wants to believe Sam but can’t seem to manage it.

“How?”

“Cause.” Sam stops, takes a deep breath. Searches Dean’s eyes. “Cause telling her about you would be telling her about myself. There’s no separation.”

Dean’s eyebrows furrow a little, like he’s trying to understand, like he really wants to understand. “I didn’t mean tell her about our life, about the hunting and everything. Just--”

“I couldn’t tell her about you because I wanted to keep you to myself. To. To keep you for myself. Because.” Their foreheads are almost touching, so close that he wants to close his eyes, but he doesn’t. He can’t. “Because if I started talking about you, I’d never stop. Because I can’t ever explain what you are to me. Because I don’t ever want anybody to understand us.”

Dean’s just staring at him, staring into him, his eyes night-green out here, a green that’s drank down all the light and is left with shadows; they’re bright and intense and utterly focused on him.

“Nobody’d ever understand us, Sammy,” he murmurs, untangling his hand from Sam’s to lift up from under the covers, fingers pushing into Sam’s hair, stroking it back from his face. Sam’s eyelashes flutter, his entire body straining out for Dean, one of his legs tangling between his. “Nobody can ever get that close to understand.”
“I don’t want them to,” Sam whispers, a confession. His breath is trembling now and Dean is somehow closer, the frozen tip of his nose sliding over Sam’s cheek, not warming him but sharing the cold. “I never want to share you with anybody.”

“Why, Sammy? Tell me. Tell me.” Dean’s hand drifts down to his cheek, his palm still warm as it cups it, the wide of his thumb stroking over Sam’s mouth. Sam’s arm wraps around Dean’s waist, tucks in tight to him, his heart thudding dully in his ribs, in his ears.

“Because you’re mine.”

“Yeah,” Dean breathes, his eyes so clear, clear as the sky overhead. “Yeah, I am.”

The kiss is a first but it feels like the middle of something, like finishing a sentence, like the exhale from a long-drawn breath. It’s the first time their mouths have touched but it doesn’t feel new, doesn’t feel unknown. It feels like comfort, tastes familiar, the same kind of warmth that Dean shares with his hands, with his arms, with his smile.

Sam parts his lips for him and Dean comes in, tucks right in with the soft of his tongue and all the pieces lock together, finally, finally, all of the parts of them that have been dancing around each other all their lives finally meeting, touching in all the right places for the very first time. Like every single breath and spoken word and moment of silence has brought them up to this, to right here, to the shared warmth between their mouths.

Dean’s thumb strokes over the line of Sam’s cheek, quickening a little heat back to his skin just as he surges closer, their tongues tangling in a sweet, elated slide. In oh, there you are and finally, finally you’re here.

Sam draws Dean’s bottom lip into his mouth, the soft pillow of it fitting in perfectly and he sucks on it as sweet as it deserves. Dean sighs, every single thing about him open, giving, right here. They trade soft kisses, each one like a gift from one to the other to the other until they’re back in each other’s mouths, like they don’t want it to end, never want to let go.

Sam has started trembling somewhere along the way, the rise of emotion in him taking awhile but it comes to the surface finally, leaving his body in a gasping sob. Their mouths pause against each other, pinkened, swollen lips rubbing numb together as their eyes slip open, lock together. Sam’s are glistening with tears, his chin trembling, his hand in a tight clutch on the back of Dean’s jacket.

“Dean,” he says, and it’s a plea, a plea for a hundred things, and Dean understands them all, down to the very last one. Sam knows because of the way Dean nods, the way he takes his mouth again, kissing him hard and hungry this time, so hard his nose presses into Sam’s cold cheek.

They feed from each other for what feels like hours, for what could very well be hours, the moon drifting along lazily overhead. Sam has long since lost feeling in his lips, is only aware of how hot their mouths are together, how fat and slick his lips feel when Dean sinks his teeth into them, when he sucks on them one at a time.

He licks at Dean’s spit, swallows it down and now intimately knows the taste of his mouth but there aren’t words for it, not a single one. It’s just an extension of how Dean smells, of the color of his eyes, of the endlessness of his freckles, the pink swell of his mouth, the seashell curve of his ear. He tastes like how beautiful he is. He tastes like how much Sam loves him.

Their kisses ease out into their mouths just touching, nestled together tiredly, breath leaving in slow, sated pants. They’re still clutched together, braided up tight under the blankets, never going to let go. They fall asleep at some point, probably mid-kiss, probably mid-thought, on a shared sigh.
That night doesn’t change them in the daylight, for better or for worse.

Dean still leaves Sam locked out of the car sometimes. Sam still rolls his eyes at Dean, still corrects his grammar at the most annoying moments. Dean still steals fries off of Sam’s plate and Sam still bitches when Dean turns the music up too loud.

But there’s an intimacy now, a slowness to their blinks when they look at each other, a stronger hesitation to turn away.

They don’t kiss like that night again, but there are moments. Moments in the middle of the night when Sam wakes up with Dean’s lips against his forehead, pressing kiss after slow kiss, like he’s just dreaming. Like the way Sam cradles Dean’s hand in his lap while he’s driving sometimes, spreads Dean’s fingers out on his thigh and strokes over each of them, tendering each knuckle, each scar, each hurt. Drunk on it, on how it’s okay that he does this now, that Dean lets him.

Sam dreams of blonde hair and oak trees and smells burning flesh and he wakes up with a jolting start, the gasp already being drawn before he opens his eyes.

His chest doesn’t have room to expand completely because there’s a tight band across it, tight and warm and strong as steel, and before Sam starts to struggle, there’s a mouth against his ear, lips soft, breath sour.

“Shh. Sammy, ‘sokay. It’s okay.”

Sam pants, quick and afraid like he’s being chased, like there’s still something here to be afraid of.

“Shhh. C’mon, little brother. ‘m right here. Just calm down.”

Sam closes his eyes to the darkness again, finally exhaling fast, in relief. He’s drenched in sweat, his t-shirt soaked through, and his stomach is trembling, tight with fear.

“Sorry,” he sighs, his entire body relaxing back against his brother, easing into the nuzzle of Dean’s nose over his cheek, those lips pressing once and sweet to his neck.

“Wanna talk about it?”

Sam shakes his head before he can even process the question, before he can even consider it.

“Just a bad dream. Sorry. If.” He swallows, waking up a little more for the ache it puts in his chest to say this. “If you wanna sleep in the other bed--”

“Hey,” Dean interrupts him, his voice still soft, like he doesn’t want them to wake up any more than they are already. “I put up with your snoring and talking in your sleep and stealing covers and kicking me, just like I always have. I’m not gonna bitch out now. Got it?”

Sam can’t help but smile tiredly, nestling back into the curve of Dean’s body as Dean’s hand presses into his belly, rubbing in a slow, soothing circle.
“I don’t snore.”

Dean’s teeth close around his earlobe, biting and tugging gently. Sam jerks against him, letting out a warning grunt just as Dean’s arms tighten around him again.

“Night, Sammy.”

The next time he has the dream, it sets them on the road to Lawrence.

Dean looks gaunt, hollowed out as he drives there, and Sam can’t forget the look on his face from earlier, the terrified, young look when Dean realized where they had to go. Sam glances over at him in the driver’s seat, studying him in profile, the full curve of his mouth, the intent dreaminess of his eyes as he focuses both on the road and on his thoughts one million miles away.

“You’re beautiful,” Sam says, soft, unexpected.

That draws Dean right back down into his body, into the car, makes him shoot a glance over at Sam, eyebrows raised.

“Somebody dare you to say that? Was it Bobby?”

Sam smirks at him just as Dean looks away, but Dean’s smiling now, little and he’s trying really hard to hide it.

Sam rests his head against the cold window, stares off into the flats of Nebraska.

“Always thought it. Always. Even when before I knew what it meant. Way before I knew I wasn’t supposed to think it. Not about you.”

Dean chews on that for a minute, eyes focused once again, but his mouth is soft, like he’s ready to speak.

“Can’t think of a better word? Like dashing? Or handsome? Or buff?”

Sam lets out a breath of laughter, the grin spreading across his mouth slow, adoring. “Sorry, Dean. You’re beautiful. I don’t make the rules.”

Dean frowns then, lips pushing into a pout.

“Just. Don’t go tellin’ anybody that shit, arrite?”

His cheeks are a little pink, but at least there’s humor back on his face, the grey, faraway of earlier replaced with awkward self-awareness and a teeny bit of pride. Sam leans over, presses a kiss to the apple of Dean’s cheek, just to watch him squirm.

“Your secret’s safe with me.”

They sleep in a motel room that night in their hometown, just a few blocks from their old house. Dean had found his way through the streets without effort or pause, like he’s thought about these streets hundreds of times over the span of his life, like he was born with knowledge of them in his bones.
They lie still in the darkness next to each other, both awake and knowing it. Sam can’t shake the smell of the house—the faint mustiness, the smell of a heater being turned on for the first time in months, the smell of toasted bread and apple juice. He wonders if it used to smell like that, if Mom made it smell like that. Wonders if it was familiar for Dean. If Dean even remembers what the house used to smell like.

He glances over at him, sees Dean’s lashes move in silhouette against the backdrop of the window.

“What are you thinkin’ about?”

Sam keeps his voice soft, doesn’t want to startle Dean, but he’s never really worried about something like that before. Dean’s always been so unshakeable, like he could brush off anything, always land on his feet. He’s seemed raw all day, like he’s tender to the touch, like he’s been ready to just turn around and run.

And Dean Winchester never runs.

“Just,” Dean starts, his voice a low scratch, tongue soothing out over dry lips, “just how we’re home. In Lawrence. And how even home, we’re sleepin’ in a motel.”

Sam hums in understanding before he draws in a slow breath that he lets out in a sigh. He turns on his side, facing Dean, arm curled up under his pillow. He wants to reach out and touch him, wants to burrow in close, to hug Dean like he’s wanted to all day, but something about Dean, about his quiet, the distance he put between them when he climbed into bed, tells Sam not to, to just leave him alone.

“He still hasn’t called.” Dean’s so quiet he almost sounds like he’s talking to himself, but Sam hears it. “I just. I just don’t know what it means. Maybe somethin’s really happened to him. Maybe he—”

“He’s alive, Dean. C’mon.” Sam risks it, puts on a brave face and moves closer, fingers pressing into the stiff, cheaply-washed topsheet right next to Dean’s ribs. “You’d know if something happened to him. You’d know. Somebody would’ve heard something by now. Would have let us know.”

“Somebody should know where he is anyway.” Dean sounds mad, frustrated, like he’s gritting his teeth. His hands are clasped tight together, resting on his stomach. Sam’s fingers flex in the sheets to keep from touching them. “It’s bullshit how nobody’s heard from him. Bullshit.”

“You’d know,” Sam repeats, the words sounding trite, repetitive but he means them, believes them. “Just like I’d know if anything ever happened to you. I’d just know, Dean.”

“If I ever do this to you, I give you full permission to punch me, okay?”

Sam sighs, feeling so tired suddenly that he can barely keep his eyes open. He takes a deep breath and makes his move, scooting down a little on the bed to tuck his face into Dean’s neck, his legs curled awkwardly, bare feet hanging out from beneath the covers and off the bed. He slides his hand across Dean’s stomach, over soft cotton and the tight, tensed muscles to hug him, to just wrap around him as much as he will allow himself.

“Last time I saw him was in Denver,” Sam says into Dean’s skin, into warm, paperthin jersey. “Last time I saw him, he wouldn’t even look at me.”

Dean tenses under him.

“Sam—”

“I just,” Sam presses on, his thumb stroking at Dean’s ribs, bumping over and over the ridges of
them. “I just wanna make it right. To say I’m sorry.”

Dean’s hands untangle now, finally, one of them sliding up across Sam’s spine, tired fingers pushing into the thick of his hair. He sighs.

“Pretty sure he forgave you before you even left the state.”

Sam snorts. “Don’t be so sure about that.”

Dean’s hand tightens into a gentle pulse of pressure in Sam’s hair, like he’s thinking, trying to get Sam’s attention.

“Talk to me. Tell me something.”

Sam frowns, heart swooping in dread for no real reason.

“What do you mean?”

He feels Dean shrug.

“Dunno, just. Anything. Something about you I might not know. That I missed. Just.” Sam realizes then, in that pause, just how fragile Dean is right now. How he’s just barely holding himself together. “Just talk. Okay?”

“Okay, Dean,” he whispers, not wanting to talk, not here in the quiet of night, not when they’re curled up like this, all vulnerable to each other, not when he’s been thinking of absolutely nothing except for how to get Dean to kiss him again. But he’ll do anything Dean asks. Anything.

Dean’s hand cards through his hair, thick fingers pushing back from his hairline to his crown and down to his nape before starting over again, and Sam spreads his hand out over Dean’s chest, heel of it resting right over Dean’s heart. And he thinks.

“I haven’t see any of the Lord of the Rings movies without you. I just. Couldn’t. You know?”

He hears Dean hum, a surprised, happy sound, and it makes him hug closer to Dean, smiling a little against his neck.

“Think we need to fix that with a marathon real soon, what do you think?”

Sam nods, doesn’t care if Dean saw any of them without him, doesn’t really want to hear about it if he has. “And, uh. Maybe after I can read the book for us? Like I used to?”

Dean’s chest jumps as he huffs out a laugh. “Can you say that one word yet?”

Sam smirks, lifts his head to glare down at Dean.

“What word?”

“You know the one.”

Sam raises his eyebrows.

“You can’t say it right either.”

Dean shrugs. “Yeah, well. I didn’t go to Stanford, so.”
Sam narrows his eyes. “Númenórean.”

Dean grins.

“Nyoooma-nyoo-nooma--Dean, can I just say Elros’ family?” Dean mimics back-in-the-day-Sam’s voice so well it’s creepy, down to the inflection of his own name. Sam’s hand tightens into a tickle along Dean’s ribs and Dean jerks, grunts and squirms around it but doesn’t move otherwise.

Sam huffs, all of it in play and they both know it, always know it. He settles back down against Dean and is immediately rewarded with Dean’s fingers touching over his earlobe, down his cheek before tucking his hair behind his ear. He nestles in tight.

“It’s okay. I don’t have to read it again.”

“You are cute as shit when you’re poutin’, you know that, Sammy?”

Sam sighs. “Dean.”

“No, you are! Always have been. That little mouth, are you kiddin’ me?” Dean lifts up until Sam is curled up on the mattress instead of his brother, and Dean is leaning down over him, looming all warm and soft and smiling in the dark and God, this. This is what Sam’s always wanted. He reaches up to touch Dean’s stomach through his shirt, just because he can.

“Am not,” he says again thoughtlessly, focused on other things entirely now. Dean’s searching his face like there’s something to see, something worth remembering, even though Sam’s just in a stretched-out, secondhand t-shirt in this $35 a night motel room bed, still that awkward, aching boy, just in a longer body now.

“Hey, Sammy, you remember that song you used to sing in the mornin’?”

Sam frowns. “...I had a song?”

“Yeah! That one about, uh. What was it? Froot Loops?”

Sam closes his eyes just as Dean’s hand spreads out over his thin stomach. “Oh, Jesus.”

“It was so cute.”

Sam opens his eyes just so he can raise his eyebrows at his brother again. “Are you talkin’ about the one where I just said Froot Loops a bunch of times?”

“There was a melody to it! It was kinda like ‘Froooot Loops! FrootLoopsFrootLoops… FROOT LOOPS.’”

“...Wow.”

“Hey! You were like, three. It was cute as shit.” Dean’s half on top of him now, and Sam can’t help that he’s smiling now, can’t help the way his cheeks flush.

“Doubt it.”

“And besides you weren’t good with Rs or Ls yet then, so it sounded like ‘Fwoot Woops! FwootWoopsFwootWoops–’”

Sam pounces then, lifting up and tackling Dean back to the bed, bracing himself up over him to grin at his smug face.
“Shut up, Dean.”

Dean’s smile is huge and kind of fucking adorable, and Sam can’t help the way his body arches, the way he reacts when Dean’s hands light on his back and slide down, fingers sweeping in hard and deep into the arch of it.

“Mmm,” Dean sighs, letting his hands push back up before sliding down again, stopping now on the swell of Sam’s ass. “You like that, Sammy?”

Sam spreads his legs around Dean’s body, knees digging into the flimsy mattress so he can push back into those hands, so he can curl up and into them like a cat. His eyes slip closed and he pulls his lips into his mouth to keep in all the sounds he wants to make.

“Like anything you do. Anything. Always have.” It’s the last two words that have his cheeks flushing hot, that are the actual confession. Dean’s hands rub at the small of his back, pushing him into a deeper arch, his ass popped up high and presented to the empty room. It doesn’t feel real.

“Since when? How long?” It’s manipulative and they both know it, like interrogation by torture. Dean’s fingertips dig in at the tight curve of his ass and Sam pushes himself into a deeper curl for it, ass tipping up to try and get at Dean’s hands.

“Too long,” Sam breathes between soft pants, finally lowering his body enough to let their dicks press together for the first time and he shakes all over, so, so fucking close already to just losing it. He’s mindless, brain on a constant, enthralled loop of DeanDeanDeanDeanDeanDeanDeanDeanDean. “I was eleven.”

“Eleven? Jesus fuckin’--” Dean growls and Sam has to open his eyes then, to look down and see the lust-blown wide of Dean’s pupils, see the sweat gathering at his temples and in the V of his neck, to see how pink his mouth is in the scant light from the window and the hunger in his eyes.

Dean’s hands push down over his ass for the first time, grabbing at him rough and possessive, not being careful at all, not being gentle but Sam never wants him to be, wants him to bruise, wants it to hurt, wants to remember. He whimpers and rocks into those hands, pushing hard enough into them that Dean spreads his cheeks, hot air sweeping all along his crack through his thin pants, and fuck, it feels so good.

“God, I just wasted all that time, didn’t I? All those years. They’re just gone and I can’t. I can’t ever get ‘em back. I can never have that boy again. And I can see you, just like you were back then. So little and those eyes on me, just always starin’ up at me. I could have had you then, couldn’t I? Made you mine even back then.” Dean’s rambling, mindless and honest and he’s hauling Sam up with his grip on his ass, dragging the burning aches of their dicks together.

Sam is shaking, braced up over his brother, the muscles in his arms trembling but he stays up because he knows if he doesn’t, he’s going to get at Dean’s mouth, he’s going to kiss him until he tastes his fill of him. It’s burning up in the room suddenly, when it had been so chilly earlier, it’s eerie-quiet and the bed is groaning under their combined weight, squeaking every time Sam drags his body hard over his brother’s. He finally finds his voice, finishes his confession.

“I’m. I still feel like that with you. That boy. I’m always that boy with you, Dean.”

Dean growls, his fingertips digging in hard, stroking over the sides of Sam’s hole through his sweatpants. “Will you still be my boy? My little boy, Sammy. Can you still be him for me?”

“Yeah, Dean. God. Yeah. I-I promise.” He drops down finally, can’t stay up any longer, wraps his
arms around the pillow around Dean’s head, knees sliding out further on the mattress so he can get in deep, so their dicks are choking tight against each other, pre-come soaking in his pants, making it burning hot and slippery as he fucks against Dean, humps at his dick.

“Ride it, Sammy,” Dean says low in his ear, hands still on his ass, haven’t left, just guiding him, encouraging every rut of his hips. “C’mon, little brother. Gonna make me come.”

Sam really gets into it then, now that he has a goal in mind, now that he has that beautiful bit of encouragement. Make Dean come, make Dean come. His Dean, his Dean. The bed is shaking now, jarring hard against the wall, the frame shuddering but he doesn’t stop, can’t stop, the friction inside of his pants not exactly right but they’re as good as naked, as close as sharing skin, sharing a body and Sam’s shaking all over now, little, humiliating sounds leaving his mouth but he’s flying high because this is happening, this is happening, this is Dean and Sam’s gonna. He’s gonna.

“He’s panting into Dean’s mouth more than kissing him, just letting Dean’s tongue in him, letting it lick its fill, letting him taste while he comes. It’s so wet now, every fuck of his hips punctuated with a loud squelch and Dean’s rumbling low in his chest, panting hard under him and Sam gathers himself back together even though he’s still soaring, still shaking and he fucks down hard into Dean, giving his dick all the friction he possibly can and fuck, Dean is so beautiful, he’s dripping with sweat and pink all over and he’s whimpering, actually whimpering, in Sam’s mouth.

“Make me come, Sammy, make me come. Make me come,” he chants under his breath, right into Sam’s mouth and Sam rides him even harder, all his muscles shaking with the effort. Dean is pounding up against him, giving as good as he gets, his hips rubbing in deep and he makes the most gorgeous sounds when he starts to come, unaware, groaning sounds like he can’t hear himself, like he’s just feeling it, has to let it out. He feels Dean pulsing so hot under him, feels every spurt filling his underwear, every jump of his dick, and it’s enough to make Sam wish he could come again.

They strain against each other, pushing and rubbing and riding it out and they’re finally kissing again, deep, greedy licks and sucks of tongue. They slow to a stop but keep kissing, keep feeding, keep shaking together.

Dean sighs finally, both of his arms wrapped around Sam now, clutching him down against himself, and Sam sinks down on top of him, boneless and foreheads pressing.

“Sorry,” he says into Dean’s mouth, trying to lift up off of him but Dean holds tight, pulls him back down as he shakes his head.

“Just. Just stay right here. It’s okay.”

“We’re gross, Dean,” Sam reminds him but he doesn’t really care, doesn’t mean it. He’ll stay in spunk-filled pants all night if it means he can be this close, if it means their ribs can bruise each other, their hearts can thump together all night. Dean seems to agree because he just lowers his mouth, pressing a soft kiss to Sam’s sweaty neck before he sighs, relaxing under the weight of Sam’s body.

Sam lowers a little, just enough to take his place against Dean’s neck, arms slipping up around it, too. He doesn’t think about it, doesn’t obsess over what just happened, not now. Now, everything feels just right, feels like it’s finally, finally how it’s supposed to be.
Sam’s waiting at the little table in their room, obedient as a dog, for Dean to wake up. He hadn’t been able to sleep, not without the nightmares, not without being able to smell burning and so he’s awake now, watching as Dean frowns and turns in his sleep, staying where he is all through it. He’s showered, changed out of his disgusting pants. Dean’s still in his, still curled up in the bed they’d basically fucked in, and now he’s whimpering. Afraid, small sounds, and Sam just can’t sit through those.

He closes his laptop and makes his way over to the bed, leaning down to card a hand through Dean’s hair.

“Hey. Dean. C’mon, get up,” he whispers, fingertips stroking over his whiskery cheek. Dean tenses, eyebrows drawing together before he gasps awake, his eyes immediately focusing on Sam, hand clamping down hard on Sam’s forearm, ready to throw off his attacker.

“Sammy,” Dean grits out, relaxing after he processes what’s happening, where he is. Sam smiles, can’t help it, leans down and presses a lingering, licking kiss to Dean’s sleep-sour mouth. Dean hums, loosens his grip on Sam’s arm to stroke over the tender skin inside his elbow. “Mornin’.”

“Good morning,” Sam mumbles against his mouth, absolutely unable to keep the dorky grin off his face. “We, uh. We should get down to the house. Don’t you think?”

Dean sighs, his other arm coming up to wrap around Sam’s waist, trying to tug him back down into bed. “Can’t we just stay here? Just for today?”

“Dean,” Sam sighs, the whine soaked through the entire word. He presses another kiss to Dean’s mouth, one to his nose, one to his forehead. “C’mon, get in the shower. I already have coffee made.”

“My good boy,” Dean gruffs, a self-satisfied little smile taking over his face as he sits up but it disappears almost immediately, replaced with disgust. “Oh, Christ. My pubes are like, fuckin’ glued together.”

Sam snorts and stands up straight again, striding across the room and grabbing a clean coffee mug and filling it with hot, cheap coffee from the motel room’s sad little set-up.

“Like I said: shower.” He turns just in time to come face to face with Dean, and his smile softens as he hands him his coffee. Dean takes it with a grateful sigh, eyes closing as he takes a careful sip.

“Perfect. Thanks, Sammy.” Dean takes another step toward him and gives him another kiss, this one coffee-flavored, strong and warm-mouthed. Their lips smile together, noses nudging and then Dean’s slipping past him, toward the bathroom.

Sam turns to watch him go, to get a good view of his ass in his tight underwear.

“Hey, Dean?”

Dean flicks the bathroom light on as he takes another drink of coffee, glancing back at Sam as he swallows, eyebrows raised but his eyes soft.

“Does this, uh. Does this feel weird to you?” He glances away from Dean’s gaze, eyes finding his own naked toes. Doesn’t know why he asks, isn’t sure he’s going to like the answer. But he just needs to know. Needs to know where he stands, how much to protect himself.

“No.”
Sam looks back up then, eyes widening in surprise. Dean’s still watching him, leaning against the doorframe, coffee in his hand.

“Really?” He can’t help but smile, just a tiny bit.

Dean shrugs, coffee to his lips again, He takes a long drink, swallows. “It feels, uh. It feels good. Like, amazing. But not weird. You know?”

Sam’s hand circles his own wrist, thumb rubbing fretfully at the scar.

“So, I don’t, like. Gross you out?”

Dean snorts, rolls his eyes like Sam’s the biggest idiot in the world. Which, well. He probably is. He ducks his head, smile pulling at his lips before he glances back up at Dean through his lashes. Dean’s eyes are following the long line of Sam’s body, a slow trail down before going back up, taking his time. Their eyes meet again and Dean licks his lips.

“Definitely, definitely don’t gross me out, Sammy. Promise.”

Sam grins, cheeks pinking.

“Kay.”

Dean shakes his head, fond smile ghosting his lips as he closes the bathroom door. Sam smiles to himself as he refills his own coffee, listening to the sounds of Dean getting naked, Dean getting wet. So, so good.

He picks up his phone, his smile disappearing. Calls Dad.

This is John Winchester. I can’t be reached. If this is an emergency, call my son, Dean at 866-907-3235. He can help.

Sam’s fuming, chest rising and falling quickly. He hurries to the front door, opening it up and stepping outside just as the voicemail beeps to prompt him to speak.

“Dad, it’s Sam.” He walks the few feet to the car so he can touch it, lean against it, comforted somehow by the cold metal. “I don’t know where you are or what you think you’re doing by ignoring us, but it has to stop. Now. Me and Dean, we’re in Lawrence. We’re home. Something bad’s about to happen, and. And we’re in over our heads. I don’t know what’s going on, or what’s going to happen, but. But we need your help. Dean needs you. I don’t care if you don’t consider me your son anymore, if you’ve written me off, but don’t you dare ignore Dean. He’s always been there for you. And he needs you now. Don’t fuck this up.”

He slams his phone closed and presses it to his mouth, the unrelenting plastic cutting into his lip. He wants to call back, to apologize. To beg instead of threaten. To tell his Dad that he misses him because what if something bad did happen to him? What if it’s only a matter of time before the phone gets cut off, and they’re left with nothing, not even a voicemail to call?

“Sam, what the hell are you doing?”

Dean’s standing in the crack of the door in a pair of jeans, still mostly soaking wet, his eyes brimming with concern as he stares out at Sam leaning against the Impala.

“I just.” Sam licks his lips, attempting a smile to lighten the mood. “Just checking my voicemail.
Couldn’t get reception in there.”

Dean relaxes visibly, but his frown stays. “Well. Get in here. It’s cold out there, man.”

“Sure, Dean,” Sam replies, pushing away from the car. “Just. Give me a minute, okay?”

Dean stares at him for another few seconds before shaking his head to himself and closing the door back, leaving Sam outside alone again.

Sam closes his eyes, taking a deep breath as he sends up a quick prayer to please look out for Dad, please look out for Dean.

He’ll worry about himself later.

It’s well after midnight, and they’re parked outside of their old house, eyes warily trained on it, like they’re waiting for it to pounce. Jenny’s back home with her two kids, Missouri has left, and Sam can’t shake the feeling that there’s something more, that they aren’t done here.

And Dean trusts him enough to camp out in the car in the middle of December, staring up at the house that contains most of his very best memories, ones that Sam was too young to share.

They’re unusually quiet, caught up in their own thoughts. Sam swallows as gentle as he can, his throat bruised pretty bad inside and out from the cord that just kept tightening and tightening, would have kept air out until he wasn’t breathing, but Dean had come. Dean had found him. Saved him.

He rubs at the bruises on the outside of his throat and cuts his gaze over to Dean who’s staring up at the house, his eyes far-off, mouth drawn down in what can only be sadness. Sam reaches over, fingers curling to run his knuckles over Dean’s clenched hand resting on his thigh. Dean looks over at him after a beat, his eyes so big, so haunting in the darkened car.

“I just,” Sam starts, swallowing again through the pain, through his nervousness. “Just wanted to say thank you. For finding me when you did.”

Dean just watches him, stares at him, eyes flickering down to his mouth every few seconds before he leans over and presses his lips to Sam’s, slow, wet skin catching on dry.

Sam’s eyes slip closed, breath leaving in a tremble when Dean pulls back. He licks his lips, tastes Dean there.

“He still can’t believe this isn’t just a dream.” He feels Dean’s hand push up into the back of his hair, short nails dragging over his scalp.

“If this was a dream, I’d have you in a much different place than my car on the side of a street in Kansas, Sammy.”

Sam grins for that, head tipping down, forehead brushing over Dean’s cheek.

“Thanks for trustin’ me on this.”

Dean shrugs, and Sam can feel it more than see it. They separate and turn to look back up at the house at the same time, searching each window for any movement or light. Nothing.

“Don’t think Missouri likes me very much.” Dean’s still looking at the house and his voice is muffled by the glass but Sam can hear him. Hears the little bit of hurt in his voice. He wants to reach over for
him again, to push in closer but he doesn’t, for a bunch of reasons. Number one being the fact that they’re on a job.

