V I C E

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V I C E

by awabubbles

Summary

Dean Winchester works in the human trafficking unit for the Vice Control Section of the Chicago PD. While undercover, Dean meets "Baby Boi" aka Sam, an underage prostitute with a strange fascination for the macabre. Sam has cast himself as Bonnie in a real life reenactment of the infamous outlaw duo, insisting that Dean is his Clyde. When Dean finally agrees, they run off to fulfill each other's deepest, darkest fantasies. For Sam, it's a dream come true; until Dean starts to spiral out of control.

Notes

This the part where I warn you not to read this fic. It's long. It's not happy. It involves your favorite characters being frustrating and doing awful things. And in general, it's just fucked up. But if you like that kind of stuff, as I do, then please enjoy.

*major spoilers may not be tagged but will be warned in the chapters they occur.

**infinite credit goes to my beta sammyatstanford who is amazing and holds my hand and tells me everything is going to be alright and basically this fic couldn't be without them so <3
VICE: A police division, whose focus is to restrain or suppress moral crimes; a fault, defect, or shortcoming.
It’s eighty-six degrees outside. Feels like more, with this ball-busting humidity that won’t quit. Not even a breeze on days like today. It makes the nickname “Windy City” feel like a joke. Eighty-six degrees with humidity to match and the southside of Chicago looks like it’s melting, the way buildings and people can’t stand up in the heat. Not that Dean Winchester can feel it inside the Super 8 Motel with a thermostat that reads a comfortable sixty-eight degrees, and curtains that shut out the melting slums.

Yes the room is cool but Dean will be inviting the heat of Chicago inside, soon, it’s poverty and desperation. He glances at his phone. The girl he’s meeting is fifteen minutes late. On television prostitutes are dressed in tube tops and neon skirts, but the girls he meets in these hotel rooms show up in baggy t-shirts and bell bottom jeans, like girls just walking the street and not working it. They don’t look like poverty, but they carry it with them in the way their shoulders slump, carrying an invisible weight. Or in the way they curl into themselves, on the defense, beat so many times they’re anticipating the next blow. Dean could be that next blow, or he could help get them out of the life. Depends on them, really.

Dean’s job is to process the prostitutes he tricks into these motel rooms through the Cook County Sheriff’s Department. The process is surprisingly bland. Dean calls and asks for a date. If they agree to something illegal then he takes them into custody and brings them downtown. There’s a case worker that looks through their files, and a Crisis Manager that offers them help. There’s a shelter the state has set up, funded by the fines they get from arresting some of the Johns—guys that try to hook up with these working girls. If the girls choose to get out they can stay protected, they can stay safe. But most of the time they don’t. It’s frustrating, and it’s hard to blame them.

Detective Dean Winchester has seen mothers and daughters, old and young, weak and strong, addicted to drugs, addicted to sex, doing it on their own because they can, in love with a pimp, or kidnapped by them. And just when he thinks he’s numb to it all, something new jumps out and slaps him in the face, makes him raw and vulnerable again and he hates it. He hates this job because he’s never felt more useless, like trying to bail out the Titanic with an ice bucket. You save one girl from her pimp but there’s always more and more and more and they look at you like you’re the enemy because in their lives all men probably are.

The thermostat reads a comfortable sixty-eight degrees.

There’s a knock on the door, and Dean rises to greet his date. She’s wearing a jean skirt and a Cubs shirt. The self-named ‘Sugar’ is older than her pictures imply, not unusual, but the point of his taskforce is to cherry-pick the youngest ones and save the juveniles from abuse. At least tonight he knows he’s not going to be greeted by a thirteen-year-old because those are the nights he needs to drink more than usual. Sugar smiles at him with painted neon lips and he tells her to get comfortable. She doesn’t hesitate to sit on the bed, strip off her shirt. She’s not wearing a bra. Her thighs are spread. She’s not wearing much else, either.

“Hundred for an hour like we agreed, right?”

Dean takes out his wallet and removes five twenties. There’s a picture in here of his son, and his ex-wife.

“Relax, honey. I’m not going anywhere.”

Lisa says this to him at their home in Lincolnshire. The nice one with two garages and the patio he built. Their old home, before they had to move. She’s wearing a baby blue nightgown. He can see her breasts. She says she’s not going but her eyes are empty. She’s been gone a long while. She still lets him stick it in though, and Dean convinces himself that’s enough.
“Relax, honey. I’m not going anywhere,” Sugar says. Dean can see her breasts and her lips, like a neon sign flashing ‘come and get it.’ Mocking him.

Lisa was wearing pink lipstick on their first date together, and this fancy French perfume with a name he still can’t pronounce. She was beautiful. She liked his car, and his music. Dean was smitten. He still remembers the taste of her lips that night, cherry-sweet, and full of promises.

“You okay, hon?”

Dean’s pulled out of the vivid past and into the dying present. “Yes,” he says, punctuated with a fake smile. “Fine.”

But Sugar is suspicious. She thinks he might be something other than a John eager to fuck her. “Maybe I should go,” she says, reaching for her shirt.

“No.” Dean thinks quickly. He sets his wallet aside. “No. I’m sorry. I’ve been thinking of someone else. But I need this.” And he proves it by removing his shirt.

Sugar smiles, sorry for him maybe. She relaxes. She doesn’t think a cop would start to strip, to bare himself in more than just nudity. But Dean is playing a game with an end goal, and that makes it okay to insert a little honesty. Whatever it takes to get a deal.

“Alright,” Sugar says. She starts to remove her skirt as well, she’s ready to get to business. “What can I do for you?”

Dean makes as if to unbutton his pants but he’s slow about it. “Some head, to start,” he says, bland, like ordering a meal at a drive-through. “And you said you did anal?”

“Sure, but it’s an extra $50.”

Five men are listening to them in the room next to this one. They’re listening for his code word. “Good deal,” Dean says, and then four men in t-shirts and jeans enter, silver badges hanging from their necks. One of them also has a Cubs shirt. “Police,” they announce.

Sugar is shocked. She protests, but she’s naked. In shame, she turns her back to cover herself. The officers look away as she dresses, then they wrap a pair of cuffs around her wrists.

Dean’s role is over. He rescues his shirt and retreats to the adjoining room while they question Sugar—name, age, who are you working for, how long have you been doing this, hold still for a photo. This is where the officers sit and wait. A laptop is hooked up with streaming audio and video from the next room. Their Captain stands by the laptop. He acknowledges Dean with a heavy hand on his shoulder. “Good job,” he grunts.

It wasn’t a good job though. It barely passed muster. Dean is embarrassed that he faltered in front of five other men without a shirt on. He glances behind himself anxiously, but the other officers are busy with the girl. They don’t see Captain Singer’s preferential treatment but they don’t have to. Everyone knows Dean wouldn’t have this job if Bobby Singer weren’t a family friend. Dean nods, but shrugs off the Captain’s touch.

“Who’s next?” he asks. Dean set up the date with Sugar, but has nothing else lined up for the rest of the night.

"Gordon," Captain Singer replies, eyes glued to the laptop screen. Dean joins him and together they watch Gordon Walker, a lean black officer with a mean face. He looms over ‘Sugar’ (real name Candice) asking short, hostile questions. Unnecessarily hostile, Dean thinks, but he says nothing.
Everyone also knows that Gordon is a hot-head.

“Alright,” Bobby grunts, “let’s move on.” He turns away from the laptop screen, to where Gordon and Candice sit in the opposite room. “Clear this room,” he barks through the open door. “Gordon, give me updates.”

End scene. The action melts and the players clean the set, preparing for their next parts. Candice is escorted into the adjoining room and seated in the bathroom while they set up for another sting. Gordon approaches their Captain, and Dean instinctively leaves. He can feel Gordon’s eyes bore into the back of his neck as he retreats, but Dean ignores the sensation. He tries to avoid the senior officer as much as he can. Everyone knows that Gordon and Dean do not get along.

Dean joins another officer perched on the edge of a bed, filling out paperwork. Jo is fresh out of the academy, bright and energetic. She looks up at him as he approaches. She doesn’t smile at him like she smiles at the others, and without a word she picks up her files and moves to the corner of the room. She may be new, but she’s already been taught to avoid him like he has the plague. The new ones are the worst, Dean thinks, because they don’t even know why the other officers hate him so much. They just accept it, because to challenge it would mean becoming like him, the pariah of Chicago’s Vice Department; suicide for a young career.

Dean ignores the sting in his chest like he ignored Gordon’s eyes on the back of his neck. He remains on the edge of the bed which is covered in printouts. Blonde girls, brunette girls, naked or in lingerie all smile up at him. These are the ads from Backpage.com that the department has culled from the massage and escort section. Looking for offers of illegal services, the officers pick through the youngest-looking ones and try to set up a meeting. Dean grabs a handful and looks through them. Leona, who doesn’t want any black men. Anna, who calls herself a Polish cutie. Terri, who’s claiming to be a Playboy Playmate. The smiling faces blur together. A sea of sex and violence. Like bailing the Titanic out with an ice bucket.

Then he sees a boy in one of the ads and Dean stops to inspect it further. The title of the ad reads: EAGER BOTTOM BOi, LOOKING FOR HIS DADDY, READY TO PLEASE ♥♥♥♥ ;))) In the body of the ad he calls himself “baby boi,” and specifies his preference for older men. He’s white, and young. Just how young? The ad says 18, but Dean doubts it. Skinny, with shaggy hair. A boy. It’s not unheard of, but it is unusual. Their department doesn’t cruise the gay side of Backpage.com often. Boys who sell themselves are usually of age. They’re assumed to be independent and not under the control of a pimp. And after a long history of the police chasing and beating gay men, their department’s all but washed its hands of what kind of sex men choose to have with each other. But Dean can see clearly that this is a boy, and not a man.

“I found that one, just for you. Since we all know you’re having trouble with women.”

Gordon is looking down at him with beady eyes, lips stretched over a proud grin. The marrow in Dean’s very bones freeze. Since we all know .

“You couldn’t perform,” Gordon accuses. “You almost fucked up. You are a fuck up.”

Dean jumps to his feet. Everyone knows that Dean isn’t liked, but Gordon is the most vocal about it, as if the others had elected him leader to remind Dean of it. Usually Gordon’s taunts are more veiled than this, but suddenly he’s found the gall to insult Dean to his face. And Dean has just enough pride to tenously fight for what’s left.