“Think I know why,” Sam replies softly, fingers tangling with the bracelet on his left hand instead of fucking with his scar again. He feels Dean’s eyes on him, feels the questions before they’re asked.

“You do? Why? I mean. I mean, I know I’m not the most likeable guy in the world, but damn. She ain’t very sentimental, is she? She knew me when I was little. Think that would count for something.” He’s dangerously close to pouting now and Sam turns to look at him, grinning at the frown on his face.

“She knows what we did last night.”

Dean’s eyes are huge, like he just got caught, color draining from his cheeks. “How the fuck does she know that?!”

Sam shrugs, studying Dean’s face carefully, looking for any regret.

“She read it in me, I guess.”

Dean’s eyes narrow.

“Read it in you? Why’d you let her?”

Sam snorts. “Seriously? You think I sorted through my thoughts and let her pick which ones to see? I’m just lucky she didn’t see more.”

Dean pauses, tongue slipping out to wet his bottom lip. “Like what?”

Sam looks back up at the house, avoiding Dean’s seeing eyes now. “She could’ve seen any of the horrible thoughts I’ve had about you half my life, and any of them would’ve been a lot worse.”

Dean’s tapping on the steering wheel now, like he’s considering, like he wants to know each of those thoughts but isn’t brave enough to ask. “So. So why does she not like me when you’re the one thinkin’ everything?”

Dean scoffs at that, head jerking to the side to meet Sam’s eyes, indignance pouring out of him. “What?! That’s bullshit! That’s--”

“Yeah,” Sam interrupts, voice soft, mouth pulled into a devious little smile. “Believe me, if she knew what I’ve been thinking about you since I was thirteen, she wouldn’t even talk to me.”

Dean’s expression changes in a single second, dropping from confused anger into curious lust in a blink. He shifts closer to Sam, hand falling from the steering wheel to push up over Sam’s knee, pulling him closer. “Yeah, Sammy? What’ve you been thinkin’?”

“Dean,” Sam sighs as Dean nudges his face closer, their noses sliding together. “Dean, we gotta be good. We’re on a job, remember?”

“Fuckin’ boy scout,” Dean groans, their lips just barely touching before Dean’s sighing, leaning back to rest his head on the window. Sam stays where he is, doesn’t want to move, doesn’t want to not be able to taste his mouth. He kisses at Dean’s chin, eyes up to scan over the house one more time.
before he closes them, tipping his head to the side to kiss down Dean’s throat.

“Love how you taste,” he whispers into Dean’s skin before his tongue licks out, sliding wet and hungry over his throat, tasting sweat and dirt and leather. Dean’s throat rumbles in a low growl right against his tongue, and the feel and sound of it makes Sam’s dick throb. “Used to watch you sweat and jerk off thinking about you dripping it all over me while you fucked me.”

“Oh, fuck, Sammy. Jesus Christ.” A strong arm comes up to wrap around Sam, hand pressing in hard to the back of his head, keeping him where he is. “Why you gotta do this now? While we’re workin’? C’mon, let’s just go back to the room. I’m sure—”

Sam pulls back then, pushes against Dean’s grip on him. He licks his lips as he slides back over to his own side of the car, mouth swollen and wet from kissing. He shakes his head as he tries to calm his breathing down again. “No, Dean, we. We gotta stay here. Just. Trust me on this.”

“Goddamnit,” Dean rasps, pushing a hand up through his hair before letting out a frustrated sigh. “Alright, so tell me again, what’re we still doin’ here?”

It’s only a few moments later, a few more words, and they see Jenny at the window, desperate palms slapping against the glass, blonde hair lit up in the moonlight.

Sam can’t help it, pictures his mom, can imagine acutely her fear in those last few moments, that same butterfly-in-a-jar franticness he sees in Jenny’s eyes as they charge toward the house, his hands already shaking, heart in his throat.

He catches Dean’s eyes just before they separate at the top of the stairs, a shared moment of feeling lost, of feeling young, of wishing there was someone who could maybe save them this time.

Sam.

His name in her voice is still ringing in his ears as he sits on the front steps of his once-home, a voice that he couldn’t have imagined but will now never forget. Pictures can capture a lot, can show him that her eyes were the same color as Dean’s, that Sam got her dimples, that she smiled with her entire face. But no one could have told him what she sounded like, exactly how beautiful and painful it would be to hear her say his name.

Missouri is talking and he’s talking back, but he can’t hear her. Can only hear SamI’msorrySamI’msorrySamI’msorrySamI’msorrySam—

“Sam? Did you hear what I said?”

He glances over, blinking out of the cradle of his mom’s voice to focus on Missouri who is watching him, who surely knows what he’s thinking, who has nothing but pity on her face.

“Sorry, what?”

She reaches over and touches his hand, her warm palm over his bruised knuckles, and he knows she’s reading him, reading him right now. Sensing all of his hesitation.

“I just asked what you boys were gonna do now. Where you’re going to go?”

Sam shrugs, his eyes finding Dean who is talking to Jenny at the car, who has his hands in his pockets and circles under his eyes and rain streaking his cheeks. He feels Missouri’s hand tighten
around his own.

“Dunno. Wherever Dean takes us. Gonna go look for Dad, I think.” He can’t take his eyes off of Dean, can’t look away, even when he hears Missouri draw in a deep breath beside him, even when he can practically feel her thoughts, her disapproval through her fingertips.

“Do you boys really know what you’re doing? Do you understand what this means?”

The words are vague but it’s all spelled out to Sam, bright and bolded. He finally tears his eyes away from his brother and looks over at her, meeting her gaze head-on.

“You mean am I sure this is what I want with him?”

She searches his eyes, stays quiet for a long moment. Sam can feel her in his mind like feather-light touches just inside of his ears, sliding across his thoughts, knowing him. He shivers.

“Yeah, Sam. Are you sure this is what you want? You can have so much more. Be so much more. You know that, don’t you?”

Sam tugs his hand from underneath hers, eyes widening a little in disbelief. He scoots back from her but turns to face her more, not backing down from her questions.

“You can read my thoughts, right? You can read me really easily, because of whatever this is that I have. Right?”

She blinks a few times in quick flutters, like she wants to break the gaze, like she wants to say something, but she just nods.

Dean and Jenny are quiet now, maybe speaking softly, maybe not speaking at all. He drops his voice to barely a whisper.

“Then you know what he means to me. What he’s always meant to me. You know how I feel when I’m not around him. You know that panic-feeling I get whenever he’s not around, when he’s even in the next room. When he’s just over there, but he’s still not here. Not where I can touch him, if I want. Here. Feel.” He reaches out for her with both hands, completely covering hers with his own, long fingers curling around to touch her palms.

Tears well in her eyes, her lashes jumping again as she draws in a quick, shuddering breath.

“Sam,” she whispers, her hands trembling under his like wings.

“You feel it? Do you?” He has tears in his own eyes now, that ache in him rising up to the surface, clutching at him, trying to pull him under, the ghost of the emptiness he’d felt back at Stanford, when Dean was so far away. “Now imagine how I feel when he’s closer. When. When he’s touching me and it’s just us and he’s as close as I can have him. It isn’t wrong. It isn’t. Isn’t bad. We aren’t gross. It’s who we are. Can’t you see it? Can’t you feel that?”

He’s squeezing her hands now, probably too tight, and her eyes are completely brimming in tears but she’s nodding, hands turning over under his to clasp them together.

“I do,” she says, sounding almost defeated, almost sad, but honest. She sighs, her gaze dropping, eyes finally letting Sam go. “Lord help me, I do. This isn’t normal, Sam. This isn’t what brothers are-”

Sam shakes his head, tries to take his hands back from her but she holds fast, her eyes locking with
his own again with a fierceness that makes him stop.

“But that isn’t all you are,” she continues, her voice rushed, words bitten off. “There’s more to you two. More than you even know.”

He frowns, head tipping to the side, an icy sliver of fear sliding through his veins. “What? What do you mean?”

“Sam! You ready?”

Dean’s voice cuts through the fog, through the darkness he feels seeping in around his edges. He looks up, finds him, meets his eyes. Dean’s looking right back, seems to sense that there’s more to what Sam and Missouri are doing than just a simple conversation.

“I’ve gotta go,” Sam says distantly, his hands going limp against Missouri’s, dropping away as he stands up.

He makes his way over to the car, to Dean, only glancing over at Jenny as she says goodbye.

They say their goodbyes to Missouri, her eyes lighting on him last, knowing, grave. He realizes with a start that he doesn’t want to know what she knows, what she sensed. He doesn’t want anything that will ruin this, this delicate thing he has with Dean. He wants to keep it, even if just for a little while longer.

The smell of the car surrounds him when they close the doors to the outside, stale and slightly damp and comforting. She roars to life all around them, and Sam’s eyes are on Dean when Dean looks past him to the house, just one last time. Sam doesn’t look back, doesn’t take his eyes off of Dean as they pull away, tires cutting through slick streets.

When Dean slides his hand across the seat between them, his palm up, Sam covers it with his own.

“Tell me about her?”

They’re back at the motel, the rain beating down outside, icy cold and heavy. Dean’s got a bottle of Wild Turkey and he’s drinking straight from it, half of it already in his stomach. He’s sitting at the little table near the window, boots unlaced but still on, his jacket damp and dangling from the back of his chair, the smell of the leather thick in the room. Sam’s on the bed, on fresh sheets, staring up at the ceiling to keep from staring at Dean.

Dean stays quiet for a few beats, gathering up his thoughts and Sam waits him out, always waits him out. His eyes look red-rimmed and he looks exhausted, chased. Sam wants to beg him over to the bed, wants to wrap every single part of his body around him and not let him up, not let him go.

“Don’t ‘member much,” he starts out, his voice low with whiskey-grit. He leans back in the chair, hand rubbing heavy at his eyes. Sam’s watching him now, can’t help it. Aches for him. “Just, uh. She liked that show. The one with the guy and the two chicks in the apartment? And Don Knotts was the landlord?”

A smile pulls at Sam’s lips. “Three’s Company.”

Dean lets out a little laugh, almost smiling before he tips the bottle again, takes another drink. “Yeah. That’s it. Anyway, I just remember Don Knotts and how much he made her laugh. She’d laugh ‘til she cried. She’d watch it and fold laundry while I did, yanno. Whatever kids do, Legos or
“I bet she had a great laugh.” Sam closes his eyes, invokes her voice in his mind again, just plays his name over and over again, trying to piece together what that voice would sound like laughing, bright and carefree, over a sitcom. Tries to gather it from Dean like he can touch his thoughts the way Missouri had touched his.

“She had a big laugh.” Dean’s got a smile in his voice, a remembering smile. “Sounded too big for her body. Dad made her laugh a lot, too. He goosed her a lot. She was really ticklish. He’d scare her by tickling her and she’d chase him around the house.”

Sam shakes his head, can’t imagine his dad teasing anyone, laughing about anything like that. Maybe he used to, back when Sam was too little to really remember, but he can’t recall Dad’s laugh, not right now. Can imagine what his Mom’s sounds like, but not his. Not Dad’s.

“What else,” he whispers.

“She’d sing a lot. You know that ‘Louie, Louie’ song? She’d sing along to that song even though she didn’t know all the words. She used to make me laugh by just singin’ the craziest shit durin’ the verses, yanno? And she’d get all loud during the chorus. Every time I hear that song even now, I just hear her singin’ it.”

Sam looks back over and Dean’s full-out grinning now, hands clasped around a mostly-empty bottle.

“Must be where you get it,” he teases, nose crinkling with his smile when Dean looks over. “Was she tonedeaf, too?”

“You little fucker,” Dean barks out in an unexpected laugh, brandishing the bottle at Sam like a lazy weapon. “I’m amazin’. ‘s why I drive with the windows down. Waitin’ for somebody to hear me sing’n make me famous.”

Sam grins over at his brother, at the sound of his laugh, at the bright sprawl of his smile, at the warmth in his eyes and he realizes then how much Dean got from Mom. Which one of them got her beauty, her light.

“Why are you all the way over there?” He’s speaking quietly now, his smile fading into an intense focus, eyes trailing over the curl of Dean’s hand around the bottle, at the spread of his legs. Dean looks over at him, eyes guarded, mouth lowering into a bit of a frown.

“I just,” Dean starts, shifting a little in his chair. “Maybe I just want too much.”

Sam lifts up then, elbows behind him on the mattress to prop himself up. His face feels warm.

“Want too much of what? What makes you think it’s too much?”

“Eh,” Dean grunts, setting the bottle down finally, leaning forward to rest his elbows on his knees. He scrubs his hands over his face, the sigh that escapes him rushing hot and loud over his palms. “Just. Just a rough day or so. Hard seeing her. Hard seeing you get hurt. Just.”

Dean stops talking, his throat working loud as he swallows, once twice. His voice is shaking, watery. “I just need to get out of here. Outta Lawrence.”

“We can leave now,” Sam offers, already trying to wake up more, pushing himself to sit up. “Let me just--”
Dean shakes his head, sitting back again, reaching for his bottle once more but just to put the cap on it, turning it until it’s tightly closed. His jaw is a firm line, tensed.

“It can wait ‘til morning. Sorry for being such a whiny bitch about this. It’s just--”

“Overwhelming,” Sam finishes, a sad smile tugging at his lips when Dean nods. “Dean?”

Dean looks over at him again, his movements slow, like he’s pushing through water. Even his blinks are slow. “Hm?”

“What do you want too much of?”

It’s quiet between them when their eyes finally meet, neither of them pushing or challenging, just holding. Cars rush by outside, somebody blaring Skynyrd, reminding Sam that life still goes on outside of this room, outside of Dean’s gaze, outside of the words between them. Somehow.

“Think maybe I want too much’a you.”

Sam sucks in a breath that catches in his throat, that leaves in a noisy, desperate sound. He clutches at his own shirt, stomach tightening.

“No such thing,” he tells him, the words quiet but packed with conviction. His dick is well-aware of what’s going on, hears the heat in Dean’s voice even when Sam’s mind is focused on the emotions. “No such thing because you can have all of me and it’s still not enough. Always wanna give you more.”

“Sam,” Dean groans, the sound like a growl and Sam’s afraid for a second that he’s gone too far, given up too much truth, made Dean angry, but Dean’s standing up now, not steady on his feet at first but he makes his way toward Sam, toward the bed without stumbling, without losing the swagger of his hips even as he kicks off his boots in two heavy clunks.

Sam presses his head back into the pillow when Dean gets closer, when he’s right here. He stares up at his brother, watches him tug his shirt off over his head, revealing his winter-pale skin, his freckles standing up in stark, precious contrast to it. The shirt gets tossed and Dean’s coming at him now, crawling into the bed and right on top of Sam, and Sam’s heart is racing now, hands already shaking.

“Goddamnit, Sammy. Godfuckingdamnit.” The words pour like heat out of Dean’s mouth, sounding like endearments somehow and Dean is on him, over him, surrounding him. His hands are digging into the meat of Sam’s sides, squeezing his hips, shoving at his shirt. Sam lets Dean take it off, his chest trembling with soft pants.

He whimpers when Dean’s hands run up his body, from his navel to his collarbone, body arching up hard, following those hands until they stop. Dean’s knee is nudging between his legs, shoving against Sam’s inner thigh to kick his legs apart, to spread him wide to fit himself between them. Sam closes them up again when Dean gets where he needs to be, wraps his legs around Dean and looks up into Dean’s eyes that are wild, stunning green and bloodshot, looking over Sam’s entire face like he’s memorizing him.

“God, just wanna eat you alive,” Dean mumbles just as he slides his mouth against Sam’s, both of their lips parting, breath exchanged between them. Dean’s thumbs slide over his nipples, the sensation completely unexpected and not gentle, and it pulls on every nerve in Sam’s body, driving a hard shudder up his spine, making him wrap his arms around his brother, clinging to him while Dean strokes at his nipples in small, rough circles.

“You can,” Sam pants, petting the back of Dean’s neck, fingers catching on the cord of the amulet
swinging down, dragging against his bare skin. “God, Dean, I’ll let you.”

Dean tastes bitter and gold with the whiskey, the flavor overwhelming when Dean finally kisses him, but Sam’s tongue slides out, edges into Dean’s mouth, seeking his real taste underneath. Dean hums into his mouth, a pleased, low purr just as he rocks his hips down, his dick hard in the trap of his jeans, rubbing thick against Sam’s stomach.

“Ohmygod,” Sam whispers, words getting caught and lost in Dean’s mouth. “Ohmygod, Dean.”

“You feel it?” Dean drops his hips, legs spreading between Sam’s, getting in deeper to grind against Sam’s stomach. “Don’t even know what you do to me. Fuck, Sammy, you don’t even know.”

Sam opens his mouth to speak, to at least let out a sound but Dean takes his mouth in a rough kiss, tongue fucking into him in low, hungry pulses that set Sam’s hips off, making him hump up, starved for a rhythm. Dean rocks against him, amulet hitting Sam in the chin.

“Sorry,” Dean breathes, reaching back with one hand to yank the necklace off over his head. He’s halfway to the nightstand with his hand, about to drop the amulet on it but Sam reaches out, tangles his fingers with the cord, tugs it away.

He pulls it down over his own head, over his messy curls, letting it come to rest against his own chest. He glances up at Dean to smile at him but Dean is frozen, staring at him, right down at the amulet on Sam’s chest.

“Oh, fuck,” Dean whispers, hips digging in harder now, close enough that Sam can actually feel the strong pulse of lust in Dean’s dick. “Oh, fuck.”

Dean curls down, tongue slipping out to swirl around one of Sam’s nipples, just a quick kiss, a quick taste and then he’s moving down a little more to kiss at the amulet, tongue flicking at the skin underneath, around it. Sam grips Dean’s shoulders hard, socked feet planted against the bed so he can thrust up, starving for friction. Dean keeps on kissing, tasting, sucking at the tiny bump of Sam’s sternum, tonguing the amulet before his hand is there and he’s pressing down on it, hard, the horns digging into Sam’s skin.

Sam’s eyes slip closed, head tipping back on the pillow and he just feels it, Dean’s dick digging against him, the amulet pressing into his skin so hard it’s going to leave a bruise. It fucking hurts, sharp and metal and unrelenting and it’s so good that Sam digs his nails into Dean’s shoulders, breaking skin and hoping that it tells Dean for him that he doesn’t want it to stop, to please, please keep going.

“G-gonna come, Dean,” he finally gasps out, his dick throbbing so hard in his pants that he can feel it in his temples, in his wrists. Dean moans somewhere near his face, so close and then he’s kissing him, one hand on Sam’s left nipple and the other still pushing, pressing at the amulet, imprinting it in Sam’s skin.

He comes then, thinking about the shape the bruise is going to leave on him, thinking about how he’s going to feel it tomorrow, when they’re back on the road, that he’s going to remember this every time he feels it. That there will be evidence that Dean touched him, wanted him like this. That Dean is doing this, right now.

That he is Dean’s.

He comes in desperate, pulling spurts, the warmth of it flooding his underwear, soaking into the worn cotton. He comes against nothing, nothing touching his dick, nothing causing it but his
brother’s possessive hands, his mouth. Comes like a girl, like a good boy, for Dean.

“So fuckin’ good, Jesus Christ, Sammy,” Dean pants against his mouth, like he can hear Sam’s thoughts. “Came so fuckin’ good for me.”

Dean’s hand slides down, fingers pushing between Sam’s legs to grip at him, to rub hard at his dick, the wet squelch of come loud even in his pants. Sam fucks up against his hand, rocks against it, mouth parted as sound after humiliating, grateful sound leaves him.

Sam whimpers, his stomach trembling as Dean pulls jolts of sensation out of him. He nudges at Dean’s face, begs his mouth back over his own. He sighs when Dean kisses him, when he licks back into his mouth, those beautiful lips kiss-swollen and soft against his. Dean keeps his hand between his legs, massaging at his spent dick until Sam tries to squirm away, tries to close his legs.

“Show me what you want, Dean.” His voice sounds wrecked, scraped raw. His hands trip down Dean’s ribs, slide around to rub at his stomach, at the front of his jeans, right over his dick. “Show me how to do it right.”

Dean’s braced up over him and staring down at Sam, his breath a shivering, searing heat that washes down all over Sam’s face. He watches Sam through the trembles, through the heaving pants that settle into arrhythmic puffs of air through his nose. He holds on and waits, waits until Sam’s eyes find his own again, waits until everything around them and between them is still but their heartbeats.

He laces his hand with Sam’s where it’s curled on the mattress, just lines their fingers up and lets their lifelines touch, just like always. He tugs Sam’s hand and Sam goes along easily, a disciple that travels between their bodies, his hand still tucked in Dean’s.

Sam looks down, can’t help it even as Dean watches him, stares down at him like Sam’s about to tell him a secret. All Sam hears is the soft sound of their hands edging past the elastic waist of Dean’s underwear, the hush-slide of the back of his own hand down Dean’s burning, naked belly, along the soft scratch of his happy trail and into the damp, warm curls around his dick.

Dean guides Sam’s hand where he wants it, slides it right down over the length of him and they both suck in a breath at the same time, both tense up and shiver in tandem. Sam’s eyes shoot back up to watch Dean’s face, to watch the almost vulnerable flutter of his eyelashes. Sam nearly gasps when Dean’s eyes meet his own, a fierce green glint in the darkness.

Sam’s hand shakes where it wraps around Dean’s dick and they shift on the bed, a gentle creak and whine announcing it as Sam spreads his legs a little wider and Dean tucks his hips closer toward their shared grip on his dick.

The literal second Sam starts to stroke, starts his hand on the long journey down the length of it, Dean gasps, the sound breaking wide open at the end, cracking into a sound that Sam has never heard before, could not dream up on his own. He watches Dean, watches his effort to hold his weight up over Sam, watches the way his raw lips part, watches the butterfly-shiver of his eyelashes when he struggles to hold Sam’s gaze.

“Yeah, Sammy. God, you feel it. Feel what you do to me? Feel.”

It’s the most intimate thing Sam’s ever felt, ever done, jerking Dean off like this. Dean’s just covering him, blocking out the entire rest of the world for Sam, just containing him here in this bed that’s not theirs, could never be theirs.

It’s so hot inside Dean’s pants, so humid and burning up and there’s a gorgeous scent coming up
every time Sam strokes and Dean shudders through it, a sweaty, elemental smell that is dirty with sex and pure with something sacred between them, just between them. After all these years, they deserve a little bit of sanctuary, even if it’s just a stolen night in a motel room in a town that should’ve been their home.

“Wanna see it, Dean,” he begs, thumb sliding over and over the head, smearing in the slick that’s practically pouring out of Dean, soaking his fingers, sticking to them sweet as honey. “Please.”

Dean presses his knees into the bed, holding himself up with one shaking arm as the other hand leaves their shared hold on his cock and fumbles with the button, with the zipper of his jeans, fingers sex-dumb and shaking.

“Please,” Sam keeps whispering against Dean’s mouth, right through the soft, aching grunts that keep falling from Dean’s lips every time Sam grips the base of his dick. “Please. So beautiful, Dean. You’re so beautiful.”

He can feel when Dean’s cheeks heat up at the words, can feel him tense, fight the denials that are probably gathering on his tongue. He grabs hold of Dean’s belt loop and tugs down once Dean gets his pants open, helps him push them down as far as they’ll go, just under the curve of his ass. His underwear is next, much easier to move out of the way, the elastic catching on the head of his dick before it gives way, revealing Dean’s cock to the air, for Sam’s eyes, finally.

Sam’s mouth floods with spit, his dick giving a protesting throb between his legs.

He’s seen it before, saw it in Holly’s mouth in that basement all those years ago, with The Doors playing. Saw it when he fucked her not long after that in the room they shared in that house, the house that almost felt like home for awhile. Saw it a handful of times before and after, always in flashes, in hungry, embarrassed glimpses, usually when he walked into the wrong room at the wrong time. But none of those times were for him.

This is for him. This is Dean for Sam. That perfect, rose-pink cockhead shining with precome in Sam’s clumsy, big-handed grip, all for him. The hefty, solid length of him, more than a fistful, more than even Sam’s hand can cover, for him.

He looks up, catches Dean’s eyes, sees the strange shyness there, the flush on his cheeks. Knows it’s because Dean’s not comfortable with this, with being told he’s beautiful, with Sam’s eyes on him, with as much love as lust.

Sam turns his wrist, lets Dean’s dick rub against his abs, letting it bump against his navel. A groan punches out of Dean, his hips fucking forward, straining to get at more warm skin.

“Yeah, Dean, fuck it,” Sam murmurs, arching up to give him more to rub against. “Fuck me.”

Dean moans, the sound rumbling and dangerously low as Dean drops down against him, trapping his dick between their stomachs, trapping Sam’s hand. He starts to thrust, fucking Sam’s hand, the head of his cock catching on Sam’s navel every single time, feeling oddly intimate, close.

The amulet is pressing into his skin again, trapped between the hard lines of their chests. The bed is thumping now, moving with Dean’s body as he ruts against Sam, his balls warm as they nudge the side of his hand. He lets his pinky slide out, stroke at the soft heft of them, pulling a choked cry from Dean.

“Yeah, Sammy, play with ‘em. Shit, yeah.” Dean’s straining against him now, trying to get in deeper somehow, and Sam’s other hand flies down, desperate to please, to make it good and he gather’s
Dean’s balls up in his hot palm, squeezing and tugging, his forefinger stroking all along the skin between them and Dean’s asshole.

Dean doesn’t tell him he’s going to come, doesn’t say anything else, just presses their foreheads together, sweat pouring off of him and soaking Sam’s face, his chest. When Dean starts to come, he’s utterly silent, no sounds but the brutal slap of his body against Sam’s, but the slip-slip of dick that gets wetter and wetter when Dean creams between them, all up along Sam’s chest, soaking Sam’s hand.

He lets out the breath he held all through his orgasm in a harsh, gasping rush, a sob dragging up out of his throat as he kisses Sam, Dean’s entire body shaking now, trembling as he keeps thrusting, keeps pressing up hard into Sam’s hand.

Sam feels it too, that strange, overwhelming emotion that Dean seems to be feeling sweeping through him as well, leaving his eyes stinging with tears, his other hand wrapping around Dean’s neck, cradling the back of his head as he presses kiss after soft kiss to Dean’s trembling lips.

Dean keeps thrusting long after his orgasm finally finishes with him, keeps pushing tiredly into Sam’s patient hand, and Sam just lets him, just stays right there, coaxing every single second of pleasure Dean could have out of him. They’re kissing like they mean it now, focused on it entirely, Sam’s tongue exploring Dean’s mouth, licking at the roof of it, over his teeth that he’s suddenly obsessed to know, to know the bump and shape of each one by feel alone.

Dean finally goes still on top of him, all of his weight melting down into Sam, jeans still caught around his thighs. He sighs into Sam’s mouth, right into Sam’s kisses, and Sam smiles.

“So sexy,” he whispers, sucking at the tip of Dean’s tongue before he lets him inside of his mouth. Dean grunts, a wordless denial, both of his hands pushing into Sam’s hair to keep him still, to hold him there, right where he is.

“Pretty hot yourself, little brother.” Dean’s mouth leaves his, kisses down over Sam’s chin, sucking on the point of it before licking down his throat. Sam closes his eyes, his one clean hand resting at the back of Dean’s head, just holding onto him as he sucks on Sam’s neck, right over his heavy heartbeat. “Be right back.”

Dean slips off of him, sudden and too soon, and Sam honest to God pouts. Keeps his eyes on Dean’s tight, bare ass as he sheds his jeans and underwear on the way to the bathroom. Sam starts to kick off the rest of his own clothes when Dean flicks on the light and disappears for a moment, using his ruined underwear to wipe himself clean before he tosses his clothes over the side of the bed.

He looks down at his hand, the one covered in Dean’s come, lines of it webbing between his fingers, thickening as it starts to dry.

Closes his eyes as he brings his hand to his mouth, sliding two fingers across his own tongue. God, yes. That taste.

It’s Dean, just like he remembered, just like he tasted in Holly’s mouth almost a decade ago. But this is his, straight from the source. Just for him. He swallows it all down before moving onto the other two fingers, free hand moving to his dick to rub, to grip at idly when he moves down to his palm, licking it clean.

“Jesus Christ, Sammy.”

Sam’s eyes fly open, both of his hands stopping what they’re doing. He looks over and finds Dean
standing next to the bed, a dripping wet washcloth dangling from his hand, looking disgustingly, scorchingly gorgeous and naked, his eyes trained Sam’s mouth.

“Sorry,” Sam mumbles, reaching for the cloth, wiping the rest of his hand clean, bottom lip sucked up into his mouth to get the last taste of Dean.

Dean’s hand is in his hair, his grip hard as he yanks Sam’s head back, latching onto his mouth, his tongue sliding in, claiming, seeking. Sam relaxes then, kissing Dean back lazily but mostly just letting him feed, letting him taste himself, letting him lick and drink at any part of his mouth that he wants.

“What’re you tryin’ to do to me? Hm? Christ. Tryin’ to rev me up again?”

Sam smiles against his mouth, reaching down then to wrap his hand around Dean’s dick again, giving him a slow tug. Dean whines, twists his hips away from Sam just as his dick gives a greedy jump toward Sam’s hand.

“We’re sleeping, Sammy.” There’s light in Dean’s eyes, a tiny glimmer of humor behind his serious big brother face, behind the tired lines. Dean leans over and flicks off the lamp by the bed, leaving them in muffled streetlight. Sam’s smile softens and he reaches up, hooking an arm around Dean’s neck and tugging him down into the bed, laughing a little when Dean lands with an oof.