Tension. Pulling tight. Threatening to snap. Their Captain senses it and interrupts. “Hey,” Captain Singer grunts, looking between the two of them with a critical frown. “Cut it out. Ain’t no time for dick swingin’ . We’ve got a new girl in five.”
Gordon and Dean. Eyes locked. Neither of them moves. Gordon raises his brows, silently mocking him. *Sit back down, boy,* it says, because cops don’t rat on each other, even when they’re hated.

“What’s this?” Bobby asks. He’s caught site of the printout and Dean hands it over.

“Gordon said he found this just for me.” Dean is careful to sound neutral.

Bobby cuts Gordon a suspicious frown. “I’n’t that nice of him. Let’s see now. Huh...interestin’.” Bobby scans the document and sighs. “Well, seein’ as it looks like a juvenile, an’ you got nothin’ else better to do, it might as well be your case.”

Dean opens his mouth to protest but Bobby cuts him off. “Git off your high horse son, and do your job. Boy or girl, we’re sworn to protect. And you,” Bobby turns to Gordon. “Quit bein’ a shit.”

The printout gets slapped against his chest. Gordon and Bobby walk away. By now, everyone in the room is watching. Dean has no choice but to accept his Captain’s decision, so he sits back down on the bed, his face flushed with impotent rage. He hates this department for ostracizing him. He hates Gordon for torturing him. He hates Bobby for being two-faced. But Dean hates himself most of all because he deserves it.

*I used to be somebody,* Dean reminds himself. The room feels like it’s closing in on him. He takes a deep breath. His life was so different three years ago. Married. Loved. A rising star in the Sheriff’s Department. Going places. His whole future ahead of him. But now the future isn’t a bright light, it’s a black tunnel, getting smaller and smaller until it crushes Dean into a tiny infinitesimal point. Into dust. Into ashes.

Dean struggles against the wave of despair that rises and threatens to wash him away. He recognizes the rising panic in his twisted gut. It happens a lot now, since that night. He fumbles for the pill case tucked into his pocket. Circular, metal, he pops the lid and dumps two small blue pills into his hand. He turns his back to the others and swallows them quickly, dry.

“You’re going to have episodes like these,” his therapist had told him. He was seeing two at the time. A physical therapist for his leg, and a shrink for his head. “You went through some serious trauma that night, and we don’t know what kind of long-term effect that’s going to have. Loud noises, tense situations, these could all be triggers for a panic attack. So I’m going to prescribe you some Xanax along with your pain medication. Only take it when you need it.”

It’s like swallowing rocks. But the process of swallowing calms him. Chemicals racing through his bloodstream, fixing what’s wrong. It’s a simple formula. Xanax for panic. Corticosteroids for his leg. Chemicals. Put them in the right order and they equal a functional human. Or close to it. Dean hopes someday he won’t need the chemicals, that someday he’ll be fixed. A deep breath. He hopes.

Jo is watching him. He sees her out of the corner of his eye, but when he looks up she’s turned her head. She stares fixedly at her paperwork, burrowing holes into it with her eyes. Dean turns away, closes the pill case, and tucks it back into his pocket.

Suddenly the room jumps alive. Gordon’s date has called, she’s on her way up. Gordon ducks into the other room and they close the door, preparing for her arrival. Dean stands from the bed. He gathers with the others, watching the video feed. His file with the young boy lays on the bed, forgotten.

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Dean nearly collapses in the stairwell on the climb up to his apartment on the 7th floor. The pain
catches him unawares, a sudden seizing of his leg that causes him to drop like a weight, knees slamming into concrete steps. He winces, mouthing silent cries of pain, rolling over to pull out the pill case again. White, circular; he swallows them knowing the effects will take some time to kick in. Dean bites his tongue and forces himself to climb the remaining steps from the 6th floor to the 7th. Luckily it’s late, and there’s no one around to see him struggle. Pain, he can handle; humiliation, he’s had more than enough.

Dean unlocks his apartment door and limps to the couch and collapses inhaling short, ragged breaths. His life has become managing symptoms. His body, something he was once proud of, has become a prison, something wild and unpredictable. He has no control over it anymore. His youthful pride lies at his feet, cast aside like a crumpled paper bag. The Sheriff’s Department doesn’t know the extent of his troubles. He’s hidden things from Bobby, desperate to stay on active duty. Stupid things, like sometimes he has panic attacks, and sometimes he can’t feel his leg. But only sometimes. The rest of the time he imagines he’s just like his old self, and Dean doesn’t think he should be thrown away like garbage because of the sometimes.

Dean breathes easier as the pain starts to slip away and the world comes back into focus. His fingertips brush against his laptop, sitting open on the floor from where he’d dumped it last night, next to the empty bottle of whiskey. He brushes his finger against the mousepad and wakes it from its slumber. The black screen disappears and reveals his last activity before alcohol and pain medication cradled him into sleep. His internet browser opens to a porn site, two muscular men intertwined together on white sheets. Dean snorts and shuts the laptop.

“You never told me there’d be fucking side effects!” Dean had accused. His therapist adjusted her wide-brimmed glasses and reminded him that in fact she had pointed out all of the life-threatening effects that he should report immediately. “No, not that,” Dean clarified. But suddenly he couldn’t say. His therapist had mousy hair pulled back into a bun, flat breasts and thin lips but all he saw was Lisa looking at his limp dick with those empty eyes and rolling over to go to sleep. He couldn’t say, but later, she had guessed. “We can adjust your dosage,” she said. But nothing helped. He’d read once that Hugh Hefner had to watch gay shit just to get it up. Somehow, that made sense to him. Dean couldn’t watch the regular stuff anymore either. He saw Lisa with her disappointed face, or those girls with poverty and shame. So he would try watching a couple of stiff dicks fuck each other but with no results. Even the bottom boy could get harder than him.

Bottom boy. Dean frowns. A bell rings in his head, reminding him of something. Bottom boi. Baby Boi. Ah, yes, the kid from earlier. Dean sits up and digs his work phone out from his back pocket. He had forgotten to call after Gordon’s sting. Shit. Dean groans as he swings his leg off the couch, only throbbing now, and mildly stiff. Of course he could say fuck it and pass it on to someone else, but Bobby had verbally assigned this to him, and Gordon sure as hell wasn’t going to let it drop until some twink boy in pink shorts strutted around in their rented room. Sometimes Dean thinks Bobby and Gordon are in on this together. But ultimately, he knows better. Bobby is an old family friend, and Dean put him in a hard place asking for a job. He understands that, as Captain, Bobby has to be careful not to play favorites. Gordon, on the other hand, is just a piece of shit.

Dean tests his leg, slowly applying pressure until he believes it’s steady enough to walk on. He stands, and makes his way to the fridge. Beer, bottle opener, and a sigh of relief before Dean unfolds the printout from his pocket, dialing the number listed under promises for a good time.

Ring, ring. Dean waits patiently. Ring, ring. Ring, ring. Ring, ring. Ring, ring. Dean sips at his beer. Maybe he won’t have to worry about this tonight. Ring, ring. “-Hello?”

Dean stops mid-sip. The voice greeting him is bright, high, like puberty is still a fresh memory. He can tell it’s a boy, young, like his son. “Hey,” Dean answers. The moment feels surreal, like he’s
calling the neighbor’s house and the next thing he’s going to ask is “can I speak to your parents?”

But he doesn’t. The next thing he asks is, “Is this Baby Boi?” Then, “I saw your ad online. Thought maybe we could meet. You do outcalls?”

He’s reading from a memorized script. Every call takes the same basic form: confirming time, date, and location. The girls answer quickly, and to the point. The whole thing takes less than a few minutes. But then, something interrupts Dean’s script.

“I like your voice, daddy.”

Dean hesitates. He doesn’t know what to say to that. The voice on the other end has taken an abrupt dive from innocent, to sultry.

“All rough and gravely,” the boy continues. “Gave me the shivers when you said my name.”

There’s a boy on the other end trying to flirt with him. Dean wants to laugh. Or throw the phone out the window. Instead, he has to play pretend. “Can do more than make you shiver, little boy.” Dean surprises himself with that line, makes his own gut twist.

Dean hears a whimper, then: “What do you want to do, daddy?”

Dean sets his beer down, alert. This is the part where he asks for a sex act, and then they talk about price. “How about a lollipop?” That’s code for oral, and he figures with this kid’s schtick, he’d probably know what that was.

“I like those,” the boy purrs. “Is that my reward for being good?”

Dean hesitates again. “Who says you’ve been good?” He blurts out. No. No. What the fuck is he doing?

“Ah, daddy, don’t be mean!”

There. The juvenescence comes back. Dean imagines a pout, a quivering pink lip. It’s hard to think straight. The boy on the other end is trying to pull him into some kind of game, ducking and weaving around the straight-forward exchange that Dean is used to. “You can earn the rest. You know. The rest of, um, of what I want.” That was clumsy. He’s got to be convincing. Then get the kid meet at the hotel tomorrow, where they’re planning another set of stings.

“You sound nervous daddy, something wrong?”

Don’t resist, Dean thinks. And he lets a part of himself slip into the dark, where he can grope for it later. “Nervous thinking ‘bout what I wanna do to you,” he says, and the gravel in his voice rattles his throat.

There’s a sigh on the other end, like deep satisfaction.

“But you’ve got to earn it,” Dean says. “You’ve got to be good.”

“I want to be good!” his boy says quickly.

“Good boys don’t have to say it. They show it.”

Rustling, movement on the other end. Dean listens carefully, and then his phone dings. He’s got a message.

“Is that good?” the boy asks, and Dean opens the message. It’s a photo of ruby red lips wrapped
around a lollipop. Another ding. A second photo. The same lollipop resting between a pair of pale ass cheeks, slowly being inserted, the pseudonym 'Baby Boi' scrawled in ink over the deed as a tramp stamp.

Dean emerges from a dark pool gasping for breath. A line has been crossed. The girls are never this forward. He shouldn’t be expected to go this far. He puts the phone down.

“Daddy?” The voice is quiet, expecting.

Dean shuts his eyes. The images are already burned into his retina. A red lollipop, and then Gordon’s grinning face. Dean opens his eyes. He picks up his phone again and dives back into the dark.

“Yes, that’s good.” He praises. “You should get a reward, but not tonight.” Dean hears a childish groan. “Not tonight,” he repeats firmly. “Tomorrow, at four,” And then Dean shares the address of the Super 8 Motel, and the room the Sheriff’s Department has booked.

“Okay,” his boy complies. “But daddy I don’t know if I can wait that long!”

“You’ll have to,” Dean tuts.

“Can’t I have something until then? Wasn’t I good enough?”

A slow, deep pain travels up his leg, to his back. Dean grits his teeth. “What do you want?”

Baby Boi laughs. “Wanna see your dick, daddy. Wanna see what my reward is gonna be.”

Dean blanches. His weakness, exposed. He imagines Gordon’s leering face, Lisa’s empty eyes. Repeated humiliation, and all for some silly whore. Anger, resentment. The blackness inside of him swells. “That’s not your reward,” Dean growls into the phone. “Your reward is my belt, whipped across your skin until it bleeds. Until you scream, baby boi. And you will scream. I won’t be happy until I know how much it hurts.”

Something dark in him, coming to the surface. Dean fears it’s scared off his boy. Walk away, he tells himself, walk away. But then, a softy little sigh.

“Wow. What a dream. If you mean any of that, daddy...I can’t wait to meet you.”

Just like that, the call ends. Baby Boi hangs up leaving Dean with shaking hands and a twisted knot in his stomach. The phone is still bright with the image of a pale ass and a cherry red lolly. Like a dying man in the desert Dean sticks a hand down his pants, wraps it around his limp cock. He jerks at it, desperate for something, anything to spark life into it.

But nothing. Dean recoils from himself. He's shaking again, but the medication he needs is different this time. Dean abandons the beer and goes for another whiskey bottle in a cupboard next to the fridge. He peels off the plastic and camps out on the couch for the night. Chemicals. That’ll fix what’s wrong. Whatever just happened, whatever darkness has just reared it's head, Dean turns a blind eye to.

That night, Dean dreams of his father, face twisted in anger, a belt in his hands.
Chapter 2

Same hotel, different room. Same ochre wall color, different art. It’s twenty minutes past four and there’s no sign of his boy, in the hotel or out in the parking lot (they have an officer in an unmarked car watching now). Maybe Baby Boi grew wise, maybe he turned and ran. If he doesn’t show up soon, they’ll move on to the next sting; another failure on Dean's record.

His leg is acting up today. The muscles are tense. He has difficulty walking on it without an obvious limp. Some days are better than others, but anyone who watches closely can tell there’s something off. Dean reaches down to massage the calf, his fingers absently diving into the hole, the missing muscle where the bullets went in. He recoils. Even Dean’s not used to the new ‘him’ yet. He remembers himself whole, and strong. But his body is like a cage now; every time he forgets he’s imprisoned, he runs into the bars.

Officers wear their injuries like badges of honor but not Dean. Shot in the line of duty, his injury is a curse, marking him for life. Everybody has their own version of what happened that night, but the conclusion is the same: he’s a rotten cop. Even if the Sheriff’s Department internal review found nothing, officer opinion has already crucified him. Even Bobby isn’t immune to it. Dean sees the doubt in the Captain’s face whenever he catches Dean with a stiff limp. His leg is a constant reminder of the night his life went to shit.

“Head up, chest out. Don’t let ‘em see you sweat!” That’s what his Dad would say, when Dean would complain, pulling on his training as a Vietnam war vet to kick some sense into him as a kid. Everything could be solved with discipline, that’s what his dad believed. Self-control and hard work. Everything else would fall into line. Certainly, his dad was the hardest working person Dean had ever known. Not that it stopped John’s marriage from falling apart, or his son from being a loser.

Dean winces, his leg suddenly cramping. He digs his fingers into the pain and massages. *It’s true, you’re a loser,* Dean thinks, berating himself. It stings, but at the same time, he gets a tiny thrill of pleasure admitting it to himself. Because it’s true. Of all the lies people whisper about him behind his back, this one is true. His dad was a hero, and his son is a total loser. Even his dad knew that. Especially his dad.

Suddenly, there’s a knock at the door. Quiet, rapt. Dean glances to the adjoining room where their team lies in wait. He thinks back to last night, a fuzzy, dark smear on his memory. He gets the distinct feeling that he’s done something wrong, and that the officers in the other room know. His heart starts to beat quickly, sure that this isn’t a sting for a teenager anymore: it’s for him. A trap to expose him for what he is: sick, and twisted, and permanently broken. It paralyzes him with fear. Another pair of knocks, more urgent this time, coupled with his phone vibrating from a pair of texts, rushes urgency back into his brain. No time for fear now, there’s a job to do. *Head up, chest out. Don’t let ‘em see you sweat!* So Dean stands and answers the door.

As he expects, it’s his date.
Baby Boi is young. Shockingly young. Round-faced, and skinny. Tall, but not quite adult-sized, and with thin, bony legs, like a newborn foal. His eyes exude a desperate intelligence as they beam up at Dean. His lower lip quivers in a tense smile. *Ben, Dean thinks, he can’t be any older than Ben,* whose sixteenth birthday is approaching fast. Dean sees an innocence in the boy’s expression, in his wide hazel eyes and the softness of his face, betrayed only by the cut-off t-shirt tucked into dangerously short cut-off shorts that barely hide what he was trying to advertise online.

His target stares past long dark bangs to drink Dean in. His perceived innocence dissolves into an approving leer. “Hey there, daddy,” the boy says, tossing his head and batting his lashes.

Dean recognizes the voice, soft and sultry, but with a painfully childish lilt. Last night comes back to him in a rush. Dean’s words, his actions; alien to himself. He was playing pretend last night to draw this mayfly in. But now Dean can’t play the boy’s game (cat-and-mouse, father-and-son, whatever this is) because there are five other officers watching, listening to him at all times. And still, he has to close the trap.

“You’re late,” Dean reprimands, stepping back to let Baby Boi in.

“I know,” he says cheerily, brushing past Dean. “I was just getting ready for you.”

Skin-to-skin contact. Dean’s nostrils flare. He catches a whiff of something that leaves stunned. A familiar perfume, the name always on the tip of his tongue, the woman always on his thoughts. He turns sharply to the boy standing in the middle of the room, eyes wide. For a moment, Dean questions whether it’s really a boy he sees, or a demon that’s been sicked on him from the depths of hell.

“Don’t be shy, daddy,” the boy says, soft and sugary-sweet. Baby Boi sheds a denim backpack onto the bed and approaches him. Dean knows he has to move, has to take control of the situation. But he’s frozen to the spot, convinced that at any moment the sickly sweet smell of French perfume will turn to sulfur.

Baby Boi reaches out to touch him. Finally, Dean reacts, striking and grabbing the boy’s wrist, holding it tight. The boy is scared, at first, but then grins up at him slyly. To him, they’re still playing a game.

Dean releases him and moves across the room quickly. His leg seizes and Dean is forced to sit on the bed, gritting his teeth. It’s not clear he’s in pain, but Dean’s head is spinning. He knows he’s being watched by the other officers. He knows this doesn’t look good. He knows he hasn’t established a verbal exchange. He knows everyone is waiting.

“Do you want to hurt me, daddy?” the boy asks quietly.

It makes Dean’s skin crawl. He’s still playing a game, and Dean’s not. He wants to scream *why would you do this to yourself? Why would you debase yourself in front of a grown-ass man?* But instead, he says: “I just...need to be clear, about what I’m getting. About what you’re getting too.”

Dean takes a deep breath. His head feels clear, now that he’s away from that scent. “I brought $300. We agreed to a lollipop, but...what else can I get?”

The boy stares at him like he’s grown a third head. Then he scoffs, and rolls his eyes. “You think I’m here for *that*?” he asks, snorting like a spoiled little girl. “Save your money, daddy. I’m here because I like you, and because I think you’re gonna like *me.* See, we could make this a long-term thing, and then you could have me whenever you wanted.”

Pain in his leg, and then suddenly, a boy in his lap. The next thing Dean knows Baby Boi is
crawling on him, straddling his legs, and draping arms over his shoulders. Dean can smell the perfume again. It numbs his body, though his mind explodes into panic.

“So try me on for size,” his boy whispers. “And see if I fit.”

There’s a siren going off in his head. Dean can’t make a deal if there’s no price, and he can’t keep pretending he wants to fuck a teenage boy. This kid has been ten times more sexually aggressive than any hooker Dean’s lured, but still, he’s reluctant to call off the sting. Despite what he told himself earlier, he doesn’t want to be the loser.

Luckily, his Captain makes the call for him. The adjoining room suddenly bursts open and four men with silver badges around their necks announce “Police!” They rip the boy off of him, and Dean gasps for air, like he’s been drowning.

At first his target doesn’t realize what’s going on. He doesn’t think Dean is a part of the sting. “Let us go!” the boy growls, his thin arms and legs useless against the older officers. “We’re not doing anything illegal. You fucking pigs can’t do this to us anymore! This isn’t the eighties, goddamnit!”

His shorts ride up so high they’re practically underwear but the promise of sex is nowhere to be found in his writhing body, his gritted teeth, only hate and defiance.

Captain Singer emerges from the adjoining room and pulls Dean to his feet. “Are you okay?” he asks, barely audible. Dean nods dumbly, grateful for the concern on Bobby’s face, instead of the anger he was expecting.

When the boy sees their Captain squeeze Dean’s arm and realizes there is no ‘we,’ their target breathes a tiny gasp of betrayal. Then Baby Boi turns into a goddamn animal. “Get off me! Don’t touch me!” he shrieks at the top of his lungs. He tries to pull away from the officers, cursing, kicking, even biting. His shouts devolve into unintelligible screams, writhing between Gordon and the two other male officers who quickly escalate from defense to offense. Gordon kicks him, another punches, pushing their target’s head down onto the bed to suffocate his screams. They forcefully pull his arms back and lock a pair of metal cuffs around the boys wrists. Once the handcuffs go on, the fight goes out of him, but not the cops. They continue to kick and punch, punishing the boy with his pink lips and cut-off shorts for more than just screaming.

“Enough,” Bobby says, and eventually, the kicking stops. Captain Singer talks over the boy’s moans. “Lock him up in the bathroom and clean this up,” he says, waving at the mess of a bed, some blood on the carpet. “We got a John comin’. Jo’s up next an’ I want all hands on deck in case he tries anything funny.

Jo, who has stayed back from the boy’s arrest, lets down her hair. She’s wearing a denim skirt and a tight halter. She looks strange with the extra makeup, but she stares at all of them defiantly. She refuses to be humiliated by her role, which all women in this department end up playing, and that’s a lot more than Dean can say after a teenage boy just crawled into his lap.