“Sorry if I hump you in my sleep.” Sam gathers the blankets up and tugs them over their bodies, making sure Dean is completely covered before he relaxes again. They’re face-to-face, and Dean slides closer, lifting one of his legs to drape it over Sam’s.

“Wouldn’t be the first time,” Dean retorts, wrapping an arm around Sam’s neck and pulling him close enough to press a kiss to his jaw. Sam’s eyes widen, body tensing as he pulls back to meet Dean’s eyes.

“Wait. Seriously?”

Dean grins, dirty and teasing and moves right back in to continue his kisses, teeth nipping at Sam’s earlobe.

“No, not really.”

Sam lets out a sigh of relief, relaxing into the kisses, pulling the covers up higher until they’re practically buried under them. He closes his eyes, arm sliding around Dean’s body and tightening, keeping him close.

“Sammy?”

“Hn?”

“You’re still wearin’ socks.”

Sam cracks an eye open to squint at him in the dark.

“...Yeah? So?”

“You’re, like. Naked otherwise.”

Sam snorts, a completely unsexy sound.

“So? My feet get cold.”
“Body heat, man. I can keep your feet warm. Take the socks off.”

Sam opens both eyes now, staring at his brother just inches from his face.

“You’re serious.”

“Yep.”

“My socks bother you that much.”

“Mhmm.”

Sam sighs, letting it be loud and annoying before he starts to try and toe his socks off. Dean’s feet join in, and together they manage to wrangle them off and kick them from under the covers to land on the floor. Sam raises his eyebrows even though he knows Dean can’t see it.

“You happy now?”

He sees Dean’s smile just barely in the shadows, and he tastes it when Dean leans over, pressing a slow kiss to his mouth. Dean’s toes drag over top of Sam’s feet, their legs tangling together, the soft whisper of skin on skin.

“Yep. Thanks.”

Sam just grunts, a smile pulling hard at his lips. Dean tucks in against him, face pressed into crook of Sam’s neck, nose snuffling around in his hair before Dean settles in. Sam’s hand slides up into Dean’s hair, spreads out to cradle the back of his head before his eyes close again.

He hears, faint and probably already in a dream, Mom’s voice brush against his ear in a simple 

*goodnight, Sam.*

They stop in Hannibal, Illinois for gas, the car running on fumes by the time Dean pulls her up to the pump.

Sam takes Dean’s last thirty bucks and heads into the gas station, hoodie zipped up tight under his jacket, the wind whipping in brutally cold.

Dean waits in the car as long as he can, delaying the inevitable. He scowls as he climbs out into the bitter Illinois winter, jacket tugged up close, collar popped to shield him from the wind as much as possible. It’s late afternoon and the sun is buried behind a thick wall of clouds, everything around them grey and dead and frozen.

“Find me a fuckin’ haunting in Cancun, I swear to God,” he mutters to himself as he opens the side door, reaching into the backseat and gathering the plastic and paper bags of burger wrappers and empty bottles of water and Diet Dr. Pepper. He tosses them in the can right behind him, turning just in time to see two girls climb out of a blue Eclipse, both of them in snug peacoats, their long hair
whipping in the wind.

He checks out their asses as he makes his way around the car, shoving the license plate aside and uncapping the gas tank just as Sam appears at the door, pushing it open to come back out. He steps outside, a loaded bag hanging from his fingers, easing to one side quickly so he can hold the door open for the two girls.

Dean can only smile as he watches the girls lift their heads against the wind to look up and up at Sam, at this gorgeous boy holding the door open for them with that floppy hair and dimpled smile. Sam nods at them, obviously a reply to their thanks, letting the door go when they step inside. Dean watches them grab at each other, looking back at Sam like maybe he’d been a mirage, the grins on their faces unmistakable, their eyes on Sam’s ass as he crosses the parking lot and comes toward Dean.

He feels it then, a hard, dirty twist of jealousy, of possessiveness, slither through him, making the caveman in him grunt in protest, in mineback off he’s mine.

Sam’s hair is everywhere by the time he sidles up next to Dean, and Dean busies himself with grabbing the gas pump, shoving up on the lever and sliding the nozzle into the tank.

“Got you some, uh. Ranch Pringles and some beef jerky and a Kit Kat bar. And a Diet Dr. Pepper ‘cause you’ve been on a kick.” Sam’s peering down into the bag, his fingers red from the cold, nose turning pink the longer he’s out here. Dean lets the gas run itself so he can turn all his attention to Sam, so he can give him a little smile out of the corner of his eyes.

“I have been on a kick, huh?” He glances around at the few people coming and going, all bundled up and curled in against the cold. “You can go ahead and get in the car. Still warm in there. I’m almost done.”

Sam shrugs, opens the car door long enough to toss the bag in before he’s closing it again. “I’m okay.”

Dean pushes his hands into his jacket pockets, taking a step closer to Sam and squinting in at the bag on the seat. “So, what you get to eat?”

“Just a couple of granola bars. Figured I’d steal a couple of your chips or something.” Sam turns toward him, frowning as he reaches out to tug Dean’s jacket closed.

“You sure? I’ve got another five in change in the car. Lemme go get you somethin’ else.” Dean’s looking over Sam’s face, studying his expression and making sure he’s not lying, that he’s not just doing that not-eating thing again or something. Sam looks up at him through his lashes, that fucking sexy fox-eyed look of his that makes Dean’s dick stir in his jeans. Sam’s still holding onto him, hands holding Dean’s jacket shut still.

“I’m good, Dean,” he says quietly, just between them. “Promise.”

“Gonna get us some more money. Maybe head to Chi-town and find some stupid rich business guys who have shit poker faces. And we can go to any restaurant in the whole city you want.” Dean steps up toward him, walks Sam back until Sam’s pressed against the car, Dean right up on him, hovering tight and close, still looking over Sam’s face, staring at his pretty pink mouth.

“Any restaurant?” Those eyes on him again, turning Dean’s fucking legs to Jell-O. He presses in harder, hips finding each other, Sam’s hands disappearing under Dean’s jacket now to stroke down over his flanks.
“Any fuckin’ restaurant you want, Sammy.”

“Even sushi?”

Dean wrinkles his nose. “Really? Anything in all’a Chicago, and you want raw fish?”

“You’ve never even had sushi.” Sam’s leaned back on the car now, legs spreading to let Dean slip between them, their dicks lined right up and pressing, rubbing a little. Sam’s got his hands on the small of Dean’s back now, fingers tugging up on his shirt to stroke at bare skin. Dean hisses at Sam’s cold ass fingers on his perfectly warm back, arching against those hands and glaring when Sam grins.

“Yeah, well,” Dean grumbles, the gas done pumping by now but Sam’s being cute and there’s nobody around right now really, just an old man creeping slow back to his truck and a woman talking loud on her phone as she pumps her gas.

“Will you at least try it?” Sam tugs Dean a little closer, staring right into Dean’s eyes as he drags his tongue over his bottom lip. Dean grunts, eyes sliding down, following that fucking seductive tongue. Digs his hips in harder, giving his dick something good to rub against.

“If I have to,” he sighs, so put-upon, and it makes Sam’s face light up like a fucking Christmas tree. “But! If it tastes like ass, I get steak. A big steak.”

“Damn,” Sam whispers, their mouths edging closer, drawing out the tension until it almost hurts. “Here I was, hopin’ you’d like the taste of ass.”

Dean nearly shudders at how fucking fast his dick fattens up at that, a growl edging up straight out of his chest as he reaches up, forearms resting on Sammy’s shoulders so he can dig his fingers into all that hair. He can see, out of the corner his eyes, the two girls who’d been eyefucking Sam come out of the gas station. He watches them slow to a stop, feels their eyes on them, on Sam.

“If that’s what you let me eat in Chicago, we’re not leavin’ the motel room, I’ll tell you that.” Dean slides their mouths together, the kiss wet and liquid and hot as shit because of how Sammy’s breath catches, how their bodies push and roll together, how Sam’s hands slide from his back down into the back pockets of his jeans, gripping Dean’s ass and pulling him in hard, closer.

They break away after just a few seconds, Sam’s breath leaving in hot pants that look like smoke in the cold air. He swallows, a bright, happy smile breaking out over his face as he rubs his forehead against Dean’s.

“We should go,” he mumbles against his lips, hands massaging Dean’s ass through his jeans. “Gonna get arrested or something.”

“Fuckin’ tease.” Dean smirks against his lips, leaning in to steal one more kiss before he steps back, lets Sam up from where he’d had him trapped against the car. Sam’s mouth is already damp, swollen deep pink and smiling all shy as he opens the car door and slides down into his seat.

Dean’s smile doesn’t leave as he replaces the nozzle and slides the license plate back down, not looking over again at the girls who are finally getting back in their car, their silence telling him that they saw the whole thing. He opens his own door and eases down into the seat, starting the car up and pulling back out onto the road, Sam smiling sweet and secret beside him.

They run into traffic about twenty miles outside of Springfield, a three-car pileup ensuring that they
aren’t getting into Chicago before sunset.

“Godfuckingdamnit,” Dean groans, slowing down and coming to a stop just behind a blue minivan with cheerleading stickers on the back. “Seriously? Do people just not know how to fucking drive? I’ve never gotten into an accident. Never. You know how many miles I’ve driven?”

“Hope everybody’s okay,” Sam murmurs, squinting as he leans forward in the seat, trying to see through the van since he can’t see around it. “You see an ambulance or anything?”

“No,” Dean grumbles, still frowning but he at least looks concerned now. A police car flies by them on the shoulder, the flashing lights making a shiver of fear run through Sam’s gut. He glances over and sees Dean’s shoulders pull in, tense at the sight. “Sorry. I’ve just gotta migraine, is all.”

Sam reaches over, hand spreading out on the curve of Dean’s shoulder, giving it a slow squeeze. “Want me to take over? We can do it without getting out.”

“Nah, m’okay.” Dean glances over at Sam, mouth lifting in one corner in what tries to be a smile. Sam brushes his thumb over it before he takes his hand back.

They inch forward a little, and Sam realizes then that all the traffic from the passing lane has their signals on, trying to get over. A black Corvette, with no warning or pause, angles himself in between them and the van, making Dean slam on his brakes with a quick, angry stamp, the abruptness of it nearly sending Sam into the dashboard.

“You goddamn stupid motherfucker.” Dean honks his horn, the sound a loud blast in the cold late afternoon, one that earns a hand coming out of the driver side window of the Corvette, a middle finger lifted towards them. Sam blinks at it, at this stupid, stupid man who has no idea who he’s messing with, taking just a second to catch up to what could happen before he reaches over, hand lighting on Dean’s thigh, his voice dropping low, calm.

“Dean,” he says, soft and just once, and Dean glares over at him, eyes bright with anger, jaw tensed. “Did you see that sonuvabitch? His fuckin’ car’s made outta carbon fiber. Does he seriously think he would survive it if I fucking hit him? What a fucking idiot.” Dean’s gripping the wheel tight and they’re moving forward again, Dean sticking right to the guy’s ass, making sure his engine revs big and loud when they come to a stop again. The guy leans out the window to yell something back at them, his perfectly manicured scruff telling Sam all he needs to know about how well he’d fare in a fight with Dean Winchester.

Sam snorts, rolling his eyes as he settles back in his seat, keeping a careful hand on Dean’s thigh. “What a moron,” he sighs, thumb rubbing in a slow circle along Dean’s outer thigh.

“If you’d’ve hit the dash, he’d be eating my gun right now,” Dean says, low and dangerous, and it sends a hard tremble up Sam’s spine. He doesn’t want to argue with Dean, doesn’t want to remind him that they don’t hurt people, they save them, doesn’t want to piss him off any more.

He scoots across the seat instead, his hand slipping higher up on Dean’s thigh, edging in a little until he rubs up deep between Dean’s legs. He drags his nose over the side of Dean’s neck that’s hot with anger, following it up with a slow kiss.

“I’m okay, Dean,” he reminds him, goosebumps trailing over his body when he feels Dean harden under his palm. “How about you? Are you okay?”

They move forward a little more, Dean all but stuck to the guy’s rear bumper. Sam hears and feels
Dean swallow, feels it when his face heats up under Sam’s nuzzling kisses that lead to the high point of Dean’s cheekbone.

“Cut it out,” Dean gruffs, the way he spreads his legs, rocks his hips forward giving Sam a more truthful answer. Sam slides his fingers up, tugs Dean’s button undone before working the zipper down, his young self inside shaking, reminding him that he’s thought about this for so long, wanted exactly this, savor it, keep this close, never forget any of it, any smell or sound or feel of Dean just in case it goes away again.

“You told me before, Dean,” Sam says right against his ear, his own breath leaving in harsh little puffs when he reaches in past Dean’s underwear and wraps his fingers around his dick. “When we were younger. Talked about that girl who sucked you off while you were driving.”

“M-Melinda,” Dean sighs, his entire body tight now, tensed, his dick pulsing and hot in Sam’s palm.

“Oh, God, Sammy, don’t do this. I can’t—”

“But you don’t have to do anything. Just gotta let me. Just let me, Dean.”

They’re moving again, coasting along at barely a mile an hour, but they’re moving. Dean’s given up his grudge with the guy in front of them in favor petting Sam, fingers dragging through his hair and down his spine to squeeze at the curve of his hip before making their way back up his body.

Sam curls down in the seat, his long legs smashed up against the door but his face is right near Dean’s crotch, collarbone pressed into the side of his thigh. He uses both hands now, shaking with nerves and want but he’s pulling Dean’s dick out, a movement that has Dean gasping, a shiver pushing all over him and ending with a blurt of precome seeping out of his slit.

Sam cranes forward, can’t help it, doesn’t think about it, just goes in with his tongue to catch it all, can’t let it go to waste. He licks over the head of Dean’s cock, the sweet hot-hard velvet of it so fucking perfect against his lips, on his tongue. He closes his eyes against the pathetic sting of tears, against the incredible surge of love he feels for his brother, against the awareness of just how long he’s wanted this.

“Oh, shit, Sammy.” Dean’s belly is sucking in and out fast, fear-fast, like he’s terrified of what Sam is doing to him. Dean’s hand is in his hair again but it’s holding on this time, the tight clutch of his fingers telling Sam that Dean is all but begging him.

He’s only done this once, back in Denver, two lifetimes ago. Only done it a single time, but it feels instinctive and not scary, feels like it’s what he should be doing because it’s Dean. He parts his lips, reminding himself of the last time he’d done this, how he’d given himself a pep talk with the things he’d heard from Dean, and now he’s here. Wrapping his mouth around Dean’s dick, getting another hot rush of slick spilling across his tongue.

“Sammy, I can’t,” Dean sobs, hand gripping the wheel so hard it’s shaking. “Baby, God, just gimme. Gimme a second. I ca-can’t. I need.” Sam can feel the tremble of Dean’s fingers in his hair, can feel the overwhelm of emotion in the car, rising up out of Dean, and it makes him pull back, makes him press a soft, almost solemn kiss to the head of Dean’s dick but he stops, rests his cheek on Dean’s thigh, face all but buried against his stomach.

The car jerks to life then, Dean slamming on the gas and jerking the car over onto the shoulder between the line of cars and the guardrail. He flies forward, obviously heading toward something but Sam doesn’t open his eyes, doesn’t lift up to see. Just keeps his hand around Dean’s dick, thumb tracing over the hard ridge at the head, bottom lip sucked into his mouth so he can keep dreaming about how he tastes.
“Just hold on. I just need to stop. Sammy, you’re gonna fuckin’ kill me.” It feels like the car finally breaks free when Dean clearly gets onto an exit, tires squealing as he jerks the car to the right, heading onto whatever road this exit led to.

They drive for just a minute or so, another right and then up a hill and Dean comes to a stop, turning the car off, the hush falling over them absolute.

Sam tightens his hand around Dean’s dick, gives him a slow, twisting stroke up, gathering up skin to press his lips to, to tender with kisses.

“Thought you said she sucked you off while you were driving,” he murmurs against the tip of his cock, lifting up just enough so he can wrap his lips around it, let his tongue slip out and lick it all over.

“God, she wasn’t you. She wasn’t you, Sammy. Sh-she.” Dean’s clutching at Sam’s shoulder now, slouched down in the seat, giving more of his lap for Sam and Sam takes advantage of it, gets both hands around Dean’s dick, letting the spit run out of his mouth all over the long, scorching hot length of it, letting his own spit drip over his hands before he uses it to slick Dean up, getting him all wet.

Dean’s free hand comes down, grabs hold of one of Sam’s hands. Sam lifts up a little to kiss it, kiss at the white half-moon of Dean’s fingernail, at his scarred middle knuckle.

“Tell me what to do, Dean,” he whispers, kissing back down to his dick before rubbing it all over his lips, over his cheek, panting harsh and loud over Dean’s skin. “Tell me what you like so I can be good for you.”

“I-just. Just you. God, please just you. Sam.” Dean runs his hand down to grip the base of his own dick, his other hand pushing Sam’s hair back from his forehead, out of his eyes. Sam lets his hands fall away, holding onto Dean’s thigh when Dean tips his cock toward Sam’s mouth, tapping it a few times against the fat swell of his bottom lip before he pushes inside, right up against the roof of Sam’s mouth.

A deep-rooted whine pushes out of Dean’s throat, his hand falling away as Sam sinks his mouth down onto him, taking Dean in deeper, eyes falling closed because this. This is heaven. This is exactly, exactly where he’s always wanted to be, always wanted to feel. This completeness, this everything sliding into place moment. This.

He gags a little when Dean thrusts up into the slick skin at the back of Sam’s mouth, right along the top, trying to keep the instinct away, trying to just breathe and relax.

“Sam. Sam, I can’t. Sammy, I.” Dean is shaking all over, his dick gushing clear almost-sweet slick over his tongue, the sounds Dean’s making getting closer together, more stuttered-out, incoherent. Sam wraps his lips around him, sucking his cheeks in and starting up as much of a rhythm as he can against Dean’s bucking, desperate hips, against the cock that is growing hotter and hotter in his mouth, that feels so fucking huge and so perfect over the curled soft of his tongue.

Dean’s fingers are bumping against Sam’s on his thigh and Sam’s lift up, let Dean’s tangle with them, clutch together. Sam feels it again, that love love love love feeling, that everything is so, so right feeling, that euphoria that makes him feel dizzy, like nothing will ever, ever be wrong again.

Dean cries out when he comes, a choked, desperate sound that is absolutely heartbreaking because it’s coming from Dean, it’s vulnerable and alone and begging and Sam doesn’t have time to think, can’t react to it because there’s thick spills of come on his tongue, every single inch of Dean moving with each spurt, all of him curled down around Sam, over him, like Sam is taking everything out of
him, drinking it all down. Sam holds on so tight to Dean’s hand that he can’t feel his fingers, just clings to him and swallows, frantic to keep it all, to drink it all down, to keep keep keep.

Dean thrums against him, beneath him, his whole body still rocking against Sam, his dick a gorgeous flush of pink and shining with spit and come when Sam finally lets it out of his mouth.

He rubs his thumb over the back of Dean’s hand as he starts to lick his dick clean, a contented sigh rushing out of his nose. His belly feels warm now, full, and he can smell Dean all around him, the sweet earth scent of him, can taste him every time he swallows. He kisses at the head of his dick again, tongue prodding at the slit until Dean whimpers.

“Stop. Please. Jesus Christ,” Dean finally breathes, his body rigid until Sam lets him go, letting his softening dick fall back against his heaving stomach, still twitching in sluggish pulses. Sam leans forward, can’t help it, and presses a final kiss to the underside of him, just above his balls.

He sits up then, his back killing him from the position he’d been in and he keeps his eyes down, doubt flooding him as he very, very gently tucks Dean back into his pants, fixes them up again, wanting to rub still, to touch him, to never stop touching him.

“Was it, um. Was that--”

Dean interrupts him by cupping his face, tipping Sam’s head up and kissing him, dirty and full on the mouth. Sam wraps his arms around Dean’s neck, pushes in closer to him, wanting to be in his lap so bad, to just wrap around him, drowned in him. His nose drags against Dean’s cheek, and he realizes when he feels the damp skin there that there are tears drying on Dean’s face, the tracks clear in the fading daylight.

“Never felt like that before,” Dean whispers into his mouth, his thumbs stroking the lines of Sam’s jaw, forehead resting against Sam’s. “Never.”

Sam smiles against his lips, a tiny, brief thing, before he kisses him again.

“C’mon, switch with me. Lemme drive for awhile.”

Dean kisses him again, maybe three or four times before he pulls back to meet his eyes finally.

“You sure? Don’t you need me to--”

Sam shakes his head, running a hand through his hair, his dick hard enough to hurt in his jeans but he loves it, loves it like the fucked-up kid he’ll always be.

“I’m good. Here. Scoot over. Just rest for a little.” Sam opens his door and slides out, snow starting to fall again as he makes his way around the car, opening up the driver’s side and sliding in on the other side of Dean, behind the wheel now.

He gets the car started up, the heat turned up a little more before he glances over, realizes that Dean’s watching him. Their eyes meet and Sam smiles at him, reaching out and snagging Dean’s jacket, tugging on it until Dean comes, slides right up against Sam’s side again.

Sam pulls out of the church parking lot where they’d ended up, empty and newly paved out in the middle of nowhere, his arm wrapped around Dean’s shoulder, Dean’s breath warm on his neck.

He realizes then that everything feels like a first with Dean, erases every other time before. That Dean is filling in all the places in his life where he wasn’t before, that he’s slowly but surely patching up all the spaces where he wasn’t before until there will be nothing, in the end, but Dean.
And it’s just how Sam’s always wanted it anyway.

They leave the Roosevelt Asylum pressed to opposite ends of the car, Dean’s face drawn, ashen, like he’d been inside of the asylum for years. Sam’s tucked against the passenger door, his throat working as he tries to find words for Dean, a better apology than *sorry a spirit made me crazy enough to tear you down with words and shoot you.*

He has tears in his eyes, hands tucked up into his sleeves as they make their way into town, in search of a motel cheap enough to take them. He hops out of the car as soon as Dean parks in front of the Star-Brite Motor Inn, leaning back in to speak to his brother who still won’t look at him, who is looking down at his lap.

“I’ll go get us a room. Just. Just wait here, okay?”

Dean nods, curt, still doesn’t look over. Sam waits a couple of beats, just in case. In case Dean has anything to say to him. He stands up straight again when he doesn’t, almost has the door closed when--

“Hey, Sam?”

Sam yanks the door back open, leaning into the car again, knowing he looks over-eager, desperate to please, to fix this but he doesn’t care. Not this time.

“Yeah?”

“Get two beds.”

Sam pauses, stung, his throat tightening but he nods because what else can he do? What could he possibly say to argue with that? Tired tears sting his eyes as he stands up, closes the door, and makes his way to the lobby.

The room is nicer than most and the last two bed-room left. Dean throws his shit in the corner, digs out a pair of briefs and announces that he’s going to shower.

Sam pries his shoes off, strips down to his underwear and sits back on the bed, leaning against the headboard. His head is killing him, still tingling with the ghost of possession, of what it feels like to be under someone else’s control inside of your own body.

He pries around in his mind, searching out any hints of the insanity remaining, any chance that he could turn on Dean like he did just a couple of hours ago. He doesn’t find anything, none of the aggressive, unpredictable violence that was thrumming through his veins earlier when he lifted two different guns and pulled the trigger on his brother. On Dean.

*Dean.*

“Shit,” he whispers, his legs naked and cold as he folds them up together and leans forward, burying his face in his hands. It feels like he’s ruined it, like he’s fucked up whatever this was between them. The worst part is that there still *is* something there, some darkness in him that doesn’t breach the
surface very often. Something like dark water in his veins that he’s felt for a very long time, that’s always been there, that he wouldn’t really know what to do without. It’s just under his skin, like he could scratch it out if he tried, just like he used to.

He used to try and get at it. To draw it up to the surface. He used to be very intimate with it, to live and sleep with it. He’d always thought, always worried, that the darkness was what made him want Dean, made him need him like he does. That they’re one and the same. That the darkness is penance for the way he loves his brother.

He hasn’t thought about it for awhile, for years, really. But it’s back now, bubbled to the top, brimming and waiting. Goading him to do something, do something, pay for it. Punish yourself for it. You need it. Deserve it.

He pries the covers down and slips under them, pulls them up to his waist. His hands are on his thighs underneath, fingers turned into claws and he’s digging into the soldier-lines of scars on his thighs, pressing in, drawing blood, ready to rake, to break skin, make it bleed.

The bathroom door opens.

Dean steps out, his underwear pulled on carelessly, barely hanging on his hips. He has a bruise about the size of a fist right in the center of his chest, just above the amulet, where the rocksalt bullet hit him. It’s a purpling red and angry-looking right now, will definitely be black and blue by tomorrow. Sam wants to press his lips to it, to touch Dean and beg him with apologies. He pushes his nails in even harder, biting down on his tongue to keep in any sound.

Dean tosses the towel toward his bag and yanks down the covers of the other bed, sliding down into it and pulling them up over him, up to his shoulders, his back to Sam.

Sam stays perfectly still, nails pressed, beads of blood pushed up beneath them, staining under his fingernails. Tries to talk himself down. Remind himself that he’s not a kid anymore, that this isn’t a solution anymore. It’s not going to help anything.

“I think we need some rules.”

Dean’s voice, muffled and low, no humor. Sounding like Dad. Too much like Dad.

“Rules?” Sam’s voice shakes, and he’s too weak to fix it. He takes a deep breath and pries his nails off of his thighs, forces them on top of the blankets. Wipes the scant blood off on them.

“When we’re on a hunt, we keep it clean. Professional. We focus.”

A sharp clench of worry sets off in Sam’s empty stomach, acid pushing up to the back of his throat, flooding his mouth with bile. His hands clutch at the sheets.

“You. You mean--”


“W-what. What about between hunts?”

The silence between them swells, pushing at the walls until it’s too much, too much for Sam to handle.

“Get some sleep, Sam.” The finality of it, the defeat in Dean’s voice drives the whole conversation
home, makes Sam realizes there’s no arguing it, not right now.

And, just like that, he’s sixteen again, reckless with self-hatred, down so deep in that darkness that it feels permanent.

Burkittsville, Indiana.

Sam still smells the Greyhound station, still smells the burning of that ancient apple tree, but he’s back with Dean.

They’d been apart for only a couple of days, but it taught him something. Taught him that he just can’t be away from him now, for any length of time. That he can’t be away for a single hour without looking at his phone, finger on ‘call.’

So he hadn’t stayed away. Made a decision, came back to him. To fucking Indiana. Saved the day. Saved the boy (and the girl, but the boy is the one beside him, the one who matters).

Sam’s smiling to himself, the window cracked, letting in the slightly cool air as they fly down an empty backroad-highway.

“What?”

Sam looks over when he hears Dean’s voice, turns his smile over to him. He shrugs, hands to himself, in his lap when they want to be somewhere else. Anywhere else.

“Nothin’. Just been a long couple of days.”

Dean hums in agreement, fingers tapping on the wheel, *Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan* playing low from the radio. “You’re smilin’ about long days?”

“Smiling about the end of long days.”

He watches Dean’s mouth curl a little for that, watches the light take over in his eyes for just a second. Laces his own hands together so at least he’s holding onto something.

They drive through a one-stoplight town, a tiny diner halfway up the main drag calling to Dean’s stomach. There’s an old wooden bench outside, and the waitress brings Sam’s grilled cheese and Dean’s double cheeseburger out to them there.

Sam tears his grilled cheese apart, likes to watch the cheese stretch and break, rearranges the pieces on his plate. Watches Dean pull the tomatoes off his burger (he never likes them but never asks for them to be left off; just always does it himself) and chow down, his cheeks full with food, his eyes lazy with that happy-eating look he gets when he hasn’t eaten for awhile.

It’s been five days since Dean touched him last. Five days since he’s kissed him, since Sam’s felt his hands anywhere. He reminds himself that he’s only had it for a few months, that he lived without it for years before. That he can live without it again. That this, being right here, is enough.
“What’s going on in that head of yours?” Dean’s mouth is slick with grease and he licks it clean, leaves it wet with spit instead. He wipes his hands off on a napkin, still meticulous in spite of his occasional gluttony, still careful about clean hands, about making messes. It’s Dad. All Dad. Sam gives up all pretenses and pushes his uneaten grilled cheese away.

“Not much. Just.” He stops, draws in a deep breath. Squints off into the sunny, early spring day, doesn’t look at Dean who shouldn’t be so beautiful just drinking a fucking Sprite.

Dean snorts, shakes his head, reaches for Sam’s grilled cheese.

“Yeah. Explains everything. Thanks, Sammy.”

“Do you ever miss something, even when it doesn’t make sense? Even when it’s right there in front of you?” He still can’t bring himself to look at Dean, looks down at his sweaty bottle of water, twisting the cap so tight that it just loosens it again, back to tight, loose, and again.

Dean pauses, one cheek fat with food. “You mean like your grilled cheese?”

Sam glances over then, a rueful smirk on his face.

“Yeah. Sorta. I guess.”

Dean swallows, rubs his hands together to get rid of crumbs. Pushes the sandwich back in front of Sam.

“There. Fixed it.”

Sam shakes his head, pushes the sandwich back to Dean, uncaps his water.

“You eat it. At least it won’t go to waste.”

Dean’s quiet now, staring down at the sandwich before looking back up at Sam.

“Was everything okay out there on the road? Anything happen?”

A cloud moves in front of the sun, sending slow shadows over Dean’s face. A brave bird lands on the table, poking around for crumbs. Dean breaks off a tiny piece of crust from the sandwich and tosses it over to it. They watch it scarf it down greedily, come closer to Dean for more. Dean smirks, breaks off a few more pieces, sprinkles them on the table. He has a new best friend.

“It was fine,” Sam finally sighs. “Kind of lonely, I guess. Never realize how used to... to having someone you are until you don’t.”

Dean’s still watching the bird, not eating the sandwich any more than Sam had. His mouth is pulled down in a frown now.

“Just someone, huh?”

Sam raises his eyebrows for that, amazed at how transparent Dean’s being.

“Dean?”

Dean finally looks up, slow and hesitant, like he’s going to be mocked, like Sam’s going to say something cruel. He looks young, too fucking young. It makes Sam’s chest feel tight.
“I miss you right now. You’re right there. I could touch you, and I miss you. Do you seriously think I feel that way about anybody else?”

Dean’s eyes go back down, cheeks and neck pinking. He shifts in his seat, watches the bird fly away.

“So. Am I the grilled cheese?”

Sam breathes out a laugh, some of the tension in his bones easing.

“Yeah, you asshole. You’re the grilled cheese.”

Dean grins, down at his hands, to himself. He stands up, stretches his long body until he’s hovering above Sam. He gathers their plates and walks around the table, pausing beside Sam to press a kiss to the side of his head, to his unwashed hair.

“C’mon. Gettin’ late.”

They stop somewhere near Eminence, Kentucky after Sam’s only request for direction is “out of goddamned Indiana.”

It feels good to be down south, even though most Southerners don’t consider Kentucky part of the South. The sun is honey-colored and sweet when it sets, and there’s a truce between him and Dean, an easiness that’s been missing for the last few days as they check into yet another motel, step into yet another room, drop their bags into yet another corner.

“You want the first shower or--”

“I want to talk to you,” Sam says in a bit of a rush, like he’s been holding the words in for miles, or for years. He stops, loses courage, tugs on his sleeves, his heart already thudding in his chest. “I just, um. C-can I talk to you? Just for a few minutes?”

Dean looks nervous immediately, one shoe untied and loosened, halfway off his foot. He steps out of it, wiggles his socked toes, puts his foot back down to the carpet. He clears his throat, blinks himself out of whatever he’s thinking.

“Uh. Sure. Let’s, uh.”

He walks over to the table and pulls the one chair out from it, sitting down and working on his other shoe. Sam leaves his on, doesn’t really expect to stay after he gets this all out, doesn’t expect that one of them won’t leave. He sits down on the bed closest to where Dean’s sitting, waits and watches him pry his foot out of his boot, watches him sigh as he relaxes into the chair.

“What’s up?” Dean can’t quite seem to meet his eyes, not right away. Sam’s more than used to it.

Sam tugs at his bracelet, twists at the watch he got recently that conveniently covers up his scar, keeps him from touching it. He can’t look Dean in the eye either.

“There’s stuff I’ve needed to tell you for awhile. For years,” he starts, his voice tight, like he hasn’t taken enough breath. He pauses, forces himself to inhale. To continue. “F-for years. Stuff that I don’t want to tell you, but I need to. Because. Because I don’t want anything between us. I don’t want to keep things from you anymore. So. So I’m just gonna tell you everything. And just hope that. That you still. Still.”
“Sammy,” Dean says softly, leaning closer to him, almost close enough to touch. He’s looking at Sam now, even when Sam can’t do the same. “It’s okay. Just tell me.”

“So, it started when I was eleven, like I told you.” He glances up at Dean through his lashes, meets those bright eyes. “When I first realized that I was in love with you.”

Dean sits back then, his body still open, eyes still on Sam but his cheeks are hot again, deep pink. Like he’s surprised. Sam looks away from him, closes his eyes.

“It wasn’t bad back then. Wasn’t hard. You still treated me like. Like I was everything. Still wanted to touch me and kind of.” Sam shrugs, blushing himself, for how stupid it all sounds, summarized like this, all of those beautiful emotions shoved down into a few simple words, inferior words. “Take care of me. I knew it wasn’t the same for you, but it was okay. I could pretend. I was good at pretending.

“It got harder when I got a little older. And it was mostly just me. Probably. Being a teenager and how fucking stupid you are anyway as a teenager.”

“I was a stupid teenager, too,” Dean adds, his voice soft.

“W-watching you with girls. Hearing you talk about them. I knew I was weird. That I shouldn’t’ve been jealous, but. But then that night with Holly happened. And Sunny.”

He looks up, their eyes locking. A beat of silence passes between them, of remembering. They both remember. In detail.

“And it was amazing,” he sighs, shifting on the bed, leaning back against the headboard, sneaker-covered feet on the bed as he draws his knees up to his chest. “It was so close to what... it almost felt a little like you were with me sometimes. Even though they were there. Like it wasn’t just me, feeling the way I did. Just for a little while.”

“Sam--”

“It got harder after that,” he presses on, his voice growing stronger, eyes squeezed shut tight, nails digging into the backs of his own hands. “You had a girlfriend in every town. You always just seemed so much older than me. And once you dropped out of school, it. It. It felt like I lost you.”

The tears come just like he knew they would, but they come early. It’s his fault, his fault for not dealing with this shit before, for having so many festering wounds in the first place.

Dean slips out of the chair, comes to sit on the bed, just a couple of feet between them now. He’s facing Sam, his eyes searching over his face, words caught in his throat but he’s letting Sam talk. Letting him get this out. Tear off the scabs.

“You didn’t care as much then. Dad was gone all the time, and you were gone, and high school was just. Brutal. I just didn’t know how to deal with it. Didn’t know how to deal when all I wanted was to stay in one place, to have friends, to just be a normal kid with them for awhile. And when I did, that’s when I realized how not normal I was. The shit I thought about when I was with them. I just. I was not fucking normal.”

“You were so smart,” Dean whispers, like he can’t help but say it, but defend Sam against himself. “So many girls liked you, your friends always liked you. You didn’t see yourself, Sam. You didn’t see how amazing you were.”

“It was hard to go to dances and only want your brother there,” Sam bites back, his words meaner
than he wants. “It was hard to pretend to be into a girl just because you know it’s what you’re supposed to want. Hard to pretend I was kissing you when it was just some girl. Some girl who didn’t matter. Who didn’t know me. I hated it. Hated myself.”

“I wish I’d--”

“I tried razors at first. I had a friend, Ashley, in Blackstone, Virginia. She was goth. Her dad used to hit her. We talked about daddy issues. She used to use razors. She’d cut her wrists and let me watch.” Sam can feel Dean’s horror, feel his mind racing, trying to piece together where this is going. “Tried to make me lick the blood, but I wasn’t into that. She let me try one day. Just little cuts. They didn’t hurt at all. Not after I’d almost had my leg broken during a hunt a month before, you know?”

He pushes the sleeve of his hoodie up, shows Dean the very faint lines from his experiments with Ashley, just a few half-hearted lines, perfectly spaced, all about two inches long. Dean leans over, squints in the dying light. Reaches up to turn on the lamp by the bed to see them better. He grabs hold of Sam’s arm, runs a thumb over the lines. Sam watches him, can’t hold in a shiver.

“She told me about her cousin who used to hit her wrists on the edge of the table. Just bang-bang-bang, over and over until they bruised. But that was more of an ache, you know? Not really what I wanted. It took too long. Hard to hide.”

“Jesus, Sam,” Dean breathes, hand still wrapped around Sam’s forearm, thumb covering the lines, like he can hide them, erase all of this.

“Cigarettes were perfect,” he finally says after a few seconds of consideration, whether he wants to really say it or not. He feels his heart in his throat, like it’s trying to jump out. “A pack would last me for about a month. And I’d only do it when I really, really needed it. When I just couldn’t stand it anymore.”

“Stand what anymore?”


“What did you do, Sam? With the cigarettes?” Dean’s closer now somehow, their knees pressed together, the room only feeling as big as the bed they’re on. It’s exactly what Sam needs to keep talking.

“Burns,” he whispers, a shiver chasing up his spine at the intense memory of it, the bright feel of fire on his skin in a perfect circle. “I burned.”

“Where?” Dean’s got both hands on him now, pulling at Sam’s arms, pushing at his sleeves, running frantic hands all over the skin he bares to himself. “Sammy. Sammy, where?”

“Just don’t leave, Dean. If. If I show you. You have to promise me you won’t just leave.” He meets Dean’s eyes again, doesn’t care how pathetic he sounds, that he’s practically begging. Dean searches his eyes, so many questions in them but he nods, his hands clutching at Sam’s sleeves.

“Promise. God, Sammy, I’d never just. I’d never leave. That won’t scare me. Just show me. Please?”

Sam sits still, floating in this moment between two distinct parts of his life, the part where Dean didn’t know and the unknown future, the part where Dean will know. It’s safe here, right in between. It takes him awhile to stand up, to get his hands on his button, on his zipper.
He pushes his jeans down off of his skinny hips, lets them hit the ground. He’s still wearing his hoodie, his shoes, jeans around his ankles, thighs visible now, right in front of Dean’s face. Right where he can see, unmistakable. No question.

Two lines of burns, twenty-eight in total, right across the tops of his upper thighs, meticulously-done, damn near ritualistic. Which it was. Maybe that was the comfort in it. They’re pale now with the years, almost as pale as Sam’s skin is on his legs that never see the daylight. But they’re there. His second biggest secret.

“Sammy.”

Sam starts shaking the second he feels Dean’s hands on his thighs, the second they span the sides, grip. He closes his eyes, dares to reach out and rest a hand on Dean’s shoulder, trying to remember to breathe, to remember that he wanted this. Thought about it on his drive back to Indiana, to his brother. This has to happen.

“You. You did this to yourself? Because of me?”

Sam can’t shake his head like he wants to, can’t deny that because it’s not untrue. But it’s not true in the way Dean’s saying it, in the way he means it. He swallows, tears slipping from his closed eyes, his hand sliding up to cup the side of Dean’s neck.

“I did this because I was ruined,” Sam replies, the words thin in his tight throat. “Because there’s. There’s something wrong with me, Dean. There’s something bad in me that’s made me this way.”

“Made you what way, Sam? Made you what way? Made you brilliant? Made you somebody Stanford all but begged to come to their school? Made you the most caring person I’ve ever known? Made you into the most beautiful. Th-the most perfect. Made you into my Sammy. Made you into.”

Dean’s crying now and it’s breaking Sam’s heart, those tears tumbling down his tired cheeks, lost in the scruff on his face. Dean’s got his arms around Sam’s thighs now, hugging him, his face pressing into the scars, nose and mouth right against them, tears wetting his skin.

“I shouldn’t want you, Dean. I shouldn’t do this. I shouldn’t need you so much.” His hands tangle in Dean’s hair, gripping at the short strands of it, his chest jumping with held-in sobs. “It’s the only thing I’ve ever wanted. You’re the only thing I’ve ever wanted.”

He feels the first kiss Dean presses into his skin, right over two of the scars, feels it down to the very core of him because his knees shake, threaten to give out. Dom did this first, then Jess, but Dean’s the only one who’s supposed to do it. The only one who Sam’s needed to do it.

A soft, childish whine pushes at his throat, his teeth gritted so hard his jaw pops. He’s clutching at Dean and Dean is kissing him, kissing every single scar, kissing each one over and over again, pace picking up with every touch of his lips, tongue slipping out, soothing over them like they’re a fresh hurt.

His legs give out finally, and Dean’s right there, turning them and spreading Sam out on the mattress, pushing at his hoodie, at his jeans, his shoes. Sam lets him, lets Dean get him naked, lets him throw his underwear off the side of the bed. Lets him see. See all of him. For the first time, just lets him see.

Dean’s hands are on his legs, massaging at his thighs absently as he nuzzles them, dropping kisses still every few seconds. It breaks something open in Sam, feeling him here, smelling Dean all around him and feeling the strange numbness of the scars under those kisses. He’s ashamed, embarrassed, helpless in how much he needs this. He just does. So he takes the attention, lets Dean do this without hesitation.
“I’m sorry, Sammy. God, I’m so sorry. I’m sorry I didn’t know. That I didn’t pay enough attention. I wish I’d known. Wish you’d said somethin’ back then.” Dean’s breath is hot, wet, made damper by his tears. He rests his cheek on Sam’s thigh, arm’s still wrapped around them, fingers pressing in hard to the soft flesh, hopefully bruising.

“Didn’t want to lose you. Couldn’t risk it,” he replies, nails dragging across Dean’s scalp, petting him slow, rhythmic.

“You don’t know that. Don’t know what I was thinkin’. I tol’ you that once. That you didn’t know.”

“D-did,” Sam ventures, a strange sensation prickling over his skin, a new feeling, something he’d never really thought about. Not honestly. That Dean could have ever felt the same way. “When did. Did this.”

“Dunno,” Dean sighs, lips pressing into another soft kiss, unknowingly against the very first scar. “Maybe recently. Maybe always. Maybe it’s just always been this way.”

It’s beautiful. It’s perfect, the perfect thing for Dean to say, the perfect thing to hear because it feels right. Feels true. Sam smiles, thumb tracing the shell of Dean’s ear.

“Like it’s just who we are,” Sam adds, chest easing just to say it out loud. “But. But, Dean. What would Dad say? What’s Dad gonna say when--”

“Nobody’s gonna tell me how to how to be with you. Ain’t nobody’s business what I do to you. Not even Dad’s.”

Dean’s looking up at him now, still fully clothed, looking tired and breathtaking and the most familiar thing in the world. Sam holds his gaze, hands sliding up to cup Dean’s cheeks and he urges him up, begs him up his body.

Sam tastes his own skin when Dean kisses him, licks at the taste in his mouth while Dean spreads his legs and eases in between them, fits in right where he belongs, lock and key. Sam’s dick is caught up against the denim hiding Dean’s, is pressed and half-hard against him, and he rocks up against him.

“And what are you going to do to me?” He mumbles into Dean’s kisses, arms around him, always wants to have his arms around him, to be holding Dean right here.

“Gonna take care of you,” Dean breathes, kissing over and over at Sam’s bottom lip before he moves away, moves back down, pushing Sam’s legs together and up once he’s crouched at the foot of the bed.

Dean arranges Sam’s legs until they’re crossed, long and coltish and shoved up, his knees almost touching his nose, his dick caught between his thighs, right above his hole that is showing very blatantly now, exposed to Dean’s eyes, and God, he can feel him looking.

He closes his eyes, breath leaving in harsh rushes from his nose, his lips bitten into his mouth. He reaches up and wraps his arms around his own legs, holding them up, back, keeping Dean’s view easy, unobstructed.

“God, Sam,” Dean sighs, his breath washing all over the back of Sam’s thighs, all over his asshole. Sam shudders hard, swallows down the sounds that want to escape. He wants to reach down, to wrap his hand around his dick but he can’t, can’t get to it where it’s down between his thighs, brushing against Dean’s forehead.

He feels Dean’s tongue first, feels it lick up across his balls and he gasps, head falling back hard on
the pillow, eyes flying open. His toes curl where his ankles are crossed in the air, feet flexing.

“Please, Dean,” he gasps, his hole clenching. “Please, please.”

Dean takes his time, kisses up the underside of his dick, suckles at the tip of his it, like he likes the taste of Sam’s dripping slit. Dean uses his one hand still on Sam’s legs to shove him back harder, to tip Sam’s ass up into the air, trying to get at it. He grabs a pillow in a stroke of genius, shoves it up under the small of Sam’s back to keep him propped up.

He feels Dean’s thumbs on either side of his hole first, feels him pry it open a little more, get at the pinker skin just inside. The tip of his tongue touches it first, wriggles curious and wet there before disappearing. He hears Dean swallow.

“Mmm,” Dean growls, an unplanned, unexpected sound, more fingers prying his asshole open, spreading him apart and then his tongue is back, hungrier this time, licking flat over him before diving back inside, working its way into Sam’s tightness, into a place that hasn’t been touched in so long, that’s never been touched like this, never by this man. By the man it belongs to.

“Dean!” Sam’s legs shake with the effort to keep them up when he lets go, reaches down past them to try and touch his brother, to grab Dean’s head, haul him in closer, yesyesyes.

“Yeah, gimme that ass, Sammy. Loosen up for me, babe. C’mon, loosen up.” Dean’s tonguing his hole like he’s kissing it, like he’s eating dessert. Sam obeys without realizing it, lets his lower body relax, his asshole pouting against Dean’s greedy tongue, letting him slip in just a little deeper, letting him taste more.

He finally gets a hand on him, touches the back of his head to pull him closer when Dean wraps his lips around Sam’s hole and starts to suck, the sound one that Sam’s never really heard before, never thought of, never realized could be so fucking hot. Soft, hard sucks, one after another after another, like this is the best thing Dean’s ever tasted, like he can’t get enough.

His dick is straining and hard against Dean’s temple, getting the tiniest bit of friction there but not enough, not enough to come. His hole is fluttering against Dean’s lips, aching for the attention, his insides so fucking hungry for more, to be touched, too. Dean breaks away, spit sliding down Sam’s crack before he’s back with his fingers this time, two of them dripping wet and rubbing at Sam’s hole, pressing in a little on every slide up.

Sam’s entire body jerks then, begging Dean with every single muscle and bone and fiber. He’s done this to himself hundreds of times, had it done to him dozens, at least. But he feels like a virgin under Dean’s hands, under those eyes, this attention. This feels like the very first time he’s ever been touched by anyone, and he’s so close to coming already that it’s humiliating.

“Do it,” he whispers, pushing out with his hole, letting it wink, beg. “Do it, do it, fucking need it, Dean.”

More spit, straight from Dean’s mouth, so fucking hot, sliming all over his asshole. Those two fingers pressing in again but not shying away this time, not teasing. They turn, angle in now, pressing until they breach him, sliding straight up inside of him, not stopping until they’re rooted all the way in.

Sam’s legs fall open then, spreading as wide as they possibly can, one of his arms hooked under a thigh to keep himself open. He can see him now, see Dean down there between his legs, see his swollen, wet mouth, his blown-out eyes laser-focused on where he’s got two fingers shoved up inside of Sam, both of them thick and spreading out just to feel him, to feel as deep and far apart as
they can inside of him.

Dean’s inside of him. Dean. Dean is doing this. Dean didn’t leave. He’s right here, closer than ever.

“Fuckin’ tight, Sammy. So beautiful, goddamn.” Those fingers are pushing in and out of him now, thrusting and it’s not enough, not really, not getting in at that tight ache in him but fuck, it’s good, he’s getting fucked and it’s Dean’s fingers, those fingers that he could pick out if he was blindfolded. Dean’s fingerprints on his insides, forever. Forever now. Claimed.

Dean wraps his mouth around Sam’s dick again, working hard and tight at just the head, the rhythm off, not perfect but he’s eager and his tongue hasn’t stopped moving in his mouth and those fingers are pushing together now, joining up and turning and curling and angling up and--

“Yes, yes, there there there, Dean, there, don’t stop. Right there, don’t stop.” Dean’s got an arm hard over Sam’s hips, keeping him down so he can suck his cock without gagging, so he can keep complete control over the speed he’s fucking Sam with, so Sam has to just stay where he is and take it.

There’s a fire spreading in him now, building up bright and hot and Dean is fucking him even harder, so unbelievably good with his hands, with that beautiful mouth. Sam looks down through his lashes just to look at him, photographic memory wrapping this moment up tight, never letting it go again.

He comes straight down Dean’s throat, hole clenching up tight around those fingers that know exactly where to go, that don’t need any instruction. Of course Dean knows how to fuck him.

Dean’s pulling his fingers out the second Sam stops coming, the second he sags back into the mattress and Dean’s flipping him over onto his stomach, shoving the pillow away, his breath harsh in the quiet. Sam can hear him stripping, hear the fall of his clothes and he’s still flying, still swimming in the deep warmth of his orgasm, so pliant on the bed, waiting for his brother.

Dean’s on him again, melding right up against his back, his dick wet as it slips between Sam’s thighs, slick with what feels like spit and come, probably from Dean’s mouth. Sam moans at the thought, back arching as Dean’s tummy fits right down into the curve. Dean’s thighs spread, shoving Sam’s legs together just as his mouth closes into a kiss at the back of Sam’s neck.

Dean’s dick is so hot when it works its way between his pressed thighs, nestled right up against his soft, empty balls. They both sigh, Dean’s nose nuzzling at the back of Sam’s ear, mouth against his jaw.

“Keep ‘em tight, Sammy. Keep ‘em tight for me.”

Dean starts to thrust against him, fucking the tight, soft-skinned trap of Sam’s inner thighs, the slap of their bodies hollow, sharp. Dean’s arms work their way around Sam’s body, caught between his chest and the mattress, hold on tight to him. Sam reaches back, hand slipping in the sweat dripping down Dean’s nape, pulling him closer as he turns his head, straining to get their mouths together.

“Do it like this, Dean,” Sam whispers, reaching back with his free hand to wrap it around Dean’s dick, giving it a loving, greedy stroke before he slips it between his ass cheeks, letting it drag up the length of it, the head of Dean’s cock pushing at the bump of Sam’s tailbone.

“Oh, fuck.” Dean sounds startled, like he hadn’t ever thought of this before, like Sam is a fucking genius. He settles back down and moves his hips again, the feeling so much more intimate now, Dean’s dick rubbing hard and furious over Sam’s hole with every thrust.
Sam arches his back hard, making his ass as plush and soft for Dean as he can, giving it right up to him. Dean’s hands are on his hips now, holding onto him as he drops his weight onto Sam and just lets go, fucking at his crack like he’s inside of him, like he’s buried deep. His mouth is on Sam’s neck, on his shoulders, his breathing ragged like it’s as good for him as it feels for Sam, like he wants this just as much.

The amulet drags over his back with every push, a dirty, teasing line up his spine and Sam just closes his eyes, just feels it, everywhere they’re touching right now, every beat in the rhythm between them, every second Dean gets closer to coming until he does, until he’s spurting between Sam’s ass and all up along his back, their bodies sticking when they grind together now, slick when Dean keeps pushing, keeps going, exhaling long sighs right against Sam’s ear, so beautiful.

Dean keeps kissing him, almost worshipping him, along the span of his shoulders, up his neck, into his hair, working his way around until their mouths meet. Sam can swear that he tastes the I love you. He licks it right back into Dean’s mouth.

“Thanks for listening,” he whispers, relaxing again, cheek dropping back against the pillow.

Another kiss at the top of his spine, Dean’s mouth lingering just there. He doesn’t respond, and for the first time, Sam takes that as a good thing.

Sam’s imagined Dean dying a lot over the years.

He’s has always had an overactive imagination. He’s used it to plan entire battles with his army men, he’s used it when drawing in his notebook during his dragon phase, he’s used it in the shower once puberty hit to imagine exactly how Dean’s hand would feel on his dick. But the thing he'd imagine most, tortured himself with since he was about eight years old, since the first time Dean came back to the car with Dad where Sam was made to wait alone in the dead of Michigan's dense wintered woods for two hours while they went and did God knows what--was Dean dying.

Alone in the dark, all Sam had been able to think about was Dean being attacked by a bear. Dean being shot by an irresponsible, overeager hunter (if he’d only known). Dean falling over a cliff and breaking his legs. Why were they in the woods for so long? Why did they need to go to the woods? Where is Dean?

Dean had come back with a gash on his leg from ankle to knee, but it was apparently from falling down a steep incline and landing on a jagged rock. He was bleeding, looking a little pale and freezing to the touch when Sam put small, warm hands on his cheeks, but he was there.

Sam didn’t know it then, but he knows now those injuries came from killing a wendigo. It hadn’t mattered then. Didn't matter because at least Dean was back, breathing tired, bitter air in Sam's face. Because maybe Sam, at eight, had spent those two hours alone in the Impala trying to figure out how to say goodbye to Dean, if he had to. If Dean just hadn't come back.

It happened every time Dean left with Dad, left on his own, for any length of time. Sam’s
imagination ran with it, tortured him. Brought him to tears more than once over the course of their short lives.

He’d never imagined it would be water that did him in. Water and a taser and one hundred thousand volts. He’d killed the rawhead, but he’d suffered a massive heart attack in the process.

Two weeks to live.

Sam’s sitting by himself back at the motel, hand clutched around his phone, tears brimming in his eyes, and he’s still shaking.

Shaking since he came down those stairs again, found Dean pale with barely a pulse in standing water in that basement. Shaking still when he’d finally gotten to see him again, see the weakness in his eyes and the way he could hardly move without flinching in pain.

Two weeks to live.

He wants to call Dad back again and bitch him out. Wants to call Bobby back, third time this hour, ask if he’s heard anything yet from anybody. If he’s heard anything about this LaGrange guy in Nebraska.

He shouldn’t have left Dean alone in that basement. The kids could’ve gone out by themselves; the monster was in the basement. Sam should have been with him. Could have covered him. See it before it got him.

He wants a cigarette so bad he’s chewing on his lip, tonguing at a chunk he’s ripped out inside his cheek. He wants to hurt, wants to take all that hurt from Dean, wants it to all be on him.

There’s a knock on the door.

Sam’s own heart almost stops when he seems him propped up against the door frame, looking like he’s going to fall over at any second, looking like he crawled the entire way here. Like he just had to be here.

He reaches for him, hands wrapping around Dean’s borrowed hoodie, pulling him in as gently as he can with all of this panicked hunger rushing around in him.

“C’mere. God, Dean, what are you doing here? They shouldn’t. They sh-shouldn’t--”

“Checked myself out. Not gonna die in a hospital where the nurses aren’t even hot.” Dean’s so strangely pliant, so soft in Sam’s worn cotton hoodie, the circles under his eyes dark as bruises, his eyes holding an odd, almost frightening paleness. Sam’s hands soften, slide around to hold onto Dean’s arms as he guides him inside, eases him into a chair. Dean grunts and nudges at him in protest, mouth set in an annoyingly adorable frown.

Sam shuts the door, locks it, double checks the deadbolt. Slides a hand around to the small of his back to make sure his gun’s still there. He knows there’s nothing out there after them, not right now anyway, but his hackles are up, every fiber of him tuned into Dean, on keeping him safe. Sam feels dangerous, reckless, like he wants someone to try and come after Dean just so he can kill them, so he can bend bones with how desperate and furious he feels.

“Stop it. Don’t joke about that. Why didn’t you call me? I could’ve come and gotten you.” Sam sinks down on his knees right in front of where Dean is slouched in the chair, kneeling right in front of him, his hands going to Dean’s thighs, eyes fixed on his brother. Dean just shrugs, uncomfortable under Sam’s eyes and Sam knows it, can feel the tension thrumming weakly through Dean’s body.
“You look like shit, Sammy. Have you slept at all? All I’ve been doin’ is sleepin’.” Dean reaches up, a hand lighting on Sam’s cheek, fingertips stroking at the rough, abandoned scruff covering it. Sam closes his eyes, trying to swallow past the lump in his throat, bringing his hand up to cover Dean’s.

*Please. Please, God. Please.*

“Been on the phone. Online. Calling every number in Dad’s journal.”

He opens his eyes and finds Dean still watching him, regarding him, exhaustion overriding every other emotion in his expression. “For what?”

“For a way to help you. One of Dad’s friends, Joshua, he called me back. Told me about a guy in Nebraska. A specialist.”

Dean huffs out a laugh, his eyes blinking closed slowly, staying that way for just a few seconds before they open again. He runs a thumb over Sam’s bottom lip, and Sam turns his face to press a kiss to the pad of it, kissing across Dean’s open palm.

“You’re not gonna let me die in peace, are you?”

“I’m not gonna let you die, period. We’re going.”

“Not tonight. Just,” Dean sighs, stretching his fingers out, letting Sam kiss at them now, like he’s savoring it. “Can we just stay here tonight? Can we just sleep? I just.”

Dean pauses and Sam looks up, his eyes filling with tears when he sees them in Dean’s. He moves closer, knees dragging across carpet, stomach hitting the chair between Dean’s spread legs. His heart is racing with frenzied, unbearable love, with terror that he won’t be able to fix this in time. Sam’s chin is trembling as he strains forward, wrapping long arms around Dean’s body, nestling his face against his stomach.

Dean sighs, the breath moving through his whole body, and Sam sends up a silent thank you that Dean’s here to draw breath at all. Sam feels one hand light on top of his head, the other resting on his back, feels Dean relax very slowly against him.

They stay there in absolute quiet for what feels like an hour but is likely only a handful of minutes, both of their eyes closed, Sam’s back aching from the stretch but it feels like replenishment, like just being this close, like this small connection right here is doing something, is working some kind of miracle.

“Let’s get you to bed,” Sam whispers, lifting up finally, Dean’s hoodie wet from his tears but they both ignore it, ignore just like they ignore the way Dean’s eyes are shiny them, the tears brimming against warm green but they don’t fall.

Sam pulls back and stands up, leaning over to press a kiss to the center of Dean’s forehead before he helps him up, arms going around his brother who feels so small, so thin, God, has he always felt like this?

And what will he do if he can’t save him? What will he do when Dean just dies in his arms? In his sleep or flying down a lonely highway in the middle of the night or after giving one of those big, bright laughs that sound like fireworks? What will he do besides keep him anyway? What will he do besides try to figure out how to follow him down?

He yanks the covers back and guides Dean down onto the bed, using every single muscle in his body to take all of the work away from Dean. He reaches down and tugs Dean’s boots off, fingers
lighting on the button of his jeans before Dean stops him with a grunt, with a shake of his head.

“Don’t. I’m. I’m kinda cold.”

“I’ll get you in something warmer. It’s okay. You’ll be warm, I promise.” Sam leans over while he’s undoing Dean’s pants and kisses his eyebrow, stealing a moment to take a deep breath, to just breathe him in, wishing for the thousandth time in his life that he could preserve this: Dean’s scent, what he smells like when Sam loves him this much, when he needs him right here.