Gordon picks up Dean’s target by pulling at the back of his shirt, and forcing the boy to his feet. He doesn’t resist as they drag him into the adjoining room, and from there, the bathroom. Dean follows, feeling responsible for the case, and the kid. He lingers in the doorway, behind the two other officers as Gordon pushes the boy down onto the toilet.

“You’re gonna be quiet now,” Gordon warns. “We got one of ours in the next room there, puttin’ herself in harm’s way, and we don’t need a little shit like you making it worse. You got that?”

The boy sits on the toilet and stares at the tiled floor in stony silence.
“I’ll stay,” Dean volunteers. “He’ll be quiet.”

Gordon and the two officers turn to look at him. They nod and file past him to join their Captain preparing for the next sting. Only Gordon remains, hovering over Dean in the doorway, lowering his voice.

“Don’t think I didn’t see what happened in there. I know a faggot-lover when I see one.” Gordon sneers.

Dean’s jaw clenches tightly at the insult, but he lets Gordon pass.

As the Vice Department prepares for their next sting, Dean slips inside the bathroom, shuts the door, and locks it. Arms crossed, leaning against the bathroom sink, Dean is a silent guardian, ignoring the boy on the toilet. He fully intends to spend the next twenty minutes like this, in complete silence, until he sees movement in the corner of his eye, hears handcuffs jostling.

“Hey,” Dean warns, thinking he’s trying to escape. But the boy doesn’t acknowledge him, hands slipping into the back of his shorts. Dean watches with sick fascination as something fat and black is pulled out of him and then dropped onto the floor. It bounces, rolls, and stops at the foot of the shower, next to the toilet. It’s a butt plug.

“Sort of hard to keep that in while someone’s punching you in the face,” he says.

Dean turns his head. He feels guilty, though he tells himself not to. The boy shouldn’t have screamed.

“You know...you really had me going there,” his boy continues. “I didn’t think cops knew how to turn me on so bad. I mean, the way you talked, I was so ready to get fucked into that mattress. Or worse.” Finally, he looks up at Dean. He’s grinning, but it’s more like a grimace with blood on his teeth. “Offer’s still open, of course. I can’t even fight you off.” He pulls at his handcuffs to illustrate.

Dean scowls. The offer, even as a joke, repulses him. “I called you because we found you offering sex for pay on Backpage. Which is illegal. And because you’re a kid. Which is twice as bad.”

“I’m eighteen,” the boy defends.

“Bullshit,” Dean scoffs. “You look the same age as my son. You might even be younger.”

“Yeah? Well then I guess I’m just pretty for my age,” the boy sneers. The cold light of the bathroom turns his skin a purple hue, the drying blood under his nose a burgundy red. This is a different boy from the one Dean opened the motel door to. This is the real Baby Boi, a street name for a street urchin. His fear of a demon is laughable now. This is just a little boy, and an annoying one at that.

“But you don’t deny that you were offering sex for cash?” Dean presses.

He’s laughed at. “We never even talked about money,” the boy reminds him. “I was gonna ride you for free.”

Dean shakes his head and chooses to ignore that. “But you do have sex for money,” he insists. “You’ve done it before.”

“Plenty.”

“So what’s different this time?”
Handcuffed and bloodied, the boy still manages to give him a sultry look. “I’m in the market for a new sugar daddy,” he says, pursing his lips and batting his lashes.

It’s an act. Dean sees through it now. In the tiny bathroom he can still smell the perfume, but it holds no power over him now. “What’s wrong with the old sugar daddy?”

“I don’t have one, that’s what’s wrong,” the boy says with a dramatic sigh. “I suck dick for extra cash now and again, but there’s nothing better than catching a big fish and fucking it dry. It’s not illegal to be someone’s boyfriend, after all.”

It is illegal if you’re underage,” Dean reminds. He’s never met a male gold digger before but he’s very familiar with this kind of whore. Baby Boi thinks he’s smart, clever. Smarter, certainly, then everybody in their department. He can already see lecturing him on the dangers of prostitution would be a waste of time. Baby Boi thinks he’s above that, thinks he’s found the key to making a quick buck and he’s going to milk the system for all it’s worth, looking down and laughing at all the people he’s conned along the way. Dean realizes he no longer has any pity for the ward in his care. He looks at the bruise forming, even now, on the side of the boy’s face and thinks he deserved to have some sense knocked into him.

“What’s your name?” Dean finally asks. “Your real name.”

The boy glares at him, and says nothing.

“I’m Dean Winchester,” he offers.

Another stretch of stubborn silence, and then, he finally admits: “Sam.”

Dean nods, it might be a fake name for all he knows, but he’ll accept it. “Alright, Sam, let me tell you how this is going to go. Once we pull in the John from the next room, we’re all going to take a ride downtown together. You’ll do a formal interview with one of us. We’re gonna ask you about your history, and whether you’re working for anyone. Then you’re going to speak with our Crisis Management Counselor. She’s going to give you some options, whether you want shelter for tonight, or if you want to go home. Then, the rest of your night depends on what you choose.”

Sam takes this in and thinks about it for a moment. “So...am I under arrest?”

“You’re in our custody until the end of the night. But no, this won’t go on your record. You’re a juvenile, we want to help.” At least that’s what he’s supposed to say. Dean guesses the rest of his department will feel as calloused as he does towards Sam. They deal with abused, disadvantaged girls all day. It’s not likely they’ll muster any pity for a cocky little boy.

“I’m eighteen,” Sam insists again, lamely.

“Whatever.” Dean is done with this boy prostitute for now. He listens to what’s going on outside. When there’s a knock, Dean unlocks and opens the door. It’s Bobby. He tells them they’re packing up for the night, and to escort Sam to a car. Dean says “Yes sir” and motions for Sam to stand. As he begins to lead Sam out of the room, Dean spots the black plug still lying on the floor.

“You uh, want to bring that with?” he asks.

“Keep it,” Sam says. “And think of me the next time someone tells you to go fuck yourself.”

Dean grabs him roughly and hauls him out of the room while Sam laughs. He brings Sam outside, to a waiting squad car where he tucks Sam into the backseat. Dean’s about to climb into the driver’s side himself when Gordon suddenly appears, hovering over him like a dark cloud.
“Did you get what you wanted?” Gordon accuses, grinning at him like they both have a dirty secret.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” He’s never in the mood for Gordon’s crap, especially now. He tries to open the door to his car but Gordon slams it shut. Dean stares at him with wide eyes. They both know Gordon is crossing a line right now, and that it could be disastrous for them both.

“Why don’t you just admit it,” Gordon hisses, low and hot standing in front of the patrol car. “You can barely close the deal with the girls and you all but let that little boy start to fuck you. You’re a faggot, Dean. Worse, you’re a child-loving faggot. That’s why your woman left you, cause one day she found you looking at your boy like—”

Dean shoves Gordon away from him violently. A shove, not a punch, that’s him exerting some self-control right now. “Fuck you!” Dean growls. He meant it to be a quiet threat, but his rage makes him shake, makes him shout. “Say what you want about me Gordon, but do not ever bring my wife, or my son—”

“You’re ex-wife,” Gordon corrects with a leer. By now the parking lot is frozen. All eyes are on them. “I showed her what a real man is like and she couldn’t get off this.”

Gordon grabs his crotch and Dean snaps in two. He throws himself at the senior officer with an ugly cry. All he sees is red.
Dean stares at the ceiling of Captain Singer’s office, balancing a baggie of ice on his face. His knuckles are raw, his face is numb, and he might have to see a doctor about his nose, but at least Gordon looks just as bad. Dean smiles to himself at the thought, until the door swings open and Captain Singer enters. Then Dean pulls the ice off his face and sits up straight, trying to look serious, or at least like he regrets something.

Bobby sits down at his desk and sighs, wistful and protracted. He doesn’t look at Dean right away. Instead, he swivels in his chair to stare at a poster on the wall, an illustration of the Vietnam War Memorial with a man leaning on the black stone wall and the reflection of the soldiers who died in duty reaching out to touch him. Dean looks at the poster as well and his heart turns into the same hard, black obsidian, because he knows where this is going.

“I served with your father, you know. Good man. Proud man,” Bobby says. “The sort of man every boy wants to be one day.”

Dean nods numbly.

“Course he weren’t always like that. Was a scrappy little thing at first,” Bobby says with a misty-eyed smile. “But while the rest of us left something of ourselves behind in that damn jungle, your daddy found somethin’. Don’t know what to call it exactly, an iron will, an iron gut. But he got somethin’ that made him stronger, better. There’s not many good stories to come out of that war, but he was one of ‘em.” Bobby swivels his chair to finally look at Dean. “And he had to go through hell to get it boy. Hell. You hear me?”

Dean keeps nodding like one of those bobble-headed dolls. Just as empty as one too.

Bobby sighs again, like Dean’s still missing the point. “After what happened, Dean, and you came to me, asking for help. I saw your daddy again, the way he was, before the jungle.”

Dean swallows tight. “You know I’m grateful, sir,” he says, dragged over hot coals.

Bobby waves his thanks away. “What you’re doin’ now, Dean, is goin’ through hell. You mighta thought that night was hell. Or the recovery. Or Lisa-”

Dean winces

“-but no, this, right here, this is your war son. And you’ve got to fight like hell if you want keep this. But not with the goddamn people in your own department!”

Dean flexes his hand, the skin over his knuckles is red and aching. If Bobby is expecting him to say something, he doesn’t.

“Now I know Gordon’s an ass. And I know he’s taken it on himself to try and punish you for what happened when you were in the Narcotics Department, but you knew that’s what you were up
against when you asked to come back to Cook County.”

Bobby gives him another opportunity to speak and Dean decides to take it this time, mustering up what’s left of his courage. “It’s just...it’s not fair,” he manages to squeak. Immediately, regrets it.

“Fair?” Bobby challenges. “The draft wasn’t fair, boy. Watchin’ your friends get blown to pieces in front of you isn’t fair. Life isn’t fair. To nobody. So what makes you think you’re so damn special?”

Dean continues to stare at his hands and says nothing. There’s no point in arguing, Bobby is right to call him out. After all, Dean has no one to blame but himself.