“You bein’ a creeper’n smellin’ me?” Dean cracks an eye open to smile at Sam, soft and teasing and already half-asleep. Sam smiles back because he can’t help it, because, well. It’s true.

“Love how you smell,” he tells him though it’s hardly a confession. He leans over to grab his bag and dig through it, coming up with his favorite sleep pants, some they got on clearance at Old Navy right after Christmas with different colored reindeer all over them. Dean had gotten them for him as a joke but they’re flannel and soft and warm. He tugs Dean’s pants off then, not kissing at his vulnerable-pale thighs like he wants to, just busies himself with pulling the pants up on him with Dean lifting and squirming around to help.

“Smell like a hospital,” Dean mumbles, nose wrinkling up as he wiggles back down into the bed, trying to find his warm spot again.

Sam shakes his head as he peels his own jeans off, stripping down to his t-shirt and his underwear. He flicks the light by the bed off, the dark flooding in around them, soothing and absolute. He makes his way into bed by feel alone, careful not to jostle Dean too much as he settles in beside him, pulling the blankets up over them both.

“You smell like Dean. ’s my favorite smell in the world.” He wraps an arm around Dean’s shoulders and guides him over to him, not stopping until Dean’s cheek is on his chest, his body tense with what is obviously pain but he’s on his side, arm draped across Sam’s chest, surrounded by body heat.

“I jus’ smell like BO and motor oil and regret.” Dean’s voice is soft, like he’s dreaming, his breathing weak but Sam has his hand on Dean too much as he settles in beside him, pulling the blankets up over them both.

“Whatever it is, I love it. Would smell every inch of you if I could.”

Dean grunts, a sound that Sam translates into well, that’s just a little fuckin’ weird, Sammy, a hand worming its way under Sam’s back, hiding there in the heat between his body and the mattress. Sam just holds him a little tighter, rubs his back to stroke warmth into it.

“Even my pits?”

Sam smiles.

“Especially your pits.”

Another grunt, another wiggle closer to Sam. Sam closes his eyes, fingers tumbling over Dean’s back in slow circles, savoring every exhale of Dean’s that tickles the hair on Sam’s arm.

“Even if I hadn’t showered in a coupla days?”
Sam grins into the dark, wants to tickle Dean just to make him react but he can’t. Knows he can’t. Not anymore.

“Definitely. Lick ‘em clean.”

“Ugh!” Dean wriggles a little, burrowing down closer to Sam, face tucking into his neck, mouth so close to Sam’s ear now. “That’s just gross, Sammy.”

“Maybe.” Sam shrugs as much as he can, tipping his head down to kiss Dean’s temple, keeping his lips there. “Still true.”

Dean falls quiet, seems to contemplate that for a minute. Sam drifts a bit, almost asleep in a matter of seconds. Hasn’t slept more than half an hour a night in three days, couldn’t stop thinking of Dean, couldn’t stay out of his hospital room, out of that uncomfortable chair right by his bed.

“Sammy, uh. ‘msorry we never got to. That I didn’t.” Dean’s voice sounds so small, like it’s trapped. He clears his throat gently. “Can’t believe I’m gonna die without knowin’ what it feels like to be inside of you.”

Sam’s entire body reacts to that, chest tightening, throat closing up, tears filling his eyes without hesitation. He turns into Dean, curling up around him as much as he possibly can, both hands sliding up to keep Dean where he is, tucked up right against him.

“Don’t say that,” he whispers, his chin trembling. He tips his head down, pressing kiss after kiss to Dean’s forehead, not even trying to hide the tears that spill down his cheeks. “This is not supposed to happen. This isn’t going to happen. I’m going to figure this out, Dean. I’m gonna fix this. I’m gonna save you from this.”

Dean’s clutching at him now, fists in tight curls around Sam’s t-shirt. Sam rubs at his back, through his hair with both hands, not stopping until Dean relaxes again, until he’s soft against him like he was before. His breath feels wet against Sam’s neck, the tiny puffs of air uneven and faint.

Three more words before they both fall quiet, before the night burrows in around them, filling in all the spaces around their bodies, giving them a beautiful, fleeting feeling of being the only two people left in the world, just for tonight. Three more words from Dean’s mouth, spoken clear and tired against Sam’s skin.

“I trust you.”

It had been easy, too easy, to heal Dean.

Sam’s up the second Dean’s knees hit the ground up on that shaky platform, hands on his brother before he goes down completely. This is it. This is the end. This is how they will end.

Except it’s not.

Except Dean’s eyes open, scurrying around in a panic before they find Sam, bright and powerfully alive. There are cries going up around them, prayers to the Lord Jesus, shouts of hallelujah, applause like this had been a performance, like Dean had played the scene out to the hilt, sold it to them hook, line, and sinker.

Sam can’t keep his hands off of him, can’t let him go. When they make it back into the safety of the car and Dean is quiet, Sam curls a fist in the side of his hoodie and yanks him closer, not caring that
they’re in the muddy parking lot of a makeshift church, that people are walking by, probably looking in. He cups Dean’s still-ashen cheeks in his hands and tips his head to slide his mouth across Dean’s, kissing warmth into his cool lips. He runs a hand down, spreads it out over Dean’s chest, feeling for and finding his heartbeat, the strong, steady rush of it bringing tears to his eyes.

“It worked,” he whispers against Dean’s lips before surging forward again, backing Dean against the door and kissing him over and over again. “Didn’t it? It worked. Talk to me. God, talk to me, Dean, please.”

“Sammy,” Dean sighs, getting both hands on Sam’s chest and pushing him back a little, leveling him with tired, wary eyes. “I don’t know. I don’t know what the fuck’s going on. I--"

“Do you feel better?”

Dean pauses, rubs his lips together. Sam’s eyes snap down, watching them. He leans forward because he can’t help himself, drops one more kiss to his mouth, whimpering when he gets a fresh taste of Dean, the ache of it pulling at him, reminding him that Dean’s okay. Dean’s okay, he’s okay-

“Sam, please, just.” Dean rests his head back against the fogged-up window, the rain slipping down outside behind him. His hands slide down and off of Sam’s chest, and Sam catches them, holds onto them. Doesn’t miss how cold Dean’s fingers still are. He draws three of Dean’s fingers into his mouth, just the tips of them, his tongue sliding all across them, tasting dirt and salt and the sweetness underneath that is Dean’s skin. Licks at Dean’s fingernails, tastebuds dragging over the whorls of his fingerprints. Love him. Love him, love him, need him.

Sam raises his eyebrows at him, impatient for him to speak, to say it. Say it say it and never stop saying it. He releases Dean’s fingers from his mouth wet and spit-shined but keeps hold of them, cradles those hands with both of his own.

“I feel better,” Dean finally says, his eyes hooded, guarded. Sam moves a little closer, crowding Dean up even more against the door. Someone walks right by the window, voices close. Sam reaches up behind Dean to push the lock down on the door.


The sob that escapes is unexpected and humiliating. He lets go of Dean’s hands only to wrap his arms around Dean’s neck, practically sitting in his lap by now but he has to be this close, has to try and press them together to ease this ache a little. Dean is still so pliant, so sweet when he sighs, wraps his arms around Sam’s waist, gives in to the way Sam wants to hold him.

“It’s a feeble promise and they both know it, but it feels good. Exactly what Sam needs to hear.
He kisses Dean again on the mouth, biting at the soft, sinking plush of his bottom lip before he kisses down, fingers dragging up Dean’s shirt, yanking it up to reveal his chest. Dean’s nipples are hard and goosebumped, chest rising and falling faster by the second.

“Say it again,” Sam murmurs just before his eyes slip closed, just before he ducks down and sucks one of Dean’s nipples into his mouth. Dean gasps, jerks hard in Sam’s hold, two helpless hands coming to rest on the back of Sam’s head, keeping him where he is when Sam starts to suck.

“I’m okay,” Dean breathes, melting back against the door when Sam’s hard sucks fall into a rhythm, his fingers stroking through Sam’s rain-slicked hair. “Not goin’ anywhere.”

“God, Dean,” Sam growls, breath washing hot over Dean’s skin. He pulls back, staring at the raw, reddened nipple he just wrecked, letting his tongue slide out to flick at it. Dean just moans, arching his back a little, pushing his chest out for more. “I swear to God, sometimes I just want to. To.”

“To what, Sammy? What do you wanna do?” Dean’s out of breath and hard in his jeans, pupils blown wide, mouth deep red in arousal. He guides Sam over to his other nipple and Sam goes, obeys by drawing it into his mouth just like he did the first one, letting out a contented sigh as he starts to suck.

Sam doesn’t answer for a long moment, caught up in the primal, embarrassingly childlike mediation of sucking on Dean’s nipple. It’s a strange, bone-deep comfort, maybe for both of them, and they laze there in the car, windows completely fogged up, kept safe by the Impala just like they usually are, one feeding and one being fed from.

Sam’s hands dig into Dean’s sides, grabbing hold of the scant extra flesh there and holding on, probably bruising the hell out of Dean’s skin but he doesn’t care. He pulls off finally with a wet gasp, completely out of breath when he looks up at Dean through his lashes and finds him almost asleep, eyes closed, long lashes fanned over pale skin.

“Want all of you,” Sam finally says, sitting up again to nuzzle right in against Dean’s face, kissing across his cheek. “Sometimes I just need you so much. Want to know what you taste like inside, want to fucking drown in you, Dean. Sometimes it scares me.”

Dean hums, like it all sounds so good, like what Sam said is beautiful and not terrifying. Sam lets Dean’s shirt fall back down and nudges down to his neck, licking at it like he’s tasting for something, like he’s marking his territory before he starts to kiss there too, starts up his starved, wet sucking on Dean’s neck.

“Shit, Sammy,” Dean hisses, grabbing fistfuls of Sam’s hair and holding on when Sam brings out his teeth, when he starts to bite at the skin he’s sucked raw, just little nibbles that he licks over to soothe.

“I promise th-that. Later. Later, I promise we can do whatever you want. I just.”

Sam breaks away finally, feeling wild, like Dean is his to feed from and he’s just drank his fill. He licks his lips and stares into Dean’s eyes, the connection between them right now so alive, so intense that he feels dizzy.

“I think I need to go to a hospital. Get some more scans, just to make sure.” Dean reaches up to stroke across Sam’s cheek like he’s soothing him, calming him down. And he does, it does. Sam finally sighs, his mind clearing, heart still pounding in his teeth but he slows down, listens to what Dean’s saying.

“Yeah,” he whispers, giving Dean a small smile. “Yeah, okay. Let’s go make sure.”
Cassie is stunning.

Like, seriously stunning. Most of the girls that Dean hooks up with are pretty. Some are beautiful, even. But Cassie’s intelligent, strong, wise in that same way that Sam always saw in Jess. The way he’d always imagined Mom being, too.

And when he sees the way she looks at Dean, the way her eyes soften with memories, the way she can’t stop staring at him, he feels that familiar, swooping pain in his gut, the one he’s been used to feeling for most of his life.

All he can think is maybe this is it. Maybe she’s the one who’ll finally take him away.

He forces himself to smile, to meet her eyes when they’re introduced. He digs down deep, finds that wall he’d let drop, the one that kept him safe from moments like this. The wall that he’s let down recently, since he’s found out what Dean’s mouth tastes like. He pulls it back up and around him, desperate to get his guard up before this gets through, this inevitable pain.

He smiles at her and knows that he’s not safe. That this one’s going to hurt.

They sleep in separate beds that night, both wearing clothes, both with their backs to the other.

They don’t talk about it.

They sit in the car, idling in front of the motel. Dean’s going to see Cassie under Sam’s suggestion, and Sam’s sitting in the passenger seat with his laptop bag in his lap, still reeling from the thought that Dean had been in love with Cassie. That Dean had fallen in love with anyone.

“I can come with you, if you want.” Sam stares down at his bag, at the place where it’s faded, worn from rubbing against Sam’s thigh for so many years. It’s the bag that Dean gave him when he’d given him his first laptop back in high school with money he’d scraped together with Bobby. It’s quietly Sam’s most prized possession.

“Nah,” Dean says after a pause, looking down himself, scratching at his eyebrow, squinting out across the parking lot, anything to avoid looking at Sam. “You stay here and do some research, make some phone calls. I’ll call you later.”

Sam glances over at him finally, taking in the way Dean’s shifting in his seat, fidgeting even more than usual. He licks his lips, nails scraping across the worn leather of his bag.

“I can, uh.” He blushes, biting down at the constantly-raw sore inside of his mouth, the one that he won’t leave alone long enough to let it heal. “If. If you want, I can.”

“Spit it out, Sam,” Dean prompts, a smile in his voice, eyes on Sam’s restless hands.

“I can suck you off,” Sam finally says in a rush, the words a little too hungry, too desperate. “Before you go. If you want.”

He can feel the burn of Dean’s eyes on him and he closes his own, his heart pounding in his chest,
breath held, like he’s waiting to be sentenced. His mouth floods with spit at just the thought of having the weight of Dean’s dick on his tongue, of smelling him. God, the smell of him.

“I think I’m good,” comes the reply, Dean’s tone light, matching the way-too-casual clap of his hand on Sam’s shoulder. “Besides, you know the rules. No foolin’ around during a hunt.”

Sam bites down on the apology that wants to come out, the need for it to keep hurting, for Dean to keep saying things that tear him apart disturbing and overwhelming.

“Right,” he mumbles, hair falling into his eyes, his hand already on the door handle.

“C’mon, I’ve gotta go. Wanna get there before dark. I’ll call you.”

“Sure.” He glances over at him, meets his eyes for the first time since they left the pier. He leans toward him the tiniest bit, head tipping, angling for a goodbye kiss, but Dean looks away at the last second.

“See ya, Sammy.” Dean’s hand is on the gearshift, ready to put her back into drive, ready to pull out.

Sam climbs out without another word, without a backward glance. Dean pulls away the second the door closes, the sound of that car leaving tearing at Sam’s stomach the way it always has.

He doesn’t call.

Sam’s ten years old again, and Dean’s out with Annie Daugherty at the movies, having pizza in the food court, being fawned over by all of Annie’s friends.

He’s twelve and it’s Liz McReynolds and Dean’s out all night with her, out at some lake with Liz and her wild friends, all in trucks filled with coolers of beer and girls with short shorts and slim, hairless thighs perfect and waiting for Dean’s ever-widening, eager hands.

He’s fifteen and Dean’s gone for days, disappeared and shacked up with some girl called Janx. Dad’s gone, doesn’t give a shit, wouldn’t give a shit even if he was here. Dean’s sexual prowess is just something else for him and Dad to bond over, for Dad to crow about to his hunting buddies.

Sam’s twenty-two, his birthday’s tomorrow, and Dean’s with Cassie Robinson, and he’s probably in love with her.

The TV’s on out in the main part of the motel room, playing some teen melodrama with loud commercials, and Sam’s sitting on the floor in the bathroom for absolutely no reason. His newly-cleaned gun is beside him on the dingy, tiled floor, his worn copy of House of Leaves on his other side, ignored, a pretense.

It’s well after midnight, and he keeps thinking maybe he should call. Should interrupt. The petty part of him wants to, but the part of him that thinks Dean would never pick him over a girl like Cassie doesn’t let him. Doesn’t want Dean to just simply ignore the call, not answer.

And why would Dean pick Sam over Cassie? Why would he pick something so messy, so completely, irreversibly fucked-up, over what could be a very solid, fulfilling relationship with an amazing girl?

It’s what he’s dreaded, what he’s always known his whole life. An inevitability. There have always been girls, but one day The Girl was bound to come along. And the fuck of it is that she came along
awhile ago, back when Sam was playing college, and he hadn’t even known it.

Hadn’t known Dean was in love with someone else.

He reaches up, feels around for his phone on the sink above his head. Stares down at the screen, his finger poised to turn it back on.

*Don’t.*

He drops it on the ground, doesn’t care if it breaks. Drags his long legs up close to his chest, wrapping his arms around them. What if Dean wants to stay here? What if he just wants Sam to let him go? What then? Where will Sam go?

Why wasn’t whatever has been happening between them enough? Why wasn’t *Sam* enough?

He doesn’t call until morning, after he’d gotten a call from the police, frantically looking for Cassie.

Dean turns up to the police site, his eyes dark like he hasn’t slept but his body loose, hips easy as he walks toward Sam. He looks well-fucked.

Sam can smell her on him the second Dean approaches, and he tells himself it’s okay, that he can do this. He can let Dean go, if he needs to. He’s done it before, when he left for Stanford. He can do it again.

It was always too good to last anyway.

Dean kisses her goodbye on the morning of Sam’s birthday, the wet sounds of their mouths making Sam grit his teeth, grip the steering wheel hard where he waits in the car.

But he’s saying goodbye. He’s leaving. In love or not, he’s coming with Sam. And it’s good enough for now.

Sam drives and Dean sleeps, sunglasses covering his eyes, his head tipped back on the seat in a way that Sam knows is going to make his neck hurt like a bitch.

He drives and the further he gets from Missouri the lighter he feels, the darkness lifting just enough for Sam to try and comprehend that look Dean had given him right before he’d gone to sleep, the silent, long glance that had ended with a smile, with a sigh like Dean had maybe made a decision.

Dean groans himself awake, lifting his head up slowly.

“Fuck, my neck,” he grits out, sunglasses slipping down on his nose. Sam reaches over without missing a beat, hand slipping beneath the collar of Dean’s jacket to rub his neck, thumb finding the tight muscle and working at it relentlessly.

Dean sighs, sinking back into the seat again, his body going lax under Sam’s hand.

“So good to me, Sammy,” he sighs, and Sam’s heart swells, leaps with pride. He smiles in spite of himself and maybe because Dean’s not looking at him, slowing his hand down to keep massaging gently even after he’s worked the crick out.
“Sleep well?”

Dean grunts, a vocalized shrug, moving a little closer to Sam like a cat that rubs at the hand petting it.

“Fuckin’ exhausted. Bein’ chased by that racist monster truck or whatever the fuck it was took it outta me.”

Sam gives a humorless breath of laughter, lips tugging into a smirk as his chest tightens.

“Yeah, pro’ly. And, you know. Up all night the night before, right?”

He’s trying so hard to sound amused, like he’s totally okay with this, with what’s happened over the last few days. And he’s trying to be, he really is. He can’t help it that he’s breathlessly possessive over his brother, that he wants to rip the eyes and arms and mouth off of anyone who touches him, anyone, and he always has.

Dean tenses under his hand, and Sam lets go, curls his fingers back around the wheel again. It’s quiet between them, both of them frowning.

“Guess so,” Dean says after a minute. He’s even more unreadable than usual in the sunglasses, his mouth drawn down, hands curled tight in his lap.

“You guess so?” Sam can’t help it, can’t help but pick at the scab, try to make it bleed. “What, was it just one and done? Spent the rest of the night cuddling and planning a future?”

“Shut up, Sam.”

The humor is completely gone from Dean’s voice, and he’s back over on the other side of the seat, no part of him touching Sam anymore.

“Why? It’s fine, Dean. Seriously. It’s just, you know. It’d have been nice to know about before, I guess. Would have been nice to know that the person I fell asleep with the night before, the person who kissed me just before we walked into the newspaper office was gonna fuck somebody else over the weekend.”

Dean is silent, and Sam’s feeling a little hysterical, all of the emotions he’s shoved down over the last few days finally coming up for air.

“It’s cool. I just didn’t know it was like that. I thought maybe there was something real between us. That it wasn’t just a desperation thing. In the trenches or whatever. I just wish I’d known.”

He’s driving too fast now, eating up broken pavement, the engine roaring around them, swallowing up John Fogerty’s voice on the radio, rumbling around in Sam’s chest until it feels like he’s shaking.

He’s shaking.

“I just wish I’d known,” he repeats, his chin trembling now, breaths gasping, short.

“What do you want me to say?” Dean sounds tired, almost bored, but Sam can hear the anger underneath, ready to boil over. Sam wants it to fucking boil over.

“That I’m overreacting? That it’s not just me? That I mean something more to you? That I haven’t been waiting for twelve years now for you to--”

“You said eleven,” Dean interrupts, turning to look at Sam, pushing his sunglasses up finally.

Sam blinks, jolted out of his racing thoughts. “What?”
“Eleven. You said it was eleven years before. Half your life.”

Sam feels drunk now with all of Dean’s attention on him again, with those eyes on him, a question poised in the air between them, every bit of Dean focused on him.

“Well,” he mumbles, lifting one shoulder in a shrug as they fly through the newly-sprouting cornfields, the sun stuck behind the clouds, making the day grey around them. “Today’s my birthday, so. I’m calling it an even twelve now.”

There’s a beat of confused silence, a struggle on Dean’s side of the car before a sigh rushes out of him, before Dean’s doubling forward, face pressed into his hands.

“Goddamnit,” he says into his palms, muffled and sounding completely defeated. “Sammy, I forgot. Jesus.”

Sam smirks again, shaking his head, dismissive.

“It’s fine. It’s not like. I mean, it doesn’t matter. It’s never been a big deal.”

“Yeah, well, it always has been to me. Shit.” Dean sits back again, can’t seem to stop moving, like he would be pacing if they weren’t stuck in the car. “First one since. Since before you left that I got to be with you on it, and. Fuck.”

Sam glances over at him, honestly surprised at the turn of this conversation, at how hung up Dean is on this.

“Dean, really. It’s okay.”

“It’s just been so crazy, man. Such a fuckin’ weird few months, and--”

“Dean, I swear, I don’t give a shit. Promise.”

“Can you. Sammy, can you pull over?”

Sam shoots a look over at him, eyes trailing over Dean’s body. “What? Are you gonna be sick?”

“Just pull over.” Dean’s tugging off his sunglasses, opening the glove compartment to throw them in. Sam obeys, always Dean’s little brother, pulling over into the grass off the side of the road, not another car in sight, nothing but miles and miles of cornstalks and the forgotten highway.

Sam kills the engine and Dean grabs him, hand tight around Sam’s arm and he yanks Sam closer to him, pulling on him until Sam’s forced to come, following Dean’s hands until he no choice but to climb on top of him, straddling him. Dean’s hands light on his spread thighs, Sam’s knees digging into the vinyl seat on either side of Dean’s body and he whimpers when Dean’s mouth finds his, when Dean parts his lips and practically begs Sam inside.

Sam spreads his legs even more, shoving his hips up against Dean’s body, getting in as tight as he can even as Dean’s hands slide around to his ass, gripping hard enough to bruise but he’s holding Sam close, this close, close enough for it to hurt.

Dean tastes like her. Sam knows because he doesn’t taste like himself, tastes sweeter, cleaner. Sam’s tongue slides in, licking around like he owns the place, like he’s looking for something. Dean whines for that, the sound so fucking beautiful in the trapped heat of the car, in the warm safety of Sam’s mouth. Sam’s got his hands on Dean’s face, holding him in place so he can lick his mouth clean, swallowing down everything that shouldn’t be there in the first place, taking it all away until there’s
“Shouldn’a done it, Sammy,” Dean gasps against his lips, hands shoving down into the back of Sam’s pants to grip his bare ass, to pull him in as Dean lifts his hips, grinding them together. “I knew it as soon as I did it. Knew it felt wrong. Don’t know why I did it. I just. I just had to be sure. Had to know.”

“And what did you find out?” Sam straightens up from his curl around his brother, looks down into Dean’s eyes where Dean’s got his head tipped up, looking up at Sam from under those long eyelashes and Sam doesn’t know how he lucked out, how he ended up with a brother this devastatingly fucking gorgeous, how lucky he is because he would have fallen in love with Dean no matter what, no matter what the circumstances were. Reality is that there’s no one more beautiful in creation than his brother, and he’s looking up at Sam like maybe Sam’s something special, too.

“That nobody makes me feel like you do,” Dean says, soft like it’s a secret, staring right into Sam’s eyes. “That I couldn’t have been in love with her, because nothing makes me feel like this. Like I feel right now. If that was love with her, then there aren’t any fuckin’ words for what we are. For what I feel right here.”

Sam’s hands gentle where they’re cupping Dean’s face, fingers stroking at his cheeks, thumbs gliding over the swell of his bottom lip. He closes his eyes, feeling immediately and instinctively unworthy of all of that, every single word, but he knows at his core that it’s true. That it’s what he’s always felt, from the very beginning.

When he kisses Dean again, it feels like a movie kiss, a kiss with fireworks, with symphonic bursts of music, with a gasping, pleased audience with swollen hearts and tearful eyes. Their tongues press and slide together, making a home out of their combined mouths, mouths that are pressing in so close, so airtight that it feels like they’ll never separate again. That it’s all gonna end with just this kiss.

Sam reaches down between their bodies, making quick work of both of their pants and he reaches in at the same time to tug both of their dicks free, both of them already hard and straining toward each other and when he presses them together, the head of his own cock catching on the velvet-hard ridge of Dean’s, they both jerk, press up even harder together.

Dean finally breaks away, panting up at the ceiling of the car while Sam looks down, letting a fat wad of their combined spit slide down his bottom lip and drip onto their dicks trapped in both of Sam’s big hands, saliva running all down the sides, slicking it all up and making that first stroke up absolute, glorious perfection.

Both of Dean’s forefingers press in against his asshole right at that second, the tips squeezing into him with absolutely no lube, prying at his hole. Sam starts to jerk of them off together, the sensation like nothing else he’s ever known before, like nothing he could have imagined it would be.

He can feel Dean’s blood pumping in the thick pulses of his cock right up against his own, like he’s holding Dean’s heart. It feels powerful, like they’re exactly equal, like they’re both giving and taking at the exact same time. Because only two men can do this, can make it feel just like this. A girl couldn’t do this for either of them, could never give something so intimate.

Cassie couldn’t do this for Dean.

He rubs a thumb over the heads of both of them, smearing all their precome together until it’s slick as hell, until it’s runny and messy and he starts to ride him then, fucking into his own hard as he starts to jerk them off, rocking back into Dean’s hands on his ass and Dean can finger him dry if he wants,
can fuck him however he wants any day of the week, especially today.

“Shit, yeah, Sammy, so fuckin’ good. Goddamn, your fuckin’ dick. Jesus Christ.”

“Kiss me,” Sam whispers, curling down again, one hand abandoning its grip so it can slide up into Dean’s hair, sinking in and pulling Dean’s mouth up against his own. “Kiss me, Dean.”

Sam moans long and good when Dean listens, when he kisses him with that fucking pretty mouth, when Dean flicks his tongue over Sam’s top lip before gnawing on it hard enough to break skin. Sam just keeps riding him, trying to keep a hand around both of them but their dicks are both fat, both long and slippery with slick and he gasps when he feels one of Dean’s hands join him on the other side, trapping their cocks right up between them, completing the circle and making it almost unbearably good.

Dean’s other hand spreads out in his pants, fingers stretching wide to span as much of Sam’s ass as he can, his middle finger sinking right up into his hole, pressing down hard to make Sam feel as full as he can.

They’re moving in tandem now, Sam’s hips snapping hard, Dean’s body tense under him as he fucks up against him, both of their hands working furiously on their cocks, the pulse and throb of them exactly the same, matched up, down to the way their mouths are panting at each other, Sam’s bottom lip caught up in Dean’s teeth.

Sam comes first, coming so hard that it hits his chin on the first spurt, the ones that follow splashing up over their tangled-up hands, dripping down their dicks and making it so slick, so loud, dripping wet, dirty skin on skin. He whines, can’t do much else with Dean sucking on his bottom lip like he is, nails digging into the back of Dean’s neck, breaking skin in five little half-moons there.

His thrusts slow as he comes down, panting so hard that he thinks he’s gonna pass out but his hand keeps moving, keeps working, wants to be completely aware when Dean finally loses it.

Dean lets go of Sam’s lip, gives it back feeling twice as big as it was before, sucked-fat and bleeding a little and Sam kisses down Dean’s jaw, finding bruised skin there on his neck, right over his pulse, a mark he didn’t put there.

“C’mon, Dean,” he pants, his arm hurting, muscles straining but Dean is shaking under him, so fucking close. “C’mon and give it to me. Give it to me ‘cause I’m the one who can make you come. Nobody else can make you fuckin’ come like this. Nobody else. ‘Cause you’re mine.”

He sinks his teeth in then, tongue pressing right up against that bitemark and Dean’s entire body tightens, goes still and Sam feels his hand get soaked where they’re still jacking their dicks together, Dean absolutely creaming their hands. Sam keeps working their dicks together, his own hurting from it so much that he has to grit his teeth but Dean needs it, loves it, loves to drag it out until he just can’t anymore.

Sam lifts up, his eyes closed, mouth blindly finding Dean’s, and they both sigh into the kiss. Dean’s got two fingers in his ass now, somehow, both of them curled up and resting there, like it’s comforting Dean to have them there, to be inside of Sam somehow.

Their hands slow to a stop at the same time, their clothes an absolute mess, hands completely covered in come. Sam rests his forehead against Dean’s, their mouths sliding together but they’re not kissing anymore, just touching.

“Nobody else matters,” Dean says softly, his voice shaky. “No matter what. Nobody else has
anything to do with this, us. No matter what happens. Okay?”

Sam nods, lips firming up just enough to give Dean one more kiss. “Okay.”

Dean smiles finally, opens those eyes up and looks right at Sam. “Happy Birthday.”

Sam grins against his lips, shivering when Dean’s fingers give a couple of lazy thrusts into his ass.

“Thanks.”

“So, what do you wanna do today, birthday boy? Your wish is my command.”

“Hm,” Sam take a deep breath, letting it out slowly as he considers. “Well, we should probably change clothes. And find some water to wash our hands. And maybe just. I dunno. Stop and get a pizza and find a room for the night.”