Bobby pinches the bridge of his nose with another long sigh. When he speaks again, it’s clear he’s trying to be gentle. “I believe in you, son. I wouldn’t have brought you on board if I didn’t. But you’re fighting an uphill battle here and you don’t have any other choice but to be squeaky clean. Whatever Gordon said - and I don’t want to know - you smile and you turn the other cheek.”

Dean bites his tongue, swallowing a violent response. How is turning the other cheek fighting back?

Bobby folds his hands on his desk and leans towards him. “War analogies aside. You work hard, Dean, you keep your head down, and you do as you’re told - every report you file has to have all the t’s crossed and all the i’s dotted. If you need permission for anythin’ you get it from me, twice. You do that, boy, and you prove them wrong. You do that and you give me something to work with.”

Bobby stares at him hard, like he’s laser-printing his message straight into Dean’s skull. Then he leans back into his chair again, weary from the effort.

“I’m not gonna write up this misconduct of yours today, either of you,” Bobby concludes and Dean nearly collapses from relief. But Bobby holds up his hand, before Dean gets too excited. “Something like this will look bad for you if it happens again, though. You might have thought the higher-ups were done with you after that internal review found nothin’, but you got a permanent black mark on your record, Dean. A scarlet letter on your frontside, and a target on your backside. You’re balancin’ on a tightrope and you got nowhere to go but down-”

Thanks Bobby, I got it, Dean thinks.

“So. Take some time to think about what I said, huh? Don’t bother comin’ in tomorrow, I’m givin’ you a long weekend. Three weekends, in fact. You’re on leave till next month.”

Dean’s sigh of relief turns into a groan. Bobby’s pretending to give him a pass, but he’s not, not really. A month of leave looks bad to everyone else in the department, confirming Dean’s delinquency not dispelling it. But Captain Singer’s made his decision, and he’s not interested in Dean’s opinion.

“Your boy’s birthday is coming up isn’t it?” Bobby asks.

Despite the circumstances, Dean smiles at the thought of his son. “Yes sir, his birthday is in two weeks, so we’re celebrating it early when he comes to visit.”

Bobby smiles fondly. He doesn’t have any children of his own, so he takes a particular interest in hearing about Ben. “Well now maybe you can celebrate both,” Bobby concludes. “You tell the kiddo happy birthday for me, won’t you?”

That’s his Captain’s way of saying they’re done here, so Dean nods. “I will,” he promises.

Bobby waves him away and Dean stands to leave. Before he goes, Dean spots the poster on the wall
again and lingers. The soldiers in the illustration are all his father. Duty and guilt mix in Dean like toxic cocktail. He wants to apologize to Bobby for being a pain-in-the-ass. He wants Bobby to know how grateful he is to him, not just for a second chance but also as a mentor and an enduring reminder of his father. And he wants to promise the man that he’ll do better, be better. But Dean also knows all those promises are empty. Because they’ve had this conversation before, more than once. And every time Dean resolves to be better than he has been, and every time he fails.

The truth is, Dean doesn’t think he’s going to be here long. Like the situation with Lisa he firmly believes that it’s only a matter of time before redeems himself and wins back his old job, his wife, and his son. Things have never been bleaker for him, not since his father died, but at the same time Dean has never been so blindly optimistic. Dean knows Bobby is right, that he ought to keep his head down and stay invisible, but there’s no point. Dean plans to improve himself, sure, but not in the way Bobby thinks. So there’s no point in promising that he’ll change. Dean has no intention of rolling over and playing dead.

I won’t miss this department, Dean thinks before turning in his badge, exiting his Captain’s office, picking up his leather jacket, and leaving the station. Dean always wears John’s leather jacket when he’s off duty, keeping his father’s things close, hoping that one day a part of the man everybody admired might rub off.

John came back from the war a decorated veteran, widely respected. He trained in the police academy and immediately joined the Narcotics Division. He rose to Captain and then Lieutenant in 10 years and he alone was responsible for some of the biggest drug busts that helped clean up this city. On his off time he built their family home from scratch, volunteered at the local soup kitchen, and still had time to make every one of Dean’s wrestling tournaments. He was the pure definition of hero. So it was no surprise to Dean that when John was shot down in the line of duty, hundreds upon hundreds of people came to the funeral. A long line of men in either their service or police uniforms put their hands on Dean’s shoulder and said how good John was, how brave, and strong. They said he was the thing that his father was most proud of, and they all knew he was destined for great things.

His mother was even there, in the same faded paisley dresses he remembered as a kid. That morning after the funeral she had told Dean that he was just like his father. Dean couldn’t tell if she was proud or disappointed. She said it with empty eyes and a mile-long stare. “You’re just like your father,” she said, and drinking her orange juice, she grimaced.

She was wrong, though. Dean knew he was nothing like his father. He had tried to be, copied the way his father talked, what he listened to, what he wore. But like Bobby said, John Winchester had gone through hell and come back a better man. But there was something missing in Dean, an essential compound that, when exposed to heat, simply went up in flames. Dean had gone through the fire, only to get burnt. He was not like his father and Dean was equal parts glad and disappointed.

It’s late, Dean is tired and his leg is stiff. It takes effort to walk which exaggerates his gait. He feels like a penguin wobbling across ice, or like a cripple dragging a club foot. As he approaches his car—midsized sedan, good family car, bought it after Ben was born, one of the few things he kept in the divorce—Dean notices someone loitering by it and stops. He can tell by the silhouette that they’re smoking. Then recognizes the boy they took into custody earlier. Dean stares at his tight shirt and cut-off jeans. Sam proudly advertises his sexuality, his youth, his lithe body, strong and unmarked. Everything about Sam mocks him.

“What are you doing?” Dean finally asks, walking to his car, careful to disguise his limp.

Sam jumps at the sound of his voice and, recognizing him, suddenly tries to stamp out the cigarette
that was between his lips. “Nothing,” he says, voice jumping like his body. “Just minding my own business.”

A warning, like Dean should do the same. But Dean ignores it. “Why are you hanging around my car?”

Sam looks between the cop and his sedan. “What this boring thing? I didn’t even notice,” he says, and then smiles slyly. “You’re a real baby daddy aren’t you? I bet you drop the kids off at soccer practice and everything.”

Hooded eyes, parted lips—but still a bruise on the side of his face. Sam is trying to be appealing, because he wants something. But Dean has no intention of finding out what that something is. “Uh-huh, okay,” Dean dismisses, retreating to the driver’s side.

Sure enough Sam asks anyway: “Hey, uh, you mind giving me a ride?”

Dean scrambles to unlock the door, his fingers suddenly stiff and clumsy. All he wants to do is go home and drink away the memories of today’s mistakes, and Sam is one of those mistakes. “Yeah I do mind.”

Finally the car unlocks and he gets inside. Dean is about to slam the door when Sam wedges himself in between it and the rest of the car. Sam looks down at him through long bangs and with a smile that says it’s used to getting what it wants. “Please?” he asks, batting his lashes.

“No,” Dean huffs. “Get out of here. Call your parents, or legal guardians, or whatever. You’re not my responsibility.”

That wipes the smile and the sweetness off the boy’s face. “C’mon,” he insists roughly. “You owe me. I’m only out here because of you!”

Dean has no patience for this. He pushes the kid out of the way and closes the door, locks it. But Sam doesn’t take to that too kindly, pounding on his windows, trying to beg. “Please? You’re a police officer and I need your help! Dean? Dean!”

Dean starts the engine to drown out his voice.

When Sam realizes Dean isn’t going to do what he wants, his mood shifts gears, like Dean’s car. Sam snaps, shrieking at him. His flat palms turn into little fists. “Fuck you, you pig! I’m gonna die out here and they’re gonna charge you with fucking homicide! How’d you like that on your conscience, you prick! A dead fifteen-year-old. Fucking pig!”

Dean’s hand lingers on the stick. Sam never confirmed his age, and it’s cheap of him to bring it up now, but despite what he’d just said, and despite Sam’s tantrums, Dean does feel responsible for seeing the kid off safely.

Sam’s hands are still pressed against his window (which will leave prints and Dean should ditch him just for that). He’s looking in at Dean desperately, trying to guess if the cop is going to give in or not. “I’m sorry for earlier, you know,” he says softly, his moods switching again wildly. “The stuff that I said before, I was just scared. I’ve never been arrested before. I promise I learned my lesson.”

Dean sighs. Sam is a liar, saccharine sweet when he wants something and belligerent when he doesn’t get it. It’s distasteful when he sees this behavior in the younger girls, but in a boy he finds it outright disgusting. Dean closes his eyes though, and reminds himself that Sam is still a kid. He still deserves his sympathy, however hard that is to manage.
When Sam hears the *click click* of unlocking doors he runs to the passenger side with a jubilant laugh. He slides inside and pulls the seat belt across his chest with a grin. “Thanks!” Sam says, eyes twinkling like he just won something. “Highland Park, please. You’ve got to merge onto I-90 north and then—”

“Yeah I know how to get there,” Dean interrupts. He stares out the window, silently unfolding a map of Chicago in his head. He concludes that Sam’s directions are correct, so he shifts the sedan into gear and pulls out of the lot.

They loop around the department before merging onto the freeway. It’s late and there are wide empty stretches between cars. Dean likes the city when it’s like this, when it’s quiet and slumbering. He likes driving on the highway at night. The simple act of driving makes him feel like he has a purpose. He hopes it’s going to be a quiet ride, but Sam is fidgeting with the tiny backpack in his lap (covered in David Bowie and rainbow patches, he notes) like he wants to say something. Dean reaches towards the radio as a deterrent, but too late.

“So you must really hate that black guy, huh?” Sam blurts out. “I’ve never seen two cops try to beat the shit out of each other like that. Kinda funny. *Kinda hot.*”

Dean sighs and pulls his hand away from the radio. “His name is Gordon, and what you saw was just,” Dean hesitates, “...an interdepartmental feud,” he jokes.

Sam laughs. It relieves some tension for Dean, about the fight, and about the kid in his car.

I-94 curves north. Dean looks for signs to merge onto I-90.

“He called you a faggot,” Sam says. Dean can feel the boy’s eyes grazing him, fingernails clawing at his skin, trying to get underneath. “Are you?”

“No!” Dean says a little too loudly, clears his throat. “No,” he repeats. “Not that it would be bad if I was. But I’m not.”

Sam sneers. “Too bad that asshole didn’t feel the same. He loves fags so much he kissed me with his fist.” He presses a hand against his reddened skin so Dean can see the bruises starting to form. Dean feels a similar bruise painted over his own cheek.

“You were resisting arrest,” Dean says blandly. It’s not an excuse though, and he knows it.

Sam knows it too. He shakes his head violently at Dean’s answer, and then lashes out, angrily slamming his foot against the dashboard.

“Hey!” Dean growls. He should have known Sam couldn’t behave. It was a stupid idea to invite a wild horse into his car.

There’s no more anger though, Sam suddenly goes limp, curling those mile-long legs against his chest, cutting him in half. “They didn’t even know what to do with me during that stupid interview,” Sam says, his voice waverling with emotion. “The shelter they have is for girls and they like, acted as if putting me in there was gonna traumatize them. Like just cause I have a dick I want to stick it into something. So instead they wanted to put me in this boy’s shelter but I’ve already been to a boarding school, and I’m never going back to something like that. I told them their Crisis Counselor or whatever to go fuck themselves” Sam growls. “I’d rather take my chances out on the street!”

Dean is silent as they merge onto I-90.

“I asked for you,” Sam finally says, peeking up at Dean over his folded legs. “They said you weren’t
“Why would you ask for me?”

Sam shrugs. “The lady cop kept looking at me like she was sorry for me but also like I was a dog that needed to be put down. So it was either you or Gorgon.”

Dean doesn’t know if the mistake is intentional or not but he smiles anyways. “Well, I was there,” he explains. “But I was being um, reprimanded. For fighting the Gorgon.”

“Oh!” Sam purrs scandalously. “Did you get fired?”

“No. Well, not yet, anyways. Right now I’m on an extended vacation.”

“That’s stupid,” Sam dismisses, twirling his hair through long bony fingers. “But I guess that means you’ll be forced to spend time with your amazing, super-happy family then?”

Dean scoffs. Suddenly Sam’s eyes are glued to him like a shark smelling blood.

“My son lives with his mother,” Dean explains. “Who...doesn’t live with me. Anymore.”

“Separated?” Sam fishes.

“Divorced.”

“Bitch,” Sam decides. “She’s gotta be a dumb bitch to let someone as hot as you walk out the door.”

Dean smirks. Sam’s reasoning is childish, and selfishly, he enjoys it. “Unfortunately it’s not as simple as that,” he concludes.

“If I was with you I’d never let you go,” Sam boasts. “I’d blow you every morning before you left for work and then again when you got home. You're dick would be, like, tired out but happy.”

Dean rolls his eyes. Ten more miles to Highland Park. “If only I was a pedophile,” he says dryly.

“Maybe you should try it!” Sam suggests cheerily. “You wouldn’t be the first closet fag I’ve fucked with a kid, an ex-wife, and a limp dick.”

Dean’s knuckles go white against the wheel. He turns to Sam sharply, who’s watching him with a tiny smile. “I made that last one up,” he says quietly.

Dean snaps. “I’m not gay. And I don’t want to touch you. You got arrested for prostitution Sam, don’t be proud of that. It’s disgusting, letting those men touch you like that. And you give it up, for what a couple of bucks? Men who would pay to fuck a boy, a kid? It’s sick. Pathetic. Don’t you feel bad? Don’t you think that makes you disgusting too?”

Dean knows it’s not fair, what he’s saying. In fact it’s cruel. He’s been on this beat long enough to know prostitutes are often forced into this life, by pimps or hard circumstances. He knows enough to know that blaming them is missing the point. But still, he does it anyway, bristling defensively from something a little boy said.

“You might be the same age as my son but if he turned out anything like you I’d be sick,” Dean concludes. He expects Sam to scream and to shout, kicking at his dashboard like he did before. It would be the perfect excuse to dump him on the side of the road. Dean had tried to do the right thing but Sam was too violent, too unpredictable. And besides, only five miles to Highland Park, Sam could walk that if he had to.
But Sam says nothing. He stares out the window blankly during Dean’s diatribe, and remains silent for the last five miles. The silence makes Dean regret his outburst. *I’m sorry*, he thinks, *I didn’t mean that.* But he never says it, and remains silent as they take the final exit to Highland Park.

“Now where?” Dean asks.

But Sam’s not looking around like he cares, or even knows he’s where he asked Dean to be. He’s still staring blankly out the window, and Dean is afraid that maybe he will have to say something after all, until finally Sam speaks.

“My dad was a mechanic from Lawrence, Kansas,” he says. "His father was a mechanic, and his father before him. He would always tell me that it was in his blood, to be a mechanic, and there’s no use fighting against nature. That is, until he realized I was a faggot."

Dean winces. By now, he realizes Sam’s not going to give him directions, so they glide down Highland Park’s main avenue while Sam continues, quiet, but insistent.

“He thought he could whip it out of me, you know. But when that didn't work he sent me to this military school. And when *that* didn't work he finally had to accept he had a queer for a son. Which he didn't. So I ran away. But he'd still agree with me now. Faggots like to get fucked, so that’s what I deserve.”

Dean opens his mouth, to say that’s not true, but Sam cuts him off.

“I've got dreams though, you know,” he says wistfully. “Of getting out. “I dream about meeting someone who will take me away from all of this. I dream that he’ll have a car, an old car, and we’ll drive around the country together, just the two of us. We’ll stop at every motel on our route to fuck until there’s a little piece of ourselves staining the walls in every town, and every state. He’ll buy me knick-knacks at stupid gift shops and he’ll win me stuffed animals at fairs. We’ll go to drive-in movies but neither of us will remember what it’s about because I’m too busy gagging on his dick the whole time. He'll tell me he loves me so much I’ll tell him to stop, but I don’t really want him to stop, I don’t ever want him to stop.”

The night sky overhead is a grey void. Even in Highland Park the lights obscure the stars, but Sam is dreaming of the Starry Night painted overhead in fantastic blues and yellows.

“But of course I know I don’t deserve it,” he concludes. “But I still dream. In case you thought those men had fucked everything out of me. In case you think I’m garbage. That’s still left. Oh, and my tight, *cute little asshole*. That’s still here too!”

Dean is silent as they drive down Half Day Road. Somehow, Sam always turns him into the fool.

“Here,” Sam says. “You can stop here.”

Dean hits the brakes in front of the Northmoor Country Club, a private golf club. It's late. There's no one around.

“Sam,” Dean begins, but the boy cuts him off.

“Thanks for the ride,” he says brightly. “I hope you enjoy the rest of your miserable, fucking life!”

The car door slams. Dean watches Sam disappear across a putting green.
Chapter 4

Dean sits across from his son at a family restaurant uptown. It’s the kind of restaurant that has wood paneling on the floors and on the walls, vinyl-covered booths, and waitresses with hundreds of buttons tacked onto their vests with sayings like ‘FUN is my middle name’ and ‘I’m Punny!’. Dean skims over the beer specials but he doesn’t drink on these weekends. Instead he orders two of every appetizer even though Ben protests. There’s an element of guilt to it. Like an apology, too late and too little.

Dean knows first hand how hard it is on a kid to have two homes. One week at his mother’s, one week at his father’s, and two versions of every holiday. His friends thought two holidays sounded great, but they didn’t have to live through the chaos of being paraded around, stretched thin between your parents like a rubber band that’s about to snap. It’s only a little easier on Ben, Dean thinks, because he sees Dean every other weekend, and just for a few days. Of course that’s awful for Dean, but he bears it. One day he’ll have his family back, but until then he refuses to be bitter in front of Ben, like his father, or withdrawn and depressed, like his mother. Dean smiles and pretends everything is fine, for his son. He didn’t just get into a fight with another officer. He’s not on paid leave. Everything is finefinefine.

“So how’s school?” Dean asks, laying his fork down on an empty plate. The food here is good, not great, but it’s still meant to be a treat for his son. Ben complained once about Lisa never taking him out anymore (not even a surprise trip to McDonalds), so Dean takes the both of them out as much as he can afford.

"Good,” Ben says lightly. He’s concentrating on cutting through the last of his chicken. His hair is in his eyes, shaggy. There’s a trend with kids his age to have shaggy hair in their faces. It drives Dean mad. His father was always strict about his hair length: military-grade short. But Dean resists the urge to remark. When it comes to Ben, Dean resists doing anything that reminds him of his father.

"Still in track?” Dean asks.

"Yup."

"Still in band?"

"Yup."

"Surprised you have time for your old man,” he jokes.

Ben snorts, and laughs. Dean smiles.

"And your mother's okay?"

"Yeah, she's okay."

Dean studies his son’s face, hungry for more information. Is she happy? Is she sad? Does she miss him, or even talk about him? But Dean bites his tongue. He doesn’t want to interrogate his son or ask him to pick sides. Dean still remembers the way his father would make Dean break down his time with his mother (“and then what?”, “what time was that?”) like he was the criminal. Dean would have to lie for his mother, to make things seem better than they were. He couldn’t say that she sat around and cried most of the time, so he would invent things that they did, boring things like grocery shopping or other chores, and slip in just enough “ums” and “I dunno’s” so that John wouldn’t be suspicious. Dean doesn’t want his interaction with Ben to be anything like that, so he limits himself
to less than three questions about Lisa every visit. Today, however, he switches to happier subjects. "Your birthday’s next weekend," Dean reminds. "I hear your mother has a big party planned."

Ben grins, finally interested in his dad’s choice of topic. "Yeah, she’s gonna take some of us to this paintball place uptown. Should be cool. I mean, I’ve only been dropping hints about it for like, ever."

Ben says with a casual shrug, trying to hide his obvious enthusiasm.

Dean smiles sadly. He's torn that he'll miss that. "Well, since you’re here this week, I thought I'd give you my gift early. How about that?"

Ben peeks up through his shaggy bangs, curious. He scans his father, then the floor, looking for the promised gift. "Not here," Dean says. "I have to drive you to it."

Ben smiles, happy but confused. "Okay," he says with guarded enthusiasm.

So Dean gets the check and they get in the car. They have to drive a little ways out of Chicago because Ben’s gift is big, and it needs space. He takes Ben to a storage unit in Crestwood where he parks the sedan in front of a large orange door. "Great, you got my first studio apartment," Ben smirks.

"Smartass," Dean mutters fondly. He pulls out his key ring and flips through them until he finds the unit key, handing it to his son. “Here you go. Open her up,” he prompts.