Dean’s smirk is almost deadly it’s so cute. Asshole.

“Aww, Sammy. You wanna cuddle with me for your birthday?”

Sam rolls his eyes, but the way his cheeks heat up tells them both that Dean’s right. “Maybe. I could want something else, too, you know.”

Dean raises an eyebrow. “Cinnamon sticks?”

Sam pulls on the hair he’s currently massaging into, making Dean hiss but not lose his smile.

“Maybe head.”

Dean waggles his eyebrows, licks his lips. “I could do that.”

“Mm.” Sam curls down again, kisses that wet mouth. “I meant give you head.”

He feels Dean’s dick pulse weakly against his own, and Dean chokes down a whimper.

“I, uh. Yeah, I guess we can arrange that.”

“Gonna make sure you don’t ever turn down me givin’ you head again,” Sam murmurs against his mouth, his next kiss a little more possessive. Dean makes a sound, breaks the kiss to meet Sam’s eyes.

“I won’t. I swear.”

It’s the honesty in Dean’s eyes right at that moment, the promise in them that’s about more than any kind of sex, that makes it Sam’s favorite birthday ever.

They’ve been dancing around it, around each other, for days. It feels like it’s time, like it’s overdue,
even, and Dean’s dick seems to agree.

It agrees loudly every time Sam sits a little too close, every time Sam reaches over for his hand in the car, every time he looks over at him with that dirty-innocent little fox-eyed face that makes Dean want to cream his jeans like a teenager.

Dean’s had a few beers in him, just enough to make his hips loose, to make his bones feel all good inside of of his own body, to make him feel like he wants nothing more than to get his baby brother on all fours back in that motel by the highway and slide his dick right up into that virgin ass.

Shit. Fuckin’ hard again.

“--Saw a motel about five miles back.” Sam’s standing up from the sticky table, long legs stretching as he pulls his wallet out of his pocket. Reality hits Dean then, smacks him in the face. Shit, this might actually happen. Like, really happen. Not just be another fantasy that Dean spanks it to in the shower involving his little brother that gets him off in under five minutes, every fucking time.

“And we should get an early start.” The words are underlined, bolded, heavy with implications. Sam is staring him down, all but begging in his annoying little brother way, in the only way he can in public with a bunch of rowdy rednecks around them. Dean holds on tight to the dart in his hand, the texture of it imprinting into his palm.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. Easy. Let’s have another round.” Dean’s heart is pounding in his throat and his voice sounds a little hysterical in his own mind, like his fear is right there for Sam to see, like Dean’s a virgin and he’s nervous about giving Sam his special flower or something.

But Sam’s shoving all of his papers and research into a messy pile, money on the table, eyes on Dean, his smile all-knowing and holding Dean where he stands.

“Yeah, you really know how to have fun, don’t you, Grandma?” It’s a last-ditch effort, like maybe there’s a chance Sam will give in and let them put it off for a few more hours, maybe another night, see if Dean will have the courage then. Jesus, why is he being such a fucking girl about this?

And there are those eyes again, that smile pulling at Sammy’s cheeks, dimples winking at Dean and he’s gone, so gone. Knees shaking, stomach tightening, heart leaping into his throat gone.

“Alright, I’ll meet you outside. Gotta take a leak.” He tosses the last dart, hitting the bullseye just for show. Grabs his jacket, giving Sam one last look before he turns toward the bathroom, keeping it together until he’s got the bathroom door closed behind him, alone for the moment.

“Shit,” he sighs, hands bracing on either side of the questionably clean sink, head hanging down heavy as his eyes fall closed.

He wants it. Has wanted it maybe for too long, much longer than he’ll admit it to himself with only three beers in him. Has been downright obsessed with it lately, since he got his first taste of Sam’s mouth, since he got his hands on that warm body and realized he was allowed to touch, that he was being given all the permission he could ever want to just savor.

This won’t just be sex. It’s going to be getting as close to Sam as he can. As close as bodies will let them get. As close to those dreams he used to have about Sam melting into him as he can ever have.

And fuck, when did he turn into a Celine Dion song?

He takes a piss because he actually needs to, washes his hands and puts his jacket on. He stares into the mirror as he adjusts his collar, squinting critically at his face, at the few lines on either side of his
eyes, at the dark haunt of circles under them, at the messy sprawl of his hair. He pushes at the slightly sweaty strands, trying to style them in the dim light, almost like he’s trying to look good for Sam. So Sam will have a good memory of him when Dean finally makes his move.

Nevermind that Sam’s seen him at his absolute worst, his ugliest, his meanest, his most awkward. Sam had seen Dean as a teenager, for fuck’s sake. And he’d loved him anyway, in spite of it all. Maybe he won’t care how Dean’s hair looks right now.

Dean smirks at himself, shaking his head in self-deprecation, tugging on his collar one last time before he sets his shoulders, takes a deep breath, and heads out, out to Sam.

Dad’s journal’s just laying on the trunk of the car, out in the open.

It makes Dean’s blood run cold. Sam would never walk away, never just leave it there, not for anything. No matter what Sam says about Dad, he knows. Knows it’s the closest they have to a bible, that it’s sacred, not to be left laying around casually where anybody could just see it.

The hairs on the back of his neck stand up, panic rising up to the surface way too quickly. Something’s wrong.

Sam’s gone.

He knows it even as he yanks open the car door, even as he looks around the gravel parking lot. He stalks around it in circles, the horror growing in his gut, making him want to grab every single person he sees and shake them until they give him an answer.

No one knows, no one’s seen him.

Sammy’s gone.

He dials his number, gets his voicemail immediately.

“S-Sammy, where the fuck are you?” He’s practically growling, his breath leaving in harsh, shuddering gasps, like he’s about to have a panic attack. “I’m in the parking lot, and you left the journal just layin’ out! Where the fuck did you go? I can’t. I can’t find you.”

Tears spring to his eyes, hot, helpless tears. He clutches his phone until the plastic whines, threatens to crack. “Sammy-babe, please. Please. Please be okay.”

Dean pauses then, standing on the side of the road in the now mostly-empty lot, right under the streetlight, phone pressed to his ear like it’s his last connection to Sam, like hanging up would be giving up, would be letting go. His chin trembles as he finally snaps his phone closed.

Sam.

Two nights later, he’s tied to a chair, tears sliding down his cheeks, surrounded by the smell of decay and death, a knife held to his eye by a dirty-skinned little girl named Missy.

Seven.

He’s heard seven gunshots since nasty Grandpa ordered Sam to be killed. Seven gunshots and five people out there. He can’t help but hope but he knows there’s not much of a chance that one of those shots hadn’t hit his brother.
“If you let me go, I promise you won’t get in trouble. I promise none of this’ll be your fault.” Dean flinches when the girl surges closer, his eyes falling closed when her knife gets close enough to graze his eyelashes.

“Shut up,” she hisses, her breath putrid, like she’s a scavenger, like she eats decay to survive. The very tip of her knife drags over his trembling eyelid, and he holds his breath, waits for the puncture. “Don’t you try to make me turn on my kin. You think you matter to me? You think I care if you don’t die tonight?”

“I know you don’t,” Dean grits out, the burn on his chest hurting so bad he feels nauseous, the smell of his own burning flesh enough to bring bile up his throat. “They’ve fucked with your head so much, you’re barely even human.”

“I think I’m gonna ask for first choice when we cook you up. Bet you’d taste real good. ‘Specially these eyes.” Knife presses in a little more, making Dean jerk in the chair, flinching back as far away as he can from her and then suddenly the knife is gone, Missy’s voice muffled as she struggles.

Dean’s eyes fly open, and there’s Sam.

Missy’s knife clatters to the ground and Sam’s got one hand over her mouth, the other arm around her to lift her up.

“Sam! Jesus Christ, Sammy,” Dean gasps, struggling even harder against the restraints, rope burning into his wrists as he fights. Sam disappears with Missy, the sounds of her muffled screams driving a shudder up Dean’s spine. A door in the hallway opens and then closes, a heavy piece of furniture scraping over the floor and Missy’s fists pounding from inside what is apparently a closet, her screams shrill, a scared animal.

Sam comes back, comes right for him, their eyes locked the second he turns the corner.

Tears jump back into Dean’s eyes, his whole body straining forward, his chest heaving.

“Sammy, please--”

“Shh, calm down. Dean, calm down. It’s okay.” Sam sinks down to his knees, too graceful in this horror house, his hands covering Dean’s where they’re strapped to the chair. Relief floods Dean’s veins at the touch, at the feel of Sam’s skin on his. He closes his eyes again, letting out a sigh that makes him feel boneless.

“I thought. I-I thought--”

“I know,” Sam whispers, hands moving now to tug at the ropes, working at the knots but his mouth is ghosting over Dean’s, words brushing Dean’s lips. “But I’m here. I’m alright.”

Sam gets one knot undone and Dean’s hand flies up, grabs onto the back of Sam’s head, hauls him forward and into a kiss. Dean’s other hand flutters helplessly, still trapped, aching to touch, too.

“God, you gotta let me up. Gotta let me touch you. Scared me so much. Sam, I was about to go outta my fuckin’ mind,” He pulls against the rope even as Sam’s fingers tug at it, mouth still sliding over Dean’s, their tongues licking at each other, desperate, as feral and instinctive as Missy’s raw-throated screams through the rotting wooden walls.

They get him free finally, finally, and Dean’s hand clamps down on Sam’s shoulder, the other still buried in his hair, keeping him right where he fucking is for a minute so he can eat at his mouth. Dean’s burnt, his head bleeding, the fear coursing through him almost driving him to exhaustion, to
not be able to do anything but slump against Sam, but just stay where he is and accept his solid, warm body.

“We gotta go, Dean,” Sam whispers into his mouth after he gets Dean’s legs and waist free, moving until he’s crouched now, arms around Dean’s waist to help pull him up. “C’mon, we gotta get out of here. Please.”

Dean stands up, pressed against Sam, head tipped up just as Sam’s tips down, their foreheads pressing hard, sticking together with the blood dripping from Dean’s temple. It’s absurd, indulgent, staying here like this, just touching, arms wrapped around each other. But it’s better than a shot of morphine, better than all the adrenaline rushes in the world, better than sleeping on a pillowtop mattress. It’s fucking vital.

Another gunshot, this one closer, makes them both jump. Sam’s hands dig into the back of Dean’s jacket, clutching at him, digging his forehead into Dean’s one last time before he lets go, heading for the front door. Dean stands still just for a second, gathering up every last shred of warmth he’d just gotten and keeping it close to get him through the final stretch of this nightmare.

“Think she can still see us?” Dean glances behind them, back to the dark house where they’d left Kathleen before the other cops showed up. Sam turns and looks with him, doesn’t see her white shirt anymore, doesn’t see anything but the high, wild grass and gravel between them and the house. The highway is stretched out in front of them, and they take a left onto it.

“No,” Sam replies, stepping in closer to Dean immediately, wrapping an arm around his shoulders, licking him in underneath his arm. Dean pushes in against him, wrapping an arm around Sam’s waist, forefinger tucking into one of his belt loops and holding on.

“Smell like shit,” Dean mumbles, resting his forehead on Sam’s shoulder, and Sam can feel it when Dean relaxes, hears him out a breath that sounds like he’s been holding in for days. Sam gives a silent huff of laughter, his hand sliding up over Dean’s neck to hold on, warm and possessive.

“You don’t smell like a peach yourself, asshole. ‘Sides, m’cold.” It’s a cool night, and Sam’s arms are unnaturally bare, not really used to going anywhere without his layers, without the familiar weight of his jacket, at the very least. Dean hums, the sound musing, interested. His hand slides up under Sam’s thin t-shirt, makes its way up over his ribs and his stomach, fingers stroking up over the sharp point of Sam’s already painfully hard nipple.

He hisses, jerks, chest pushing up into that hand as his footsteps falter, not really sure how to keep walking forward while Dean’s rubbing at his nipple like that, fingers pulling, twisting it in a slow, savoring torture.

“You are cold, aren’t you?” Dean’s head is turned and obviously he’s no longer concerned with walking either because he’s nuzzling at the sweat-dirty side of Sam’s neck, lips so soft and warm when he starts to kiss there. Sam swallows down a whimper, his hand spanning Dean’s cheek to keep his mouth where it’s now sucking a bruise on his neck. Dean turns, pressing up against his side completely where they’re now standing out in the middle of the open night on the side of the highway, his dick already hard and hot where it’s digging into Sam’s hip, already so fucking good that Sam can almost taste it.

“Gotta let me suck on it, Dean,” Sam whispers, gasping when Dean pinches his nipple hard, tugging on it until Sam whines. “Please, Dean, gotta let me taste it.”
It’s reckless and fucking stupid and probably the worst timing in the whole world, but he doesn’t care. He’s dumb with the relief of being saved, with having Dean okay and beside him, with having Dean touch him like this after so many years of wanting, of hurting himself as punishment for wanting. It’s dark, no streetlights out this far in the country, and they don’t hear police sirens yet.

They ease over to the side of road just like they would if they were in the car, and Sam’s knees hit the grass the second they stop walking. Dean’s hand sinks back into his hair, firm and commanding, and Sam brings his hands up to Dean’s hips just to hold on, letting his neck go lax, letting Dean control this.

Dean drags him in close, pulls Sam’s face right up to his dick. Sam’s eyes close just as Dean rocks his hips forward, rubbing his denim-covered dick against Sam’s face, all over his mouth, his chin, his nose. Sam’s mouth opens in full, firm kisses, nuzzling in hard when the head of Dean’s cock rubs at his mouth.

“This what you want?” Dean’s voice is a low whisper, already breathless but still so in charge, and Sam’s entire body is loose with submission, with just doing what Dean says.

“Yes,” Sam sighs, lips closing in to suck at the head of his dick through his jeans, hands sliding down to hold onto the back of Dean’s thighs. He can smell Dean even through the denim, can smell sex and salt and he’s soaking Dean’s jeans with spit, with his begging kisses. “Please let me. Please.”

Dean’s free hand slides down, works his belt open, the metal clicking loud in the quiet around them. Sam’s breathing hard already, kissing Dean’s fingers while he thumbs the button of his jeans open, while he edges the zipper down, kisses at torn cuticles and busted knuckles, at filthy skin. He moans when Dean pushes two fingers into his mouth, fucks them over his tongue, letting Sam suck on them to distract him while he pushes into his underwear and pulls his dick out. The smell of it fills Sam’s nostrils, making them flare with hunger and he holds on tight to Dean’s thighs, pushing in closer to his body.

Dean pulls his fingers out of Sam’s mouth and threads them through his hair to take control of Sam’s head again, making sure Sam doesn’t just dive right in to suck on him. Dean grips his dick hard in his other hand, slapping at the side of Sam’s mouth with it, rubbing it against his cheek, his balls pressed up tight against Sam’s chin, his bottom lip. Sam opens his mouth to lick at them, to suck open-mouthed kisses at whatever skin Dean’s letting him taste.

“Gimme that mouth, Sammy. Gimme that fuckin’ mouth.” Dean’s tipping his dick forward, sliding it right up into Sam’s mouth, straight over his spit-slick tongue. Sam moans, breath rushing hot over Dean’s pubes as Dean tightens his hand in his hair and hauls him forward, shoving his dick in deep. Sam chokes when it hits the back of his throat and keeps going, forcing its way into his throat.

“Yeah, like that,” Dean growls, his hips fucking forward, balls slapping at Sam’s chin and Sam’s entire world is Dean’s cock, so big where it’s trapped in the first couple of inches of his throat and filling his mouth, his nose nestled in the soft tangle of hair around his dick, the smell of him overwhelming, everywhere, thick and earthy and Dean. Sam can’t stop gagging, can’t keep it in, but it makes Dean moan every time, makes him spill slick into Sam’s throat, and God, it’s exactly what Sam’s always wanted, wanted to be trained on Dean’s dick, just like this. Wanted Dean to fuck the perfect space into his mouth, made for Dean and Dean alone. Train Sam how to take exactly his length, exactly the fat width of him, make him perfect for this, for him.

He’s gagging, coughing spit up around Dean’s cock but he won’t let him go, won’t force him out, never ever. It’s dripping down his chin and soaking into his shirt and he’s in heaven, can’t draw in enough air so he feels dizzy and he’s never felt this good, this powerful. Dean yanks him off suddenly, pulls him back and Sam’s panting, gasping, his mouth dripping and open.
“Look at it,” Dean orders, his voice wrecked, quiet. He renews his grip on Sam’s hair and gives him a little shake to wake him from his dick-induced stupor, to get him to listen. Sam’s eyes fly open, coming into sharp focus on the dick so hard it’s swaying in front of him, precome still oozing from the tip, the entire length covered with saliva and whatever Dean’s fucked out of Sam’s throat, dripping and pink-tipped and primed for fucking. Sam angles for it, tries to get it back in his mouth, a petulant whimper leaving his mouth.

“I said to look. Just fuckin’ look at it, Sammy.”

Sam’s eyes flutter at the power in Dean’s voice, the hardness of it. He stares at Dean’s cock, his own dick so hard that he’s flexing his hips back and forth, aching for movement, for friction, all of it so fucking painful and he loves it. Craves it.

“I love it, Dean,” he whispers, tongue sliding out to lick at his mouth, breaking the webs of spit connecting it to Dean’s dick. He rests his cheek against Dean’s still-covered thigh, breath rushing out in a hot sigh over that cock. “God, I love it. Need it so bad.”

“Yes be fucked with it?”

“Yes,” Sam gasps, straining forward against Dean’s grip on him, trying to take it back in his mouth, tongue sliding out and just barely catching on Dean’s slit. “Yes, Dean, fuck.”

“Yes it in your ass, Sam? W-Want me to. Christ, want me to fuck you?” Dean pushes his dick back at Sam’s mouth, just barely letting his lips close over the tip, just letting him suck at the head. Dean groans, so close that Sam can taste it.

“Yes,” Sam sighs, his ass clenching tight, his guts hurting with the need to be fucked open. He shivers when he hears police sirens in the distance, the chaos of them hurtling toward them.

“Hurry up and get me clean. Lick all that off and get up.” He lets Sam at him then and Sam obeys like a zealot, keeps his mouth soft as he sucks at the sides of Dean’s heavy cock, tongue working deft and starved at the underside of him, sucking at the long, thick vein and drinking down every drop of spit he put there, every drop of liquid Dean’s dick is dripping with. He wants to just wrap his lips around him, make Dean fuck his throat until he comes.

The sirens are getting closer, and the rebellious boy in Sam, the daring one who loves how dangerous Dean feels right now draws Dean back into his mouth, sucks down the first several inches of him and tightens his hands on Dean’s legs, willing him to come.

Dean growls, actually growls, both hands going into Sam’s hair and he pulls on it hard, hard enough to make Sam gasp, make him let go of Dean’s dick and Dean’s yanking him off again and dragging Sam to his feet, both of them stumbling deeper into the woods at the side of the road, Sam fuck-drunk and Dean with his jeans trapped around his thighs.

Sam’s breath leaves his body when he’s slammed back against a tree just as the police cars roar by in a terrifying flash of red and blue and white and the scream of sirens that remind him too much of Missy’s voice.

Dean’s mouth is on his, his dick still out and so hard it has to hurt but he’s shoving it against Sam, the head of it pushing beneath Sam’s t-shirt to rub at his bare stomach. Dean’s drinking down the collected spit and pre-come on in Sam’s mouth, kissing him with a greedy tongue and Sam wraps his arms around him and hauls him forward, forcing Dean to grind against him.

“You think I’m gonna do it right here, gonna fuck you for the first time right here?” Dean’s hands
gentle then, fingers pushing hair from Sam’s forehead, stroking down over his cheeks. Sam drinks down Dean’s sigh, his hands spreading out to rub at Dean’s back.

“Don’t care. Waited long enough. It doesn’t matter, Dean. I promise.”

“Well, you’re gonna wait a little longer. Because I care. I want you in a bed. You deserve that, at the very least, you hear me? You’re worth waiting for, just a little bit longer.”

The words make Sam’s throat tighten up, make him kiss Dean a little harder, love bordering on obsession coursing through his veins. Dean takes hold of Sam’s hands, guides them down to his pants, silently ordering Sam to tuck him back into his pants. Sam does, knows it has to hurt when he tugs Dean’s underwear back up over his hard dick, when he buttons and zips his jeans back up, the outline of him visible through the denim.

“Please hurry,” he begs, doesn’t care how pathetic, how young he sounds. How he feels like he’s been stuck at sixteen, waiting for Dean, waiting for this night. How he still feels small when Dean’s hands are on him, when he’s like this, when he’s being Sam’s big brother, the one Sam’s been in love with for most of his life in one way or another. “You’ll never know how much I need you, Dean. I-I just. You’ll never know.”

The sirens are gone, stopped. The night’s gone quiet again, nothing but the sound of their breath rushing together, but the gentle drag of the breeze through the trees. Dean doesn’t tease him, doesn’t smirk, doesn’t try to laugh his way through this. Just cups Sam’s cheeks, stretching up to press his lips to the middle of Sam’s forehead, keeping them there until tears burn at Sam’s closed eyes, his body already shaking with too much emotion. But that’s always there, always been there between them: too much. It’s always too much and never enough. Maybe tonight, it’ll finally be enough.

“C’mon, Sammy. C’mon, baby brother,” Dean mumbles against his skin, almost too quiet for it to be for Sam, for him to hear. “I got you.”

They separate just enough to be able to walk, arms going back around each other, Sam leaning on Dean this time as they emerge from the woods, their feet finding the highway again, the night big and deceptively beautiful around them, but they know better.

They track the car down at the police station and finally find that motel they’d talked about two nights before, the last time they were together. Dean’s still got a bloody forehead and they both reek of death but the guy behind the counter at the motel barely looks at them, just shoves a piece of paper at Dean and takes his credit card, an old episode of Night Court playing on the tiny television behind the counter.

“You coulda stayed in the car,” Dean says softly as he fills out the form, his handwriting sloping and elegant and Sam presses in tight against him, presses a kiss to the side of his neck, his eyes on the the back of the motel employee as he runs the card.

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“Couldn’t stand to be away from you,” Sam tells him, not in seduction but in all honesty. He kisses up to Dean’s ear and sighs before he kisses at the lobe of it, nuzzling with the curve of his nose. “Do you remember when we were younger and you told me about how girls have that ache in ‘em? How it’s deep inside and you’ve gotta fuck it out of ‘em?”

Dean’s pen stops on the paper in the middle of his fake signature - Henry James Edwardson, Jr. - his breath held. He nods, a single movement, the air around them absolutely still. The receipt for their credit card whines from the machine.
“I’ve had that ache in me for so long, Dean. Had it for so many years, and I’m just waiting on you. I’ve just needed you. Need you to fuck it out of me. Cause you’re the only one who can reach it.” He’s got his arms around Dean’s waist now, fingers clasped on his opposite hip. He’s kissing at his neck now, not giving a shit that the guy’s turning back around now, that he’s got his eyes on them as he slams the receipt down in front of Dean for him to sign.

“Shit, Sammy,” Dean whispers, his hands visibly shaking where he’s scratching a name on the paper and pushing it back toward the guy, hand out for the key. The guy stands in front of them, key dangling from his fingers over Dean’s palm, his eyebrows raised.

“You boys break anything in the room, you pay for it,” the guy finally says, the keys jingling when they land in Dean’s palm. Dean turns to face Sam, his pupils blown wide, eyes on Sam like he’s going to tear into him right here.

“You hear that, little brother? You break it, you buy it.” He lifts up and takes Sam’s mouth in a hard, dirty kiss, breaking away with a devious grin on his face. Sam’s cheeks are scarlet when he looks up at the guy, catches his slack-jawed, confounded expression.

“Have a good night, man!” Dean wraps an arm around Sam’s waist and pulls him out of the lobby and back out into the night. He starts to head for the car, for the trunk to get their shit, but Sam shakes his head, grabs Dean by the arm and pulls him toward the line of motel rooms.

“Nope, not now.” Sam snags the keys from Dean’s hand and finds the right room, number five, hand trembling only a little as he tries to get the key in the lock.

“But our bags--”

“Do you need anything in the bags right now?” Sam’s got the door to the room open and he’s turned to look at Dean, his eyebrows raised impatiently. Dean’s face flushes and he looks down, looks so stupidly pretty there with his bloody face and the mouth that Sam’s made so pink.

“Got some lube and condoms in mine.”

Sam’s eyes widen and he ducks his head just like Dean had, grinning down at his shoes.

“Okay. Just. Just hurry, Dean.”

He tears his eyes away from his brother and steps into the room, flicking the light on, the one bed in the middle of the room making him stop dead in his tracks. He hadn’t been listening to Dean talk to the guy in there, had been too busy fussing over his burnt jacket, over the hurt skin underneath to notice that they’d just gotten a big king bed.

He feels seventeen again, like that one time Dad and Dean left him in Granville, Ohio in the room with one bed. That one bed had just been for him, had been a jail sentence, had been Dean going away, leaving Sam alone.

This one bed is for the two of them, is symbolic and important and Sam is stupidly touched that Dean even thought of it.

“You weirded out?” Dean is right behind him, his arms wrapping around Sam from behind, plastic bag rustling from his hand. “I’ve just. I’ve wanted just one for awhile, and--”

Sam turns around in his arms and grabs hold of Dean’s jacket to turn both of them together until he’s got his own back pressed up against the door and Dean comes right along, easy and like he can read Sam’s thoughts, shoving Sam back up against the door hard enough to close it, their eyes locked.
He’s terrified here in this second, standing on the knife’s edge of their relationship. This feels different, like a marriage, like a devotion. He can see it in Dean’s eyes, too, in the softness there, in the way his tongue soothes over his lips, can see how nervous he is.

“Having second thoughts?” Sam has to ask, has to give Dean a chance to back out gracefully. He reaches up to stroke across Dean’s cheek with a gentle hand, thumb just barely touching at the tiny puncture on his left eyelid, right where Missy’s knife had been when he’d come into the house. He wraps his arms around Dean’s waist and tugs him forward until their bodies are pressed up together, his mouth the perfect height to kiss that little hurt, to suck soft at the skin over Dean’s trembling eyelid.

“If you think we’re leaving this room for the next three days, you’re wrong, Sammy.” Dean’s hands are wide and explorative, dragging Sam’s shirt up over his head and throwing it down, dropping his bag of supplies. He runs his hands over Sam’s back and down into his jeans, under his briefs and he massages Sam’s ass, every muscle in him aching from being tucked into that cage for so long. He whines with relief, eyes falling closed as he lowers his head, blindly seeking out Dean’s mouth with his own.

Dean sinks a long middle finger into Sam’s ass, just slides right in dry like he’s done before, like he can’t help it. Sam’s dick throbs in his jeans, been half-hard for what feels like hours but this, something inside of him, so close to being what he wants, and he’s afraid he’s going to come before Dean even gets inside.

“I heard you that one time,” he says against Dean’s mouth while Dean fucks that finger slowly in and out of him. “W-when I was eleven, you telling your friends the story of how you lost your virginity. I was in my room, but I heard you. It. It was the first time I realized.”

“Realized what?” Dean’s voice is so soft, like he’s touched, like he’s a little raw inside this moment. Sam’s hands shove up under Dean’s jacket to rub at the curve of his back, stroking up his spine. They kiss a little more, just a few soft licks before Sam finds his words again.

“How I loved you. How jealous I was of that girl. That I wanted it to be me. Because she didn’t know you, didn’t know how. How special you are. She couldn’t take care of you like I could’ve.”

Dean’s voice drops down low when he groans for that, his hands leaving Sam’s pants to slide down even lower, gripping the back of Sam’s thighs and pulling until Sam has no choice but to lift up, to wrap a leg around Dean’s body. Dean hauls the other one up and Sam wraps his arms around Dean’s neck, legs wrapped around his waist, leaning back on the door, his heart racing.

“You gonna take care of me, Sammy? Hm? Gonna take care of my dick?”

Sam just nods, all his words gone, his entire body flushed hot and he cradles Dean’s head closer, leaning down and kissing him, their tongues nudging at each other as Dean turns them, lifts Sam up away from the door and walks them back toward the bed.

Dean drops Sam down on it and Sam keeps a hold of him, pulls Dean down right on top of him, shoving at Dean’s jacket and his shirts, wanting them off now. Dean grunts when he shrugs the shirts off, the burn on his chest not letting him lift his arm too high. Sam frowns and sits up a little, grabbing the left sleeve of his t-shirt and helping his arm through, helping him get the shirt over his head and off.

The burn is about as long as Sam’s forefinger and a deep, angry red. Dean strokes Sam’s hair back as Sam just stares at it, rubbing a finger just under the burn, not wanting to touch it.
“You need to get it cleaned. Put some aloe on it.” Sam lies back on the bed and pulls Dean down on him again, staring up into his eyes.

“I’ll do it later. Promise.” Dean’s eyes are dark again and he’s got his hands on Sam’s waist, tugging on his jeans until they just slip right off his slim hips, his underwear going with them. Sam puts his legs together and straightens them so Dean can pull his shoes and socks off and shed him of his jeans all in one go. Sam scoots up on the bed, head finding a pillow, his eyes on Dean as he spreads his legs as wide as he can, showing Dean his hole, shameless and safe here under those eyes.

“Fuck, Sammy,” Dean whispers, his hands stroking over the length of Sam’s legs, squeezing at the meaty softness of his thighs before he pushes them up, tipping Sam’s ass up to himself and bending down to latch onto Sam’s hole with a hungry, sucking mouth.

Sam’s legs strain back, knees touching his chest, his feet catching on the bar running lengthwise across the headboard so he can stay in that position, his ass up high and perfect for Dean. He closes his eyes and wraps a hand around his dick, the other hand pushes into Dean’s hair while Dean tongues his asshole.