Ben takes the key and eagerly strips the door of its heavy metal lock. Then he grips the bottom of the door and lifts. Sunlight floods into the locker and reveals the sleek black frame of a 1967 Chevy Impala, the exact same model Dean’s father used to drive.

Ben’s surprise is a tight smile. "A car?" he confirms, ducking inside for a closer look.

Dean's smile, falters. “That’s right,” he confirms, following his son inside. “My dad used to have a model just like this. He was the envy of the town. I loved riding in that thing. And now that you’re old enough, I want you to have one.”

Ben runs his hand over the frame. "There’s a dent here,” he notes. “And rust. The tires are balding. There aren’t even any hubcaps!"

"That’s because you and I are gonna fix her up together,” Dean explains. "When you come down here for the weekends we can work on her. And then, by the time you get your license—"

"I've already got a permit," Ben reminds. "By the time you get your license, " Dean repeats. "You can drive her out of here. Deal?"

Ben hesitates. "It's kind of an old car, isn't? And it might take awhile to fix. Does mom know?"

"If it keeps you off the road longer I'm sure mom will love it."

Ben grins, scans the Impala one last time before meeting his father’s eyes. “Okay, deal,” he agrees.

Dean’s chest floods with warmth. He pulls his son into an embrace, jostling his hair fondly. “You little rascal, oh but it’s rusty!” he mocks.
“Shut up!” Ben laughs, pushing himself away.

Dean watches his son fix his hair with a swelling of pride. Shaggy hair, baggy clothes; Dean would have never been able to look like that, dress like that, or jokingly tell his father to shut up. Because his father never joked, and Dean would have never dared. But Dean’s son smiles with him, and he laughs without fear. This is the one thing good thing I’ve done that’s right, he thinks, and the one thing he’s done better than his father. Dean has to turn away at that thought, because it churns up some turbulent emotion.

Luckily, Ben is oblivious. “But we’re not doing any of this tonight are we?” he asks, standing outside the unit, keys jangling in hand like he’s impatient to leave. Kids, you give a (rusty) bauble and they forget about in five minutes.

Dean clears his throat, as the moment passes. “On a Friday night ?!” He says, turning to Ben with exaggerated shock. “I wouldn’t miss a Friday night for the world!” And that gets him the biggest grin yet.

On Friday nights Ben and Dean play Call of Duty, for hours. Until the sun comes up and they can’t keep their eyes open anymore. This is another thing Ben can’t do at his mother’s house, because it’s too violent, or it’s too lazy, or it’s not good for a young boy to stare at a screen and shout expletives for hours. But these are all of the reasons Dean loves to do it. So he drives Ben back to his apartment where they camp out in front of the couch and order a pizza. Neither of them are hungry after dinner but Dean buys an extra large, extra pepperoni anyways, and by ten o’clock they find their appetite again. By three they finish off the cake lurking in Dean's fridge with "Happy Birthday Ben" written in blue icing. By four thirty they’re ready to call it a night.

Ben takes the bedroom when he’s here. He keeps a spare set of clothes and toiletries in the apartment so he doesn’t have to pack much more than a backpack with his homework when Dean picks him up. It’s a comfort, for Dean, to retain some of his son’s things throughout the weeks he’s not here. Once, Ben brought everything back to his mother’s home (their home , Dean thinks, his goddamn name’s still on the mortgage). Ben said he was donating them to a local charity -and sure enough he brought new clothes to replace them two weeks later- but the absence of Ben’s clothes for those two weeks had quietly devastated him.

Now, as Ben washes up and gets ready for bed, Dean excuses himself and steps out onto the fire escape to light up. He doesn’t drink when Ben is here but the cigarette is still a necessary reprieve from the day. Lisa had never approved of the habit, and Dean had tried to quit, but when the divorce was finalized he picked it back up again. First out of spite. Then he'd maintained it out of need.

Ben knows what he’s doing when he excuses himself, but he pretending not to notice, so Dean is allowed at least a few minutes at the end of the night where he can stop pretending everything is fine and sink into himself. But in the middle of his first cigarette (because sometimes there’s more) Dean hears a gentle tap on the window, from inside. He turns to see Ben, waving, and instinctively lowers the cigarette, out of his son’s view.

“Hey dad, I forgot to pack my phone charger can I use yours?”

Dean glances through the window, into the kitchen where he charges his work and home phones. “Sure,” Dean says, not that his son should have to ask. Ben thanks him anyways, and retreats. Dean turns back to the cigarette in his hand and realizes he was trying to hide it. He laughs at himself. He thinks of that kid they brought in last night, desperately stomping on his own cigarette, like Dean had nothing better to do than haul him in again for underage smoking.

Dean raises the tobacco to his lips again and takes another drag. Hmm. That kid. That strange little
kid. He replays their last exchange in his head: the car door slamming, and Sam disappearing into the
night. He has a lingering curiosity about that case that sits low in his belly, like a hunger. That violent
boy with pretty dreams. In some odd way Sam reminds him of himself. Can't quite put a finger on it,
but the feeling is still there. Dean takes another drag, pulling smoke into his lungs. Strange. Strange.

Dean's pulled from his thoughts but a sudden a noise inside the apartment, a muted crash. He turns
and looks through the window again, doesn’t see anything, not even Ben. Worried, Dean dumps his
cigarette into a mug of water he keeps near the window and pushes up the pane of glass until he can
stick his head inside.

“Ben?” he calls out, the parent in him anxious and alert.

Ben suddenly pop ups from behind the kitchen island, pale and nervous. He sees his father and gets
more nervous. “Sorry! I um. I-I didn’t. I was just trying to. Um. And then there was-”

“-what’s the matter?” Dean interrupts, climbing through the window, and shutting it behind him. He
goes into the kitchen and sees his son holding two phones: Ben’s own in his left, and then Dean’s
work phone in his right. Ben quickly dumps his father’s work phone on the counter like it’s burnt
him.

“Are you okay?” Dean asks, confused.

Ben nods, staring at the floor. “I was just taking out the charger,” he explains quietly. “When I
noticed you had a new message and I…” Ben trails off, turning his head away.

Dean grabs his work phone off the counter, and swipes open the lock screen. “You know you
shouldn’t be looking at this,” Dean says sharply, though the fault is probably his for not putting a
password on it. But Ben knows what he does, and Dean can’t imagine what would get him so
flustered. That is, until Dean opens his last message thread and sees the newest text.

“Jesus,” Dean all but gasps, turning his back to his son like that could shield him from what he’d
already seen. Ben apologizes again, but all Dean can think is fuck, fuck, fuck!

It’s Sam, texting him in the same message thread Dean originally used to lure him in. The text says
thinking of you ;) and then there’s a photo of a pair of wrists locked into handcuffs. The wrists are
draped over a pale ass, spreading the cheeks open so Dean can see a pink, puffy asshole, gaping and
well fucked, they way they are in porn, like some of the porn Dean watches to try and jack off.
When Dean sees the picture his blood runs red hot.

“I deal with fuck ups all day, Ben!” Dean shouts, turning back to his son. “You should know better
than to look at this shit! What were thinking? Huh? What were you thinking!”

Ben winces, his whole body flinching like it expects more than just a raised voice. When his father
pauses, waiting for an answer, Ben doesn’t dare look up at him. “I wasn’t, I mean-I’m sorry!” Ben
apologizes. And then, “I’m sorry, sir.”

The ‘sir’ is like a bucket of ice on Dean’s rage. He realizes, in that moment, he’d turned into his
father. Dean slams the phone onto the counter muttering “shit ,” and withdraws to the other side of
the room. Ben stands watching him, silent.

Dean shakes his head, runs a hand over his beard. ”You shouldn't have to see shit like that."

Ben finally peeks up at him from behind his bangs. “I’m not a kid anymore,” he quietly insists.

Dean laughs. “Yes, you are. And that,” he says, pointing to his phone. “That was a kid too.” Which
might not be fair, but Sam isn’t a kid, like Ben, his son. Sam’s an entirely different creature to Dean. “We brought him in the other night. This boy, fifteen just like you. It was my case. I set it up. I had to meet him, in a hotel, and pretend like-can you imagine, Ben? A boy, your age, walking into that room, knowing what he was going to do?” Dean shakes his head. “The girls are one thing, they’re victims. But he was laughing in all of our faces.” Dean points to the phone again. “That’s him, trying to laugh in my face again.”

“Didn’t you arrest him?” Ben asks.

“We arrest the pimps, not the prostitutes,” Dean explains.

“Even if they sext you?”

Dean laughs dryly. “Yes. Even if.”

“...are you gonna arrest him now?”

“No,” Dean says. “He’s not worth my time.”

Ben stands up straight now, looks him in the eye. Dean wants to say that he’s sorry for raising his voice, that he never meant to blame Ben. He wants to remind Ben that he’ll never have to be scared of him, even if he’s angry, because Dean would never hurt him, would never touch him. He wants to tell Ben everything’s going to be okay, again, because someday Ben won’t have to see his father only on the weekends. But he doesn’t say any of those things. Instead he says: “By the way don’t let me catch you doing any of this sexting stuff. You are in very big trouble if your mother or I finds anything like that on your phone.”

Ben blanches at the accusation. He’s never even had the birds and the bees talk with his father, so this is downright horrifying. “Geez, dad!” he huffs. “I’m not doing anything like that!”

Dean smiles, Ben relaxes, and like that everything feels right again. “C’mere,” Dean says softly. He goes back into the kitchen to wrap his arms around his son. “Goodnight, kiddo.”

“G’night,” Ben says, squirming out of his grasp when he thinks Dean’s been hugging him for too long. He smiles apologetically at his father, and then retires into the bedroom for the night.

As the bedroom door closes Dean remembers that he misses kissing his son goodnight. Ben had shot up like a weed, and at the ripe old age of six he had insisted that good night kisses were for babies, so Dean was forced to quit. And now, in his teenage years, even hugs were becoming a struggle.

Dean sits on the couch and closes his eyes. He sighs. He’s exhausted. He leans his head back and feels himself drifting towards sleep when that photo -handcuffs, ass cheeks, and a puckered hole- pops into his head again. His eyes snap open and he bolts from the couch, plucking the phone from the counter. He swipes open the lock screen and there it is.

thinking of you ;)

There’s a tattoo partially covered up by the hands and the cuffs, Dean notices it now. He recalls Sam’s original case files, a tramp stamp scrawled over the boy’s ass, spelling out his username “Baby Boi”. And then the arrest plays out like a movie again behind his eyelids: the messages, the bust, the drive home. Dean shakes his head. Quickly, he deletes the photo, deletes the entire message thread, and after the phone has been cleansed, he sets his work phone back down.

There. Dean takes a deep breath. The sun is starting to come out, the sky turning a hazy pink. Dean exhales. Then he picks up his personal phone, next to his work phone and starts a new message
thread. In hindsight he thinks he should have hesitated, at least a little bit. But he doesn’t. Dean types in a new number, his message, and then hits send. The speech bubble appears on his screen.

*Let’s keep work and play separate,* it says.

Then Dean sets up a password for his personal phone.

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On Saturday, Ben and Dean lay out their plans for the Impala. The biggest change will be the engine, which they decide to remove and upgrade. The morning is spent hoisting the old one out, and the evening is spent choosing a new one online. They also argue about an audio upgrade, which Dean refuses. He wants to maintain the old interface, not slap in some new digital stereo. They settle on new speakers and Dean spends Sunday picking those out while Ben works on homework he’s neglected.

Seven thirty comes around and Ben packs up his things. This is the hardest part for Dean. He spends Saturday anxious about Sunday. And on Sunday he’s constantly watching the clock. At eight o’clock they get in the car, and Dean drives Ben back to his mother’s.

They pull up to a modest two-level home with a red roof and green shutters. His ex-wife is standing outside as they pull into the driveway. Usually, she stays inside when Dean picks Ben up and drops him off. He wonders, maybe, if something is wrong. Lisa’s face is calm and impassive while Dean’s palms begin to sweat. But he doesn’t say anything to Ben, who’s already reaching into the back for his things.

“Need any help?” he asks, as he always does.

“I got it,” Ben says, and they get out of the car together.

Dean gives him another hug and says he’ll see him soon. Ben passes his mother, who asks him how his weekend was. “Good,” he says. “Dad got me a car!”

Lisa looks shocked by this revelation but Ben, with a mischievous grin, runs into the house before she can ask anymore questions. After the door shuts, there’s an awkward 30 seconds of silence before they realize they might have to talk to each other.

“It’s a fixer upper, something we can work on together.” Dean finally says, from the opposite side of the driveway. He used to park cars out in this lot and work on them, oil changes for the neighbors or personal touch ups for his and Lisa’s own cars. But that feels like a lifetime ago.

“It’s not another one of your muscle cars is it? I don’t want him in a metal death trap,” Lisa asks.

Dean had gotten his hands on a ‘93 Ford Mustang and spent about three months renovating her. He would bring her around to car shows where other gear heads drove through town. The engine was so loud though that you couldn’t hear the person next you, not that Dean minded, but Lisa was convinced it was a sign that the whole thing was going to spontaneously fall apart. He’d loved that car, something he’d put together with his own hands the way his father had built their house. But he’d been forced to sell it in the divorce to pay for his lawyer (scum sucking piece of shit) and Dean wasn’t sure he’d have the will to work on another car again until he saw the Impala online, thought of his father, and then thought of Ben.
“It’s safe,” Dean assures. “It’ll be mother-approved.”

Lisa nods, and brushes some hair out of her face. They both stare at the ground under their feet.

Dean peeks up at his ex-wife. “You look nice,” he finally offers. “Is that um, is that a new blouse?”

Lisa frowns. She ignores the question. “You know about Ben’s birthday party next week?” she asks.

Stupid, Dean internally berates. Stupid, stupid. “Ben may have mentioned it,” he says.

“And you know that you’re invited?”

Dean stiffens, suddenly becomes alert.

Lisa doesn’t look at him, but she walks towards him, arms crossed. “The past few years have been hard on Ben,” she says. “And I think we owe it to him to come together and pretend to be adults, at least for this. Don’t you think?”

Dean feels his chest swell. Part of him is ecstatic that he gets to see Ben again next week, on his birthday. Part of him is deliriously happy that Lisa is even talking to him. But another part of him hates her. How many times has he extended the olive branch only to get turned away? And now she has the gall to tell him they need to suck it up and act like adults for their son? What about slapping me with divorce papers without so much a warning, he thinks. How fucking ‘adult’ is that? But of course Dean doesn’t say that. Lisa has all the cards: their house, their son. She can refuse him and it will hurt. But if Dean refuses to simply go to his son’s birthday party, he’ll be the one that looks like the monster (again). So he eats the scraps he’s thrown and acts gracious for them.

“Of course I will,” he says. He neglects to tell Lisa, he has nothing better to do because he’s on leave for three weeks. “Does Ben know?”

Lisa shakes her head. “I’ll tell him. But he was asking. And the other dad’s will be there, of course, Jimmy and Terry.”

Douchebags, Dean thinks. Fucking great.

“Great,” Dean says with a strained smile.

Another 30 second pause.

"And also, I know he's supposed to be with you again two weekends after next. But he has a track meet in Indiana. So. Is it okay if he sees you the weekend after that? I know it's a dry spell for you, but he's excited by the trip."

And if he said no? Dean has no control over any of this, though Lisa politely acts like he does. Lisa and Ben's life moves forward, together, while Dean remains stuck.

"Yeah that's fine," Dean agrees blandly.

“Okay good,” Lisa sighs, like she was scared he might say no. “Well, I better get back and-” she makes some vague motion towards the house, “-Ben.”

“Right,” Dean agrees. “Ben.”

Lisa turns her back to him and retreats inside. Dean watches her, and then climbs back into his car. Suddenly, he releases the breath he didn’t know he was holding.
That was first civil conversation they’d had in months. And she’d invited him to Ben’s birthday party! Dean smiles to himself. True, she invited him on Ben’s behalf. And she’d probably only been standing outside to sort out Ben’s schedule for the month. But still, it was something. It was progress.

Dean starts his car with a grin and pulls out of the driveway. He’s looking forward to next weekend.
Chapter 5

Dean has five empty days to fill before Ben’s birthday party on Saturday. The emptiness stretches out before him like a void. He had so much time to sit and think after he was shot, too much time. Dean hates empty time, he has to fill it with something, anything to keep idle thoughts threatening to haunt him at bay. So he keeps himself busy by working on the Impala. Dean fixes a few dents, rubs out the rust, repairs the vinyl seating, and gives the car her first oil change. He’s supposed to be working on this car with his son, but Dean knows two things about Ben. One, his son is anxious to begin driving his own car. And two, the tedious work of rebuilding a car with your own hands doesn’t give Ben the same pleasure as it gives him. It reminds Dean how different his son and him are.

Dean adored his own father, obsessively tried to be just like him. Ben, in contrast, has his own unique identity. This was normal, Lisa assured him. It was unhealthy to hero-worship either parent, and Dean accepts that. If Ben were just like him, Dean would be concerned. Sometimes Dean worries he, himself, is too much like his father. He worries he passed on some fatal flaw. Because Dean wore the trappings of his father, and wanted to live his success, but there was very real darkness to John that Dean rarely discusses. He worries about it in himself (like his anger at Ben discovering Sam's text), but so far, he hasn’t seen any sign of it Ben.

Dean pulls himself out from under the Impala and sets his tools aside for the night.

Ben was a good son, and he would grow up to be a good man, but Dean didn't want to abandon his roll as father just yet. Ben's birthday part will be the first time in a long time that Lisa, Ben and him will all be in the same place together, and Dean has high hopes for their reunion. He is sure that if Lisa sees them as a family again, she will want to keep them that way. He is sure that she will invite him back. And it will all start on Saturday. He just has to survive five days.

Dean sighs. Five, empty days.

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After working on the car, Dean hits the gym. Then he stops off at a gas station and picks up a six pack of beer and a bottle of Lysol. Back home, Dean decides to clean his apartment. Normally, he doesn’t lift a finger until the day before Ben stays over, but Dean is seized with a need to occupy himself so he scrubs, and he sweeps, and he vacuums.

He finally starts going through the boxes of stuff from their home, his stuff, stuff he’d shoved into a corner in the bedroom and chose to forget as his final act of denial after the divorce. But he goes through it now, because he has nothing else to do. It’s not much, mostly clothes and odd knick-knacks from when he was a kid, but Dean does rediscover his golf clubs under a pile of bed sheets. He pulls out the equipment from the closet and examines it with wonder. How long has it been since he played? Not since before he’d been shot, and wistfully, Dean misses it. But his memories are haunted by ghosts.

He used to play with Terry from up the street, but the divorce meant their friends were forced to choose sides. Dean also used to play with people at work. In particular, his ex-partner Benny. Dean runs his thumb over the polished titanium club. He still has fond memories of Benny. Everybody else
knew his ex-partner as a legend akin to his father: loved and well-respected. Part of him misses Benny, the other part hates him.

Two AM. Dean puts his golf equipment aside and allows himself a smoke before he finally crashes for the night. There’s four more days to go but at least he’s made it through the first twenty-four hours. As a small reward, Dean allows himself to look at his phone. He has a new message.

*Wish u were here to tuck me in ;)*

Dean takes a long drag and feels hot smoke fill his lungs. He keeps it in until it hurts, until he’s forced to exhale.

This isn’t the first message since he’s switched phones. Sam’s been sending him a string of status updates: what he’s doing, what he’s eating, random selfies (some explicit, some tame). Dean hears his phone ping, once, twice, dozens of times throughout the day, but he waits, for hours. He waits as long as he can, like he’s testing himself. He waits, and then he looks, but nothing else. Sam doesn’t seem to mind, keeps texting Dean despite the silence.

He looks at Sam’s last text again.

Dean doesn’t know why Sam stormed out of his car and then, twenty-four hours later decided to text him a nude. Maybe Sam’s stupid or fatalistic. Either way, that photo was like a line, cast out into the dark. Dean knows it was bait, meant to reel him in, but what was the harm in looking?

Dean is curious about Sam. Fascinated, even. He’s seen a lot of girls broken by their work. But Sam was a boy, a boy who had sex with men, used by men just like the girls. Dean’s father had very strong opinions about those kind of boys - fags, queers - and he made sure to ‘toughen’ Dean up so his son would avoid that fate. But Sam wasn’t ashamed of what he did, in fact he shoved it in everyone’s face like a middle finger and that bothered Dean, as much as it amused him.

Sam was exotic. Sam was familiar. And if the boy wanted to play games, Dean was willing to go along with for now.

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Tuesday is less productive with the car. Dean finds himself thinking too much of his ex