“Dean, get the lube. God, please, just. Please.”

Dean grunts, ignores him for a couple of minutes while his tongue works on Sam’s ass, loosening up the tight clutch of it and licking around just inside of him when Sam finally opens up to him. He pulls back with a gasp, with a wet pop, licking his lips as he slides off the bed. Sam keeps his feet where they are on the headboard, his eyes watching his brother cross the room to find the bag while he strips the rest of his own clothes off, shucking his jeans and shoes and socks and underwear.

He comes back completely naked, his dick bobbing just as hard as it had been a few hours ago out on the side of the road when Sam had had it in his throat.

“Look at you, Sammy.” Dean slides right back into place, his dick sliding up right between Sam’s cheeks and rubbing at his hole. Sam gasps, his head tipping back just as Dean brings both hands down hard to slap his ass, palms stinging, massaging the sharp sting right down into his skin.

Sam pushes down into those hands, trying to beg for more without ever, ever having to say it out loud. Dean’s sucking on his own bottom lip, the head of his dick nudging at Sam’s hole, eyes trained on his own handiwork, at the bright pink imprints of his own hands in Sam’s skin.

“You like when it hurts, don’t you?” It’s not really a question, not really one he expects to be answered it seems because he’s slapping Sam’s ass again, even harder than before, hard enough that Sam tenses, lets out a high, hurting sob, eyebrows drawn up together in pain when Dean rubs it in again, hands spanning Sam’s entire ass.

Sam just nods, eyes flying open and finding Dean’s, wishing he could see the handprints clearly, wishing he could see what he looks like, such a fucking slut for his brother, just like he always knew he was.

“I just,” Sam tries, his voice shaking, feeling so exposed, so bared to the bone here. “It doesn’t have to always hurt w-with you. You don’t. You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to. Okay?”

“Okay.” Dean whispers back, seeming to understand him through his stammering, pathetic excuse for a confession, curling down to press three wet kisses to Sam’s pink-slapped ass and then one kiss to his mouth before he’s turning his attention to the box of lube, frowning down at it as he rips it open, tearing off the seal and prying the lid up.
“That the only tube you bought?” Sam can’t hold in the smile when Dean looks up at him in surprise, his cheeks stained pink. Dean squeezes some out onto his fingers, grinning as he crawls back up to Sam, leaning down over him, their mouths hovering close as Dean pushes two slicked-up fingers inside of him.

“Think we need to buy stock in lube?” Dean spreads his fingers apart inside of Sam, digging up as far as he can get before he pulls them out again. Sam just whimpers, bearing down on Dean’s fingers while they fuck him open, when they rub so sweet and dirty at the rim of his asshole before pushing back in each time.

“Wanna be sore from you all the time. Want to feel you forever.” He feels safe saying this stuff here between their mouths, in the haven they’ve created out of this bed. Sam fumbles for the bottle of lube, pouring some onto his fingers blindly, probably making an absolute mess but he doesn’t care, doesn’t care about anything but the sound Dean makes when Sam wraps his hand around him, but the way his dick jumps against Sam’s palm when he starts to slick him up.

“Sammy, I got. I got condoms. Hold on. Lemme.” Dean pulls his fingers out, leaving Sam’s ass feeling open and empty as he reaches behind him for the other box. Sam remembers his brief but educational time with Dom, remembers Dom fingering him open, kissing sticky sweet endearments into his skin. Dom had warned him about these moments, about getting guys to use lots of lube, about never fucking without a condom, no matter how much the guy tells him he loves him.

But Dean’s not just any other guy, and Sam knows it.

Sam catches Dean’s wrist, doesn’t let him open the box. Dean turns to look at him, head tipped to the side in question.

“Did you use a condom with Cassie?”

Dean snorts, abandoning the box to drape himself over Sam again. He reaches up, pries Sam’s feet off the bar of the headboard so he can ease Sam’s legs down onto his shoulders. Sam sighs in relief, his free hand sliding up Dean’s arm, fingers bumping over scars, over the hard knot where a bullet once went through Dean’s skin, just before Christmas back in ‘02.

“Course I did,” Dean finally answers, wiping his fingers off on the bed so he can burrow down around Sam, his arms trapping Sam in a cocoon where he can see and feel and smell nothing but Dean.

“You’re not going to with me,” Sam replies, big words, scary ones, but he’s not afraid. Not with Dean. Their faces are so close that it should be awkward, weird to talk like this, but they’ve gotten so close lately, spent so much time talking with their mouths touching that Sam doesn’t even notice.

“We don’t need them. But. But just us, okay?”

Dean’s nodding fast, his dick blurting out slick all over Sam’s fingers where he keeps jacking him off slow, thumb rubbing at the underside of his cock.

“Just us,” Dean echoes, staring at Sam like he’s a dream, like he’s not real. Sam’s heart is beating so loud in his ears that he can’t hear anything else, can’t hear his own whimper when Dean shifts his hips so that his dick is lined up, the tip pressing right up against Sam’s hole, feeling absolutely massive, impossible. Sam searches Dean’s eyes, feels for all the world like he’s young again, like he needs Dean to guide him through this, to take care of him.

“Put me in,” Dean whispers against his lips, their eyelashes tangling, dragging together, Dean’s breath hot and bitter on his tongue. Sam gives Dean’s dick one last stroke, making sure he’s
completely coated with lube before he tightens his hand around the middle of it, the angle awkward but it’s ungodly intimate, being in control of this. His arm flexes when he presses Dean’s dick up, the head of him just barely breaching, just barely popping inside.

“Oh, shit,” Sam pants, his dick giving a dangerous jump on his belly, a shudder driving up his entire body. Dean’s leaking again, making it so messy, his hole already so sloppy-wet. Dean pushes his hips forward, sliding in a little more, just barely an inch, the fat head finally slipping all the way inside, making them both shiver, Sam’s asshole fluttering around him, Dean’s tongue flicking between Sam’s parted lips, fucking into his mouth just as surely as he is Sam’s ass.

Sam’s jerking off the part of Dean’s dick not in him yet, can’t help it, can’t stop touching him, worshiping him. He takes a deep breath as he finally lets go, his hand slimy so he wipes it on the bed like Dean had, needing both hands to stroke up over Dean’s back, over his sides, starting up the rhythm he can already feel thrumming in Dean’s hips.

Dean doesn’t need permission, doesn’t wait for instruction, just digs his knees into the bed and angles his hips down and in, fighting to get deeper inside of Sam, working through all of that virgin-tight muscle that just didn’t get touched when he’d let Jess fuck him. Not like this. It’s never, ever been like this.

“Dean Dean Dean Dean Dean,” he chants, his fingers digging in, clutching at his back, bruising his skin surely but he has to hold on, has to cling to him or he’s afraid Dean will just slip away, like this is just another vivid, beautiful dream. Dean lets out a whine, his whole body tensing as he just drops his hips, sinking the rest of the way in, his balls warm and heavy where they rest against Sam’s tailbone.

He’s in all the way, throbbing like a heartbeat in Sam’s guts, big and hard as steel but it’s like they’re melding together, like he just had to get right here to complete the process. Sam tightens around him just to feel him, feel exactly where he is, how deep. Dean sobs against his mouth, his arms wrapping under the pillow behind Sam’s head, cradling Sam up against him.

“God, don’t do that. Ohmygod, Sammy, you. You.” Dean’s hands are shaking as they rub up and down Sam’s legs, as they massage at Sam’s calves where they’re resting on his shoulders. Sam closes his eyes, a warmth spreading through him, driving straight up his spine and he’s coming before he realizes what’s happening, his insides quaking around Dean’s dick, his own dick spilling untouched between their bellies.

He’s shaking on Dean’s cock, his body jerking, trying so hard to milk him, like he can’t help it.

“I’m sorry. Oh, fuck, I. Dean, please, I.” His hands slide down to grip Dean’s ass, hauling him in closer, trying to get him to move, to fuck him through his embarrassingly quick orgasm.

“Jesus Christ, Sam. Fuck.” Dean lifts up, elbows pressing into the bed so he can get a little more control over this, so he can drop his lower body down and just let his hips work. Sam just watches him, so in love he could fucking die right here, right now.

Dean starts to fuck him then, just grits his teeth and fucks into Sam’s spasming insides, fucks right through the tightness of his orgasm and Sam writhes on his dick, arms wrapped around Dean’s neck now, clutching at him as his dick keeps dribbling out drop after drop of come.

“Can’t believe you just fucking came on my dick. So fuckin’ sexy, Sam. Goddamn, you’re so fuckin’ sexy, little brother.” Dean’s putting his ass into it now, his whole body into it as he starts to really pound Sam, his dick slopping in and out of his fuck-slack asshole. The bed is moving under them, whining and rocking with each expert thrust of Dean’s hips, and Sam knows somewhere in the
back of his head that it’s not going to take much to break the frame.

Sam melts back into the bed when his orgasm finally, finally lets him go, when he can just focus on
Dean, on the way his dick feels inside of him.

“Look at me, Sammy. Look at me. Hey, c’mon.” Dean’s fingers are so gentle in Sam’s hair, so sweet
where they’re stroking sweat-slicked strands back out of his eyes, the direct antithesis of the pornstar-
confident fuck of Dean’s hips. Sam meets his eyes then, finally, tears sliding down his cheeks
because it’s so good, it’s everything, it’s more overwhelming than he could have ever, ever
imagined.

He sobs with each thrust now, each rough slap of Dean’s body against his own, each hard rub of that
cock against his over-sensitive prostate. His dick is already trying to get hard again, already straining
from the perfect angle of Dean’s dick inside of him. He’s mindless now and there’s relief in the
sounds he’s making, deep-rooted, aching relief as he just opens up for Dean, as he just takes him,
takes it as hard and deep as Dean can give it to him.

“I know. I know.” Dean murmurs against his lips, feeding him soft, whispering kisses, fingers
 tangled in Sam’s hair now, clutching to hold on. He’s grinding his dick into Sam now, staying rooted
 inside of him for the most part, fucking in so deep that Sam can only gasp, shaking hard as he tries to
grind down against him, tries to ride him and get him deeper, more. “God, baby, I know. Sammy.
Sammy.”

Sam crosses his feet at the ankle at the back of Dean’s neck, pulling him down as close as he can get
him, his own knees digging back into the pillow beside his head. He feels it when Dean comes in
him, feels it, feels the way his hips stutter, feels the hot pulse of his balls, feels the warmth spreading
through his insides, like Dean is emptying his entire body into Sam’s.

Sam finds Dean’s mouth and kisses him, feeds on the sounds Dean’s making, and it feels like the
world is ending, like everything should be crumbling around them, like this was the very last thing
that needed to happen before time just stopped. His dick is throbbing between them, mostly hard
again and leaking into the mess on his belly, and Dean just can’t seem to stop moving, just can’t stop
fucking him, his whole body trembling like a leaf on top of Sam, only whimpers escaping him now.

They stayed locked together just like that, Dean still tense like coming wasn’t enough, like he needs
more. Sam cups his cheeks, fingers stroking under Dean’s eyes and finding the skin wet.

“Dean,” he soothes, kissing at Dean’s slack mouth, sucking at his bottom lip. “Dean, ‘m right here.
I’m right here.”

“Need you, Sammy,” Dean finally whispers, breath shuddering against Sam’s face, the words kissed

One of Dean’s hands pushes between their bodies, wraps around his dick. Sam jerks for the
surprising touch, his dick throbbing to full hardness when Dean starts to stroke him, the question in
his hand, in the timid way he’s touching him.

“You. You want me to fuck you.” If Sam sounds amazed, it’s because he is. His dick gives a hard
pulse for the realization, slicking up the handjob he’s getting from Dean. He must tighten around
Dean because Dean moans, presses his forehead to Sam’s.

“Yeah. Yeah, I just. Will you? Please?”

Dean’s blushing. He’s got his bare dick softening in Sam’s gaping ass, and he’s blushing. Sam
moans, pushing up against Dean until Dean gives, lifts up, his dick leaving Sam’s ass with a slimy, wet slurp.

Sam grabs him by the waist and turns them until Dean’s sprawled out on the bed, his dick wet and soft on his stomach, his body red with exertion all the way down to his navel. Sam feels the come leaking out of his ass and down the insides of his thighs, and he wishes they’d thought to put a towel down, wishes he had enough confidence to straddle Dean’s face and sit on it long enough to make Dean eat all the come dripping out of him.

His dick sways hard, lifting and bobbing at the thought. Another day. Not now.

Dean’s staring up at him, watching Sam in the strangest, most sudden surrender, his legs splayed open almost as an afterthought, his body soft, waiting for Sam’s direction.

He realizes then, in that second, that Dom had been dead wrong about him. Sam is not a complete, subby little bottom. He just needs the right incentive to be a top. An incentive like Dean staring up at him, baring his belly to him, waiting for his dick.

“Spread your legs for me, Dean. Show me your hole.” Sam sinks back on his haunches, wiping his hand through the mess of come on his stomach so he can jack his dick with it. Dean squirms under Sam’s focused, greedy eyes, a brand new flush spreading across his body.

“Sammy,” he sighs, his legs sliding closed, like Dean Winchester is fucking demure. “I don’t. I don’t wanna. I just wanna get fucked.”

Sam raises his eyebrows at him, tongue sliding out to wet his bottom lip. “Okay. Turn over, then. Hands and knees.”

Dean chews on his bottom lip, looking a little doubtful now. He gives a sigh finally, pushing up so he can turn over on his belly, knees pressing into the bed, his upper body dropping down as he props up on his elbows.

Sam’s hand falls away from his dick, his mouth hanging open as he takes in the sight of Dean with his ass in the air, the long, gorgeous line of his back bared, broad shoulders, the naked, vulnerable nape of his neck flushed.

“Dean,” Sam breathes, hands coming up to cup his brother’s hips, giving his waist a squeeze before he strokes down over his ass, spreading his cheeks apart to finally look at Dean’s tight pink hole. “Ohmygod. Dean, I.”

“Sam, please. Later we can. Y-You can. I’ll be good later. I promise. Just. Just.” Dean’s hand slips up between his own legs, thick fingers pushing dry at his hole, edging inside with just in his fingertips.

“Okay,” Sam whispers, leaning down to kiss at Dean’s fingers where he’s prying himself open, licking in around them just to get a taste, just a quick taste. Dean’s hole clenches, pulling in tight when Sam slides his tongue in right alongside his fingers, getting them wet, making the push easier. Dean tastes so good, a little bitter, tastes just like his skin smells. Dean whimpers, pushes his ass back against Sam’s face like he can’t help it.

He pushes his fingers into Sam’s mouth, spreading that taste around on his tongue. Sam sucks on his fingers, thumbs rubbing at Dean’s asshole, massaging around the tightness of it.

“Love how you taste, Dean. Feed it to me. Feed me the taste of your ass.”
Dean whines, the sound muffled where he’s got his face buried in the pillow. He sinks his fingers back up inside of himself, going in easier this time because of Sam’s spit. He pulls them back out and feeds them back into Sam’s mouth, giving him even more of that taste, that delicious, dirty fucking taste that Sam’s already addicted to.

Sam looks around quickly, spotting the abandoned bottle of lube and grabbing it. He pops the cap and turns it over, squeezing out a sticky, long line of lube over Dean’s asshole, all over his fingers and down his crack. He closes it back up and tosses it away and dives into Dean’s ass with his own fingers, two of Dean’s and two of his own fucking him open, loosening him up. Sam can’t tear his eyes away, can’t believe what he’s seeing, what he’s doing.

“You ever done anything like this, Dean? Ever--"

“No.” Dean pulls his own hand away, wrapping his arms around the pillow, ass tipped up even more. Sam edges a third finger inside of him, curling them down and rubbing until Dean goes rigid, back arching hard. “Fuck!”

Sam growls, fucking at Dean’s prostate until Dean is moving with him, slamming his body back on Sam’s hand, trying to get him in deeper. Sam pulls his fingers out but it’s so hard to do, so fucking hard to stop. He wraps his hand around his dick again, getting it all wet with the lube slicking his fingers.

“If. If you need me to stop, Dean, you gotta tell me. Otherwise.” He grabs Dean’s thighs and spreads them even more, getting Dean’s body lower so he can line his dick up perfectly, rubbing the head of it over Dean’s loosened hole. “Otherwise I’m just gonna--”

“Fuck me,” Dean gasps, hand already on his own cock, the muscles in his right arm flexing hard as he jerks off. “Fuck me, Sammy, fuck me fuck me.”

Sam’s only fucked an ass once. It was Jess, and it was a night when they’d both smoked a little too much pot and she’d started asking questions about how it felt, what it was like. It had been awkward and messy and in the end, she hadn’t liked it as much as she was hoping. One and done. But Sam had loved it in secret, loved the tight clutch, the way it had felt decidedly different.

And now.

He holds onto his dick right behind the head, one hand on Dean’s soft, thick ass as he rubs against his hole, leaking slick all over him. He pushes in and Dean tenses up, his whole body pulling up, shying away.

“Sorry,” Dean pants, taking just a second to recover before he’s coming back, offering his ass up again, hand not on his dick anymore because he’s gripping the covers, face pushed completely into the pillow. “G-Go ahead.”

Sam slides his hand up to grip Dean’s hip, keeping him in place as he grits his teeth and presses in again, forcing the head inside even though Dean is tight as hell, tighter than anything Sam could ever imagine. Sam spreads his legs a little, ass tensing as he keeps on pushing, forcing his way in, fighting for every single inch.

“Goddamnit, Sammy. Of course you have a fuckin’ horse dick. Jesus fucking Christ. Just. Just hold on. Shit.” Dean’s stays where he is, his back heaving as he pants, tries to recover. Sam just stays where he is, trying so hard not to move, not even all the way in yet but he doesn’t want to say that. He just runs his hands up and down Dean’s sides, rubs at his tensed stomach, both his hands moving down to wrap around Dean’s dick, one working just the head and the other rubbing at his balls, making
Dean tense up around his cock, and Sam grits his teeth and just holds on.

Dean’s hips start to move after a minute, chasing after the hand that’s jerking him off. Sam starts to move with him, pulling back when Dean’s moving forward, each slide getting a little faster until Sam is actively moving his hips, letting Dean’s hand take over on his dick so he can grab Dean’s hips, rearing him back and onto his cock as he starts to fuck him in earnest.

He drapes himself over Dean’s back, letting Dean take some of his weight so he can get in even deeper, his balls finally resting against Dean’s warm body, slapping against him with every thrust. Dean’s being so quiet, like he’s concentrating, like Sam’s going to have to earn every sound he makes.

Sam pushes down on Dean until Dean more or less collapses on the bed, laid out prone on his belly. He spreads his legs out, trapping Dean’s body between them as he presses down on him completely, his belly nestled against Dean’s back, his dick buried so far inside of Dean that he swears he can feel the head of it bumping against the mattress beneath Dean.

“Fuck me with that big dick, Sammy. God, I fuckin’ need it.”

Sam kisses across Dean’s shoulders, mouthing his way up his neck as he starts to fuck Dean with all of his strength, with all the power in his body because he knows Dean can take it, knows he can take it like nobody else Sam’s ever been with. Dean feels like heaven inside, like a gift. He’s so grateful for this, for Dean letting him do this. For Dean asking for this. Sam never knew, never thought about--

There’s a shriek and then a shudder and the frame of the bed breaks, falling away from the headboard but not the footboard. They slide forward, stopped only when Sam’s hands come out and press against the wall, keeping them from falling anymore. Dean laughs, each stutter of it making him clench up over and over around Sam’s dick.

“You break it, you buy it.” Dean cranes up, turns around to meet Sam’s eyes, to give him a big, beautiful smile that Sam has to reach for, has to kiss. Dean’s jacking his cock again, pushing back on Sam’s dick and Sam stays dug up inside of him, letting Dean fuck back on him, letting him milk his dick as much as he wants.

“I ain’t buyin’ it,” Sam mumbles against his mouth. “Takin’ it outta your ass maybe.”

“Shut up and keep fuckin’ me. Maybe we can break the other end.” Dean props his ass up by getting his knees under him a little bit, getting enough leverage so Sam can start thrusting again, hard, rough slaps that keep him mostly buried inside, just letting him pack it in deep, letting him pound against Dean’s prostate.

Come is still dripping out of his ass, sliding down Dean’s balls as well as his own. He will never, ever get over this night. Not ever.

Dean gasps when he starts to come, his head hanging low, face buried into the pillow again as he really starts to tighten around Sam’s dick, milking at him over and over again until Sam has no choice but to come, but to push in as far as he can and let go, giving Dean as much come as he has left.

The other end of the bed finally breaks, the mattress and the boxsprings falling flat on the floor, the footboard collapsing back on the ground. Sam barely notices, barely reacts to it because Dean is shaking so hard Sam’s almost scared, he’s clutched up so tight around his dick that he doesn’t know if he’ll ever get out again.
He rubs at Dean’s arms, strokes over his sides and kisses his neck over and over, his dick still working tiredly inside of Dean, like it can’t seem to let go either. Dean’s burning up inside and finally smooth, the glide easy and slick when Sam gives him a few more, slow thrusts, just wanting to draw a few more shudders out of Dean.

“Think you ruined me,” Dean finally mumbles, completely boneless on the broken bed, not even reacting to Sam kissing at his mouth. Sam smiles, gives a contented little hum, hands sliding down to Dean’s ass to give it an appreciative squeeze, a hard slap on either side. Dean grunts, jerks, relaxes again with a sigh.

“Think I just found a new hobby.” Sam grins when Dean grunts again, when he gathers enough energy to turn around and glare at Sam.

“I don’t think so, Mr. Ed. That thing’s only gettin’ near me on special occasions.”

Sam blushes even though his ego is near to exploding. He lifts up off of Dean carefully, his dick finally sliding free, completely soaked with come and hanging heavy, mostly soft. He climbs up out of the bed, doesn’t let himself look at Dean’s ass, doesn’t look at his ruined hole because he’ll just want to latch onto it and suck it clean, soothe at it with his tongue. He finds a towel in the bathroom without turning the light on, wiping his ass and his dick clean before he comes back into the room with a fresh towel.

“Here, um.” He has to get down low to sit on the mattress on the floor, the towel held out in his hand for Dean to take. Dean grunts again, doesn’t move.

“You do it. Can’t move.”

Sam takes a deep breath before he runs the towel up between Dean’s legs as gently as he can, wiping over his hole, his mouth flooded with saliva at the thought of getting his mouth on it.

“Lift up a little, Dean.”

Dean sighs but obeys, lifting up enough for them to tug the blanket off the bed, leaving the sheets on, Sam slips under the top sheet next to Dean and pulls it up over them, throwing the towel off the side of the bed. Dean is almost asleep by the time Sam presses up against his side, draping an arm and a leg over Dean, dropping a sleepy kiss to the skin just below his bloody temple.

“Gonna patch you up tomorrow,” he whispers, his eyes falling closed. “Okay?”

Dean makes a faint noise, his arm heavy as it slides over Sam’s waist, pulls him in closer.

“Was amazing, S’mmy.”

Sam smiles, taking a deep breath that he lets out in the slowest, most content sigh.

“Yeah. You were.”

Sam wakes up when he feels a dick pushing at him from behind, eyes dragging open as it slips inside, his asshole sore, raw. He whines when it pushes all the way up into him, slicked up only with what feels like spit and the rest of the come Dean left in him earlier. Dean’s pressed up against his back, Sam’s leg lifted and held in the crook of Dean’s arm.

There’s a mouth at the back of his neck, breath rushing hot and sour against his skin.
“Go back t’sleep, Sammy.”

Sam breathes out a laugh that comes out more like a moan, craning his head to look back at Dean who’s already starting to thrust, this angle apparently fucking perfect for prostates because goddamn.

“How’m I supposed to sleep while you’ve got your dick in me?”

“Sorry,” Dean kisses along his jaw, not really sounding in the least bit sorry. “It’s just. You know how sometimes you wake up in the middle of the night and you want it but you can’t do anything about it? Well, now I.Fuck, you were just right there and you feel so fuckin’ good--”

“Harder, Dean. God, do it harder.”

Dean finally shuts up, hikes Sam’s leg up even higher and God, he gets in that much deeper, his dick pounding into Sam so good that Sam swears he can see stars. The lamp by the bed’s still on, dawn finally creeping up outside. It’s hot in the room, the air conditioner off, and Dean’s belly is sweaty when it slaps at Sam’s back.

Sam comes all over himself, the head of his dick caught in a tight circle made by his thumb and forefinger, Dean’s mouth sucking a bruise on his throat.

“You said you wanna feel me,” Dean growls, panting now, so close. “You said you want to be sore, that you wanna feel me. Gonna make sure you fuckin’ feel me.”

“I feel you,” Sam gasps, his body shuddering hard, sluggish, still half-asleep and ripped away by a fast, intense orgasm. “Ohmygod, Dean, I feel you so deep.”

Dean slams into him so hard Sam thinks there will be bruises on his ass in the morning, one, two, three brutal thrusts and he’s emptying into Sam again, second time before the sun comes up.

Sam’s out, asleep before Dean’s even done with him. Falls asleep with Dean’s dick still inside of him, with Dean still whimpering at his back, with his name on Dean’s lips.

Sam wakes up because there’s rank air being breathed right against his mouth.

He wrinkles his nose as he stirs, eyes slipping open and he’s face-to-face with Dean. Dean who is dead to the world, mouth open, snoring against Sam’s lips, sleep gunk caught in his long lashes, drool dampening their shared pillow, the whole nine.

Sam smiles.

He tries to wiggle away, his full bladder calling, but the hand that he’s suddenly aware of on his ass tightens, keeps him where he is. He lets out a raw, gravelly whine, lifting a sleep-heavy hand and resting it on Dean’s scratchy cheek.

“Dean--”

“Grrn.”

“I gotta pee.”

“No.”

“Yes, actually. I do.” He pushes back against the hand that just gets more possessive, fingers slipping
along his crack, ghosting over his hole. He arches his back because he can’t help it, giving a defeated sigh as he momentarily relaxes back against his brother.

“Feel good. Warm.”

“It’s burning up in here, Dean.”

“Don’t care.”

“Why are you talking like a caveman?” Sam pushes back against Dean’s grip and he wins this time, catching Dean by surprise and he sits up, every single muscle in his body hurting, his ass sore and used. He shivers.

“Cavemen don’t use contractions.” Dean turns over onto his belly right on the spot that Sam just vacated, the covers slipping down, only half-covering his ass now. Sam stands up on shaky legs, reaching up to try and smooth down his hair that is wild from Dean’s hands, his eyes on Dean’s ass as he rounds the bed toward the bathroom.

“Cover that thing up.”

“What thing?” Dean’s voice is muffled now, face half-buried in the pillow, and Sam wonders if Dean can smell him in the pillow.

“That pretty ass, Dean. You know what.”

Dean grunts, reaching down to yank the covers up to the middle of his back. “You ain’t goin’ near it again for at least a week, so don’t get any fuckin’ ideas.”

“A week, huh?”

“Hell, yeah.” Dean sounds more awake now and he lifts his head, eyes bleary and taking a minute to find Sam, but he raises his eyebrows when they do. “I can barely move, Ron Jeremy.”

“I got fucked last night, too. Twice.” Sam’s fighting to keep his grin in, but the flush on his cheeks gives him away. He leans back against the doorframe to the bathroom, arms crossed over his bare chest, eyes soft and on his brother.

“Yeah, well.” Dean sighs and curls back up in bed again, voice muffled once more. “Not all of us are size queens.”

Sam lets out a surprised burst of laughter for that, pushing off from the wall to saunter back over to his brother, bringing a hand down to smack hard on the closest asscheek. Dean yelps and curls up tighter, shying away from that hand and he turns to glare at Sam for all he’s worth.

“I said stay away!”

“So that includes me eating you out, too, huh?”

Dean’s face softens into thoughtfulness, head tipping to the side as he considers. He shoves the covers back away, revealing his entire naked ass this time before he melts back into the bed, eyes slipping closed.

“That’s allowed.”

Sam smirks, sinking a knee into the mattress as he brings both hands down to frame Dean’s ass, prying the cheeks apart and showing off Dean’s slightly-puffy little hole, a shy pink and just as pretty
as Sam remembered.

“That’s what I thought,” he murmurs, leaning down and letting the flat of his tongue lick right over it, the tip of his tongue flicking and tendering where Dean’s surely sore, aching. Dean gasps, his whole body tensing, asshole flinching under Sam’s gentle tongue. He tastes salty from come, sweaty and dirty because they both need showers still, badly.

Sam stops after a few seconds, pressing a kiss right in the middle of his now softened hole before he lifts up, licking his lips.

“I’m getting in the shower.”

“You bastard,” Dean whimpers as Sam stands up again, burying his face in the pillow and groaning. Sam grins, has to tear his eyes away or else he’ll just climb back in the bed next to Dean and suck every last drop of come he left in him out.

He showers quickly, rinsing himself as clean as he can inside and out, his insides tender but in the best way, in the way he’s always savored before from his own fingers, from when he let Jess fuck him. But this time, it’s because of Dean. It’s finally because of Dean.

He climbs out of the shower and Dean’s standing there, looking rumpled and half-asleep and adorable, and Sam can’t help but grin at him.

“You next?”

Dean just grunts a reply and shuffles past Sam to the shower, their fingers catching as they pass, forefingers curling together and not letting go until they have to. Sam has a hard time brushing his teeth because he can’t stop smiling.

He gets dressed and takes the car in search of a McDonald’s and finds one only a couple of streets over, getting them a bag of breakfast sandwiches and two giant coffees. His mind is blissfully blank, still tasting Dean on his tongue, still remembering the look in his eyes last night, all the looks.

He returns to the room, juggling all the food, to find Dean pouting on the bed.

Sam raises his eyebrows at him.

“You okay?”

“I was serious about not letting you leave for three days.”

Sam laughs, shutting the door and setting the food down on the table. “Plannin’ on holding me hostage, huh?”

“Maybe.” Dean still looks upset but he starts sniffing the air, his stomach gets the better of him. “What’d you get?”

Sam shrugs and sits down at the table, watching Dean open the bag and dig around in it. “Little of everything. Figured it’d be lunch, too. Since we’re stayin’ in.”

Dean unwraps a sandwich and takes a bite out of it, sinking down into the chair across from Sam and wincing a little as he does. He swallows and picks up his coffee, tipping it toward Sam.

“New rule: I say whoever tops the night before’s gotta get breakfast the next mornin’.”

Sam raises his eyebrows again, trying to contain his grin as he picks the bacon off his sandwich and
lays it on Dean’s napkin. “What if we both topped?”

Dean hums while he chews, a flirty glint in his eyes as he swallows. “Whoever took it better is the winner.”

Sam breaks off a piece of his sandwich, blushing for the way Dean’s looking at him. “So who won last night?”

Dean winks as he sips his coffee, one of his bare feet sliding over and skating up Sam’s shin. “I think you definitely took it like you were born for it, Sammy.”

Sam ducks his head, suddenly not interested in eating breakfast, his dick fattening up like it can overhear the whole conversation. “Think you just don’t want to remember how pretty you looked on my dick last night, Dean.”

“Oh, Jesus, please don’t call me pretty. Anything but that, alright?” Dean’s face is plenty red too but he still looks pretty pleased with himself. Sam grins and turns his attention back to his sandwich, trying to ignore the way Dean’s toes are spreading, the way his foot is basically petting his leg now. It’s sweet, comforting, too perfect to be real.

Sam eats half of his sandwich before he decides he’s had enough and passes the rest to Dean. Dean looks down at it and then up at Sam, one cheek fat with food.

“You doin’ okay, Sammy?”

Sam looks up and their eyes meet, hold. The air conditioning is on, humming loudly above their heads, taking some of the humid warmth out of the room. Dean’s eyes are vivid in the morning sunlight from the window, all of him washed in gold, like he’d been posed there. Sam smiles at him, reaching over to drag a fingertip over the back of Dean’s hand, catching on the fine hairs of his knuckles.

“I’m pretty amazing, actually. I don’t really feel… different. Not really. Like, I didn’t feel different when I woke up, but. I just kind of feel like I woke up with all the answers this morning. You know?”

Dean’s fingers awaken under his own, lifting and spreading to tangle with Sam’s. He’s eaten all of his own food but hasn’t touched the rest of Sam’s yet, his fingers a little greasy from the biscuit. “That’s, uh. That’s really good to hear. Real good. Just want to make sure I know what’s going on over there.”

“Not much at the moment,” Sam replies, a grin teasing at his lips. He gives Dean’s hand a little tug. “Just trying to decide if I’m going to suck your dick now or wait thirty minutes for my food to digest.”

Dean’s eyes widen, shoulders straightening. “You don’t have to wait to suck dick. It’s not like swimming.”

Sam pushes back from the table, their hands falling apart so he can slide from the chair and shuffle over to Dean on his knees. He comes to rest on his haunches in front of him, hands resting on Dean’s knees, thumbs circling his kneecaps.

“Do you know that for sure or are you just that desperate?”

“Probably the second thing,” Dean says quietly, already sounding breathless. He reaches up, fingers tangling in the back of Sam’s hair while the other one slides down into his underwear, pulling out his
dick which is already fattened up, half-hard and looking good enough to eat. Sam licks his lips.

“Gonna keep eating breakfast, Dean? While I suck you off?” Sam nuzzles at his cock, kissing at the slit, letting his lips be soft and wet and fat as he mouths at him.

“Just be a good boy and put that in your mouth,” Dean slides the head past Sam’s lips and lets out an aching sigh, like he’s been waiting on tenterhooks for Sam to do just this. Sam moans, his eyes slipping closed, his entire body relaxing, almost tranced out because he just loves doing this, loves being right here that much.

Sucking his brother’s dick at breakfast probably shouldn’t come so naturally.

“When did you first think about me like that?”

They’re curled up in the broken bed now, air on full blast so it’s freezing in the room, and they’re both in their underwear under a pile of blankets. Their legs are heavy and tangled up together, Dean’s fingers stroking through Sam’s hair, unending and slow, like he’s memorizing every strand. Sam’s hand is spread out on Dean’s back, right between his shoulderblades, enthralled with the liquid strength of Dean’s muscles there.

So this is what it’s like to be in love.

Dean’s eyes laze open and find Sam’s because they’re sharing a pillow again, faces inches away.

“Hm?”

“When did you, um,” Sam repeats, shyer now, “when was the first time you thought about me, you know. Like this?”

“You mean when was the first time I wanted to bad-touch you?”

Sam grins, eyes falling closed because he can’t hide the blush that springs up on his cheeks.

“Yeah.”

“In your bathing suit places?”

“Dean.”

“Dunno,” Dean sighs, but it’s not an unhappy sound. More like he’s just settling in, getting closer, like he’s not going to try and weasel out of the question. Sam opens his eyes again and watches him, watches Dean’s eyes searching the wall behind Sam’s head, like he’s really thinking. Like there are times to actually sift through. His heart skips.

“I feel kinda dirty talkin’ about it. Like the cops are gonna bust in the second I start tellin’ you how I wanted your cute little butt in middle school or somethin’.”

Sam edges closer to him, heart racing in his chest now, bypassing all the jokes he could say that would lead them away from the heart of this conversation to latch onto the few details Dean just gave him.

“Middle school? Really?”

“It was pro’ly earlier than that. I was a horny kid. Didn’t really know what I wanted or anything, just
knew what felt good. I was like thirteen and you used to sleep in bed with me, you know. I knew what sex was and what guys and girls did together, and I’d been. Y’know. Jerkin’ off for a year or so. You were always just so warm, Sammy. Felt so good in bed at night. Woulda been so easy to. To just.”

“Yeah, it would’ve,” Sam whispers, eyes focused and locked on Dean’s, struggling to keep from sliding closer, getting their dicks all shoved up together so they can grind their way through this conversation. “When was the… the, um. I mean. Did you ever have, you know. Fantasies? About me?”

“Shit, of course,” Dean rushes out, his voice so quiet, just for Sam, like he’s still ashamed of it. Sam rubs over his back, down the long line of it, comforting and more than a little turned-on. “That one year you went to Boy Scouts for a month or so? You were like, what? Twelve?”

Sam nods, face hot. “Twelve.”

“The shorts and the little scarf and you earnin’ your badges? Christ. Nearly killed me. And every time you played soccer. Came home all sweaty and in those little shorts—”

“I’m noticing a shorts theme here, Dean.” His mind is spinning, desperately trying to rewrite his history now that he’s hearing these things, now that he knows another side of this, now that he knows that there is another side of this.

“Those are just the big ones, the ones that I still,” Dean trails off, his eyes falling closed as he moves in closer to Sam, scruffy cheek resting on Sam’s bare shoulder. Sam’s hand drifts up into Dean’s hair, petting him with the same, slow rhythm Dean’s touching him.

“You still what?”

“I’m so going to hell for this, Sammy.”

“The ones you still think about?”

Dean nods, hand pausing on the nape of Sam’s neck. “And after you turned sixteen and shot up? Jesus fucking Christ. Just had to force myself not to think about it. Just couldn’t think about it.”

“Bet you changed your mind when I lost all that weight,” Sam’s quiet, self-deprecating, head ducked down so he can bury his face in Dean’s clean hair, breathe in his shampoo. Things are quiet between them for a minute, like Dean’s working something out in his head.

“Was that ‘cause-a me, too? When you stopped eating?”

Sam sighs, arm sliding around Dean’s narrow waist, hugging up tight against him, comforted beyond all reason when Dean wraps an arm around him, hugging him right back. He feels just safe enough to answer.

“All of that stuff was because of me, because I didn’t know how to deal with anything. Not because of you, okay?”

Dean doesn’t say anything back for awhile, just keeps his grip on Sam tight, hand tucked between the mattress and Sam’s ribs.

“Was Dom because of me?”

They’re not looking any each other anymore, snuggled up too close now to be able to, but Sam can
feel how hard it is for Dean to ask that question, can hear the hurt still in his voice, after all this time.

“Why did it bother you so much?”

“Answer the question, Sam.”

Sam swallows, his throat working against Dean’s temple. He nods, just a single, jerky movement.

“Yeah. It was.”

“You did all of that to piss me off? To. To hurt me?” Dean lifts up now, meeting Sam’s eyes, surprising a gasp out of him when he sees Dean’s eyes bright with tears.

“No,” Sam breathes, hand sliding up to cup Dean’s cheek, the length of it from the heel to the tips of his fingers spanning nearly the whole side of Dean’s face. “No, Dean. It wasn’t that. God, it wasn’t. I was so fucked up over you. You don’t understand. I was obsessed with you. I knew where you were at every possible second, if I could. I knew what you had for breakfast, I knew what shampoo you were using. I knew what song you were really into with on any given day. I was with you every single day, and I was obsessed with you. But I had to pretend like I wasn’t. Like I was normal. Just your brother.”

“Why didn’t you ever tell me? Why--”

“If I’d’ve ever told you and you didn’t feel the same way, I would have killed myself, Dean. You don’t understand.” There are tears in his own eyes now, and he’s too into this conversation, too desperate to make Dean understand to care. “How could I have ever guessed you’d feel the same way? I still. I still can’t believe that you’re letting me do this. That I’m getting away with this. With touching you and. And talking to you like this. Telling you this stuff.”

“Why Dom? Why did you. You.” Dean grits his teeth, his jaw a tight line, the tears in his eyes making them nearly glow in the low light. “Why’d you do that?”

“He just came outta nowhere, took me by surprise. I wanted you so much I could barely stand to be next to you. I couldn’t stand touching you, Dean. It nearly drove me insane. And then here comes this guy, and he just.” He shakes his head, eyes wide from the memories. “He just wanted me. The way no guy’s ever--”

“Stop,” Dean whispers, fingers pressing in so hard on Sam’s ribs that he knows they’re going to bruise. Dean’s eyes are closed again, head tucked down, and his chest is heaving. “Just. Just give me a minute. Alright?”

They fall quiet while Dean struggles, throat working as he swallows over and over, tears sliding down his cheeks but Sam doesn’t say anything, doesn’t bring attention to them. Just strokes over the side of Dean’s face, his fingers tender across the light beard Dean’s got growing in, all along the shell of his ear. Sam just waits him out, his heart ready to burst out of his aching chest, but he waits.

“Keep goin’,” Dean finally grits out, nose all but pressed against Sam’s throat, face hidden.

“I knew I was leaving,” Sam continues, his voice soft, trying to be as respectful as he can, to tread lightly around Dean because he honestly never realized how much this hurt him. “Knew I was going to Stanford. I was trying to emotionally separate myself from you, because I had to. And I could pretend with Dom.”

“Pretend what?”
“Pretend it was you,” he says right against Dean’s ear, reminding him without words that no matter what else has happened, they’re here right now, together. “The whole time, I just pretended it was you. Until. Until I couldn’t. Which is why we never went all the way. I made him stop. I just. Couldn’t do it. Because he wasn’t really you.”

“What did he say to you? Did he tell you how amazing you are? An’ how beautiful and smart and perfect and how much he cares about you? Did he tell you that stuff, Sammy?”

Sam nods, can’t draw a breath to speak because he realizes now that Dean is crushing him against his own body, that both of Dean’s arms are around him, their chests melded together, hearts beating at each other through their ribcages. When Dean turns them, presses Sam back into the bed and covers him with the bare heat of his own body, Sam just spreads his legs for his brother, just lets him.

“Those were my things to say to you,” Dean’s voice is soft, trembling, younger than Sam has heard Dean sound in years and years. “Not his, nobody else’s. Nobody else gets to tell you those things, you hear me?”

Sam nods again, dizzy with how fast his head is moving, but he wraps himself around Dean, arms and legs hugging him down, hands petting his back, comforting him when he feels the hot fall of tears on his neck where Dean’s buried his face again.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers against Dean’s ear, his chin trembling, every inch of them touching, wrapped around each other. “Dean, I’m sorry I hurt you. I wish it had been you. I always just wanted it to be you.”

Dean’s nodding now, over and over again as he lifts up and catches Sam’s mouth with his own, his lips soft and warm but the kiss is hungry, possessive, tongue licking into Sam’s mouth and tracing every bump and corner and molar inside. Sam moans, arms lifting to wrap around Dean’s neck, legs tightening so that they’re grinding now, Dean fucking down against Sam, both in their underwear, their dicks hot and hard and rubbing through worn cotton.

“We’re never gonna say his name again. Okay? Never again.”

“Okay, Dean,” Sam breathes into his mouth, right into the kisses Dean is licking into him now, one hand gentle and big and cupping the back of Dean’s head. He can still feel Dean’s tears, feel their wetness on his own face. “Nobody but you. Always just wanted you. Always been yours.”

“Say it again, Sammy. Tell me again.” Dean’s hands find his own while Dean keeps him distracted with his teeth chewing into Sam’s bottom lip, and Dean’s got him pinned to the mattress before he knows it, wrists caught up under Dean’s wide arms, legs tightening so that they’re grinding now, Dean fucking down against Sam, both in their underwear, their dicks hot and hard and rubbing through worn cotton.

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Sam struggles just to feel the restraint, just to feel how trapped he is. He lets out a breathy, shivering sigh when Dean kisses down his neck, sucking bruises as he goes, their dicks thick and leaking everywhere now where they’re fucking against each other, both already so close.

“Always been yours, Dean. Always been your boy.”

“Fuck, yes,” Dean hisses, the hard lines of Dean’s teeth teasing over his neck before he bites down, sinks in hard enough to break skin, and Sam cries out, writhes under Dean, head tipped back to bare his neck for him. “Again.”

“I’m your boy, big brother,” Sam whispers, his hands going numb because no blood’s getting past Dean’s grip on his wrists, and his cheeks are flushed because of what he just said, how dirty it is,
even for two brothers fucking on a motel bed. Dean growls, lifting up from where he’s making a
feast of Sam’s neck and staring straight down into Sam’s eyes, looking absolutely feral, their bodies
still moving together like they were born to do this, to rut and fuck each other like wild things.

Dean’s hands loosen on Sam’s wrists only to let his thumb drag over the moon-shaped scar on his
left wrist, and Sam can’t hold in the stuttering cry, can’t keep his hips from flying up, humping at
Dean, so desperate, so fucking close now that Dean’s touched him there, on that scar.

Dean hums, dipping down to kiss at Sam’s mouth, his legs spreading wider to get in closer,
spreading Sam’s legs with them. “You like that, Sammy? Like me touchin’ you there?”

“You like that,” Sam gasps, eyes slipping closed, colors flying behind his eyelids, like maybe he’s
dying. “Please.”

Dean’s yanking at Sam’s watch, unfastening it and tossing it off the side of the bed and fuck, his
burning hot mouth, all that wet breath and his slick tongue and Dean’s doing just what Sam asked,
he’s sucking on his scar like he’s trying to feed from it, like Sam’s going to give him something from
it.

He comes almost immediately, still held down by Dean’s grip on him, his hips lifting straight up off
the bed and Dean is grinding down into him with the dirtiest, sweetest circling fucks of his hips,
shameless and perfectly humping Sam until he comes too, every growl Dean lets out during orgasm
muffled from the way he’s still latched onto Sam’s wrist, sucking a bruise over the whole span of it,
the scar right in the center.

They collapse down on the bed at the same time, breath heaving, their bodies shaking together,
underwear sticky and ruined once again. Dean’s suckling at Sam’s scar now, tonguing it and kissing
it, driving shivers up Sam’s spine with every lick.

“Sorry about that girl back in Indiana. The one I brought back to the room.” Dean’s so quiet that
Sam barely hears him, barely makes out the words between the sweet kisses Dean is leaving on his
now suck-bruised wrist. “Hated myself for doin’ that. I was real fucked up over everything, but I still
shouldn’a done that.”

“It’s okay.” Sam cradles Dean where he is, lets him keep up his almost nursing on his wrist, all of it
so serene and sweet it doesn’t feel real. He closes his eyes and smiles up at nothing. “Let’s just call a
blanket apology for everything before today, okay? All is forgiven. Can we do that?”

“I dunno, Sammy. Don’t think I’m ready to forgive you for makin’ me see The Phantom Menace in
theaters.”

Sam snorts for that, pushing his fingers into Dean’s hair and giving it a hard tug, enough to make
Dean grunt, smile against his wrist, but he doesn’t stop his kisses on it.

“Asshole. And here I was, tryin’ to be nice. And I was ready to forgive you for killing my fish I won
at the fair.”

“Sammy, that was a sad-ass, county fair goldfish. It had a lifespan of a week, tops. I just saved it
from impending misery.” Dean laces his fingers with Sam’s as he slides back down until they’re
face-to-face, their smiles ghosting together.

“By knocking his home off the dresser?”

“His ‘home’ was a 2-liter Pepsi bottle! And I just shut a dresser drawer! Wasn’t my fault it was on
the edge. I think your fish was suicidal.”
Sam snorts. “Just because you insisted on callin’ him Eddie Van Halen.”

Dean grins against his mouth. “Better than Balki Bartokomous.”

“...I can’t believe you just said Balki Bartokomous while our dicks are touching.”

“Can’t help that I’m an expert at pillow talk.” Dean tucks his arms under the pillow Sam’s resting on, body relaxing down on top of Sam, a warm, beautiful weight. “You in love with me yet?”

Sam’s smiling so hard his face hurts.

“I don’t know what it feels like to not be in love with you.”

He closes his eyes when Dean presses a kiss to the mole on his cheek before nuzzling at his face, their mouths finding each other blindly. Perfect, every time.

Four days later, they’re driving through Benevolence, Georgia, and the rain is falling in heavy, warm sheets. The world is slate blue and wet green, and the Impala’s wipers are working overtime. Sam has his window cracked because summer rain is one of his favorite smells, the heat and wet of it. His cheeks are damp with rogue raindrops, and he can feel Dean’s eyes on him every moment or so, admiring or bemused, he doesn’t know.

“Well, shit,” Dean sighs, the car slowing down, the sound of the tires cutting through the slick roads loud over Van Morrison on the radio. Sam opens his eyes and looks forward, seeing the long line of stopped cars coming into view in front of them.

There’s a funeral procession coming towards them, headed up by a beetle-black hearse, each car in the line sporting a small orange flag, marking it as part of the entourage. They’re coming slowly, sluggish in the rain, and Sam finds himself wondering about the body in the hearse, the person who used to be in it.

Dean reaches up and shuts the radio off, filling the car with silence except for the rain pelting down from overhead. Sam is immediately reminded of Dad, of the first time they’d gotten caught up in a funeral procession in the South. Dad had turned the music off, too, told them it was a sign of respect, just like all the cars stopped as the procession passes.

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“It’s showin’ respect for the dead, for the survivors, too. Most people don’t stop anymore, don’t show any respect. In too much of a hurry to care,” Dad had told them, his voice low, like it’s something to remember. They’d all three fallen quiet in this same car, watching each car as it passed them, Dean in the passenger seat, twelve years old and sullen for being chastised when he’d complained about Dad for turning off “Over the Hills and Far Away” and Sam in the back seat, eight and wide-eyed, knobby elbows on the back of the bench seat where he’d leaned forward.

Sam blinks himself out of the memory, eyes back on the moving cars, just like all those years ago. He glances over and finds Dean frowning, a fingernail digging into the steering wheel where he’s gripping it.

“What’s wrong?” Sam asks, keeping his voice quiet, not really wanting to interrupt Dean’s thoughts, but he can’t help but wonder.
Dean shrugs, shaking his head to snap out of his thoughts, eyes lowering to his lap. Sam’s focused on Dean completely now, forgoing respect because he cares about Dean more.

“I dunno, just thinkin’,” Dean finally offers, long lashes lifting as he eyes the seemingly endless line of cars again. “When I die, nobody’s ever gonna do this for me. You know? There wouldn’t even be three cars in the line. There’s just not enough people who’d give a shit.”

Sam swallows, tears pricking at the backs of his eyes at just the thought of Dean dying, of being stuck here, left as a survivor. He reaches over, hand cupping the back of Dean’s head before sliding down to his neck, squeezing gentle and slow.

“Dean--”

“Doesn’t matter,” Dean cuts in, the tightness in his voice negating his words. “Don’t really care, I guess. Just weird thinkin’ about how there won’t be people who’ll remember me.”

“Hey.” Sam runs his thumb over the curve of Dean’s ear, fingers curling over his cheek. His throat aches, tight with emotion. “I know all the good things you’ve done in your life. Even if nobody else knows. I know your good heart, Dean, and it won’t ever be forgotten because I’ll always know. I’ll always remember. Okay?”

Dean’s looking away again, can’t seem to look over at Sam but he’s nodding, swallowing over and over as he blinks down at his lap. He takes a deep breath and glances over at Sam, just a glance, but the bright warmth in his eyes catches Sam off-guard, steals the breath right out of his body.

“Oh, Sammy. But if I go, I’m takin’ you with me, you hear me?”

“You better,” Sam whispers, his voice shaking a little but they lean forward at the same time, lips sliding together soft and warm and trembling with held-in emotion. The car behind them honks and they break apart, realizing the procession’s gone, moment’s over, traffic moving on up the road.

Dean’s hand finds Sam’s between them, clasping tight, not loose, holding on like Sam’s an anchor, his touchstone, the grip so complete that Sam can feel Dean’s heartbeat against his palm.

Two weeks later, they’re driving like two bats out of hell through the rain-slicked streets of Chicago, both of them bleeding badly, skin torn into by unseen claws.

Everything in Sam screams that they need to go back, that they need to find Dad again, that they shouldn’t have let him go. He closes his eyes and pictures him so clearly, the strange serenity in his eyes, like he’s accepted his fate, accepted his role in this whole, fucked-up game.

“Dean--”

“Sammy, just don’t.” Dean’s voice is trembling, watery, his hands in a death grip on the wheel. Dean draws in a sharp breath that he lets out in a sob, and Sam’s eyes fill with new tears. “Just. Don’t. Please.”

Sam stays quiet until they get out of the city, his torn cheek hurting so bad that he doesn’t want to touch it, doesn’t want to look at it. They get out onto the interstate and into night traffic, headlights too bright around them, out of place.
“Let’s just find a motel,” Sam finally says, keeping his voice soft, unobtrusive. “We’re both torn up. We need to get cleaned up, okay?”

Dean just nods, his mouth set in a firm line but his chin is still quivering, tears tumbling helplessly down his cheeks.

They drive for another twenty-three miles without saying a word.

Dean takes the exit into Wheaton, drives until they find a vacancy sign. He’s the less torn-up of the two, so he goes in to get the room while Sam gathers their stuff for the night.

One bed, a busted TV, and a crucifix on the wall.

“Gonna take a shower,” Dean mumbles, a pair of clean underwear clutched in his hand. Sam looks up from where he’s digging through his own bag, only finds the courage to speak when Dean turns the bathroom light on.

“How can I join you?”

Dean stops, turns to look at him, his face unreadable where he’s silhouetted in the light.

“Sure,” he finally replies, his voice quiet, tired. Sam doesn’t hesitate, just jumps up, clean briefs dangling from his fingers, a first-aid kit in his other hand.

They undress without speaking, and Dean turns the shower on as hot as it’ll go. He steps in first, leaving the curtain tugged back a little, a silent invitation for Sam. Sam turns to glance at his own reflection in the mirror, at the fresh gashes on his face, the tear tracks through all the blood.

He follows his brother into the shower.

Dean’s got his back to him and he’s holding cheap soap and a bleach-white washcloth, scrubbing them together under the spray to try and get the cloth as sudsy as he can. Sam takes it from him when the soap is half-gone, sets the soap on the shelf, draping the washcloth over his palm.

Dean keeps his back to him, his head down, the water cascading down the back of his neck, wetting his hair, the water pink as it pools around their feet from the blood on Dean’s face.

Sam washes Dean’s back first, scrubbing across his shoulders and down, following behind with his hand that just rubs the soap in, that just glides and pets over Dean’s skin, going gentle over the very worst of the bruises completely covering Dean’s body before the water washes the soap away. He washes his ass, the backs of his thighs, all the way down to his knees. He urges Dean to turn around and Dean obeys wordlessly, his eyes down, lashes long and dark and wet on his cheeks.

He washes his front now, just like Dean used to do when Sam was little, scrubbing hard at his pits and gentle over his normally ticklish ribs that are now mottled with bruises just like his back was. He cleans his smooth belly, his dick, the fronts of his tired legs. Lets the water take it all away.

He rinses the cloth out and drops it onto the shelf before he grabs the tiny shampoo, goopping half of it out onto his palm and rubbing his hands together.

“Head back,” Sam says softly, his voice almost lost under the spray of the water. They’re both so vulnerable here, so unprotected. Anything could come, anything could happen. Sam’s not scared of the thought, more just wearily accepting of it, can think of worse ways to go than being in this tiny
space with Dean, hands on his warm, tired skin.

He washes his hair with as much care as he’s ever taken with anything, making sure not to get any shampoo on the gashes on Dean’s forehead, making sure to massage it into his scalp, nails dragging slow and deliberate before he guides Dean back under the water, rinsing it all out again.

Sam grabs the soap and cloth again, about to suds it up for himself when Dean takes it from him, finally meeting his eyes for the first time since they were in Chicago.

“Turn around.”

Sam’s throat hurts with trapped emotions but he turns around, head down, letting Dean wash him just like Sam had just done to him, down to the hand stroking over his skin after the washcloth.

Dean squeezes the rest of the shampoo into his palm and looks up at Sam, giving a breath of a laugh, shaking his head.

“You’re kinda too tall for this part.”

Sam laughs outright for that, his smile a little sheepish. He sinks down to his knees there in the shower, looking up at Dean with a raised eyebrow.

“Better?”

Dean smirks at him, rubbing his hands together until the shampoo is nice and bubbly.

“It’ll do.”

Dean’s hands sink into his wet hair and Sam sighs, wrapping his arms around Dean’s waist, his un torn cheek nestling in against Dean’s stomach. Dean takes his time, washing his hair with much more deliberation than he ever did when they were little, with more patience but just as much love. They work together to rinse it out without getting Sam’s cheek wet, and Sam’s knees ache when he stands back up.

Sam climbs out first, braving the cold bathroom to grab the first towel and hand it in to Dean who’s waiting in the warmth of the mostly-enclosed shower. They dry off, pull on their underwear nearly in tandem, toss their towels into the same corner.

Dean cleans Sam’s wounds first, rinsing them out and smearing on some Neosporin as gently as he can while Sam shifts where he’s perched on the toilet lid, trying to be tough and not flinch but it hurts.

“Think I need stitches?” Sam lifts his gaze, watches Dean’s eyes as they focus on the task at hand, applying butterfly bandage after bandage to Sam’s ripped-open cheek.

“Pro’ly,” Dean mutters, covering the whole thing with a giant Band-Aid at the end. He sighs. “We’ll keep an eye on it. That’s really deep, Sam.”

Sam just shrugs, not really worrying about it anymore because Dean fixed him up, and it’s a scientific fact that he’s always felt better when Dean was the one patching him up, skinned knees, dislocated shoulders, or claw marks from a shadow demon.

He plays nurse with Dean when it’s his turn, cleans and bandages him up, pressing a kiss over the Band-Aid when he’s done. Dean smiles at him when he stands up, one of his hands spreading out over Sam’s bare waist.
“Sap,” he accuses, pushing in close enough to rest his cheek on Sam’s shoulder, both his arms going around Sam now, hugging him, leaning on him with almost all of his weight.

Sam wraps his arms around Dean’s neck, pulls him in all the way, their cheeks resting together, eyes closed. They don’t talk about Dad, about where he could be, but it’s there between them, aching like a loss, like the fallout of a decision they might regret for years.

“Let’s go to bed,” Sam says finally, lifting up and giving Dean a small smile when their eyes meet. They kiss just once, sweet and almost chaste before they leave the bathroom, flicking off the lights in both rooms, leaving them in darkness.

Every hair on Sam’s body stands on end when he tenses, waiting for those demons in the dark to come back, waiting for that horrific feeling of his skin being torn into by something he can’t see to fight off. He jumps when Dean’s fingers close around his wrist, tugging him toward the bed.

“You’re okay,” Dean whispers, his voice so close, so low, comforting. Sam can hear him tug the sheets back, hear the whisper of Dean’s body slipping between them. Sam follows him in, relaxing as Dean’s hands stroke over his arms while he sinks down onto the mattress, pulling the covers up over them both.

Dean’s mouth finds his own and they kiss again, slow and almost reverent, like a thank you. They pull back just enough to be able to breathe, heads resting on a shared pillow, breath warm and mingling between them. Dean’s hand slides over Sam’s back under the covers, stroking up his spine in gentle, aimless swirls, easing him down into sleep.

Dad’s gone, their family torn into pieces, but they’re here. It’s never going to be the way it was, the three of them in that car, not the way Dean wants. But he and Dean are together, the connection between them unbreakable, forged in their own blood.

He realizes, when Dean’s hand finds his own under the blankets, fingers lacing together, that this right here, the love between them, isn’t just important. It’s the most important thing, and something they will fight to keep.

And that’s more than enough.

end.

Chapter End Notes

Discussion and notes post: http://melungeoned.livejournal.com/64291.html

Works inspired by this one: Dom’s Dreams by NaughtyPastryChef

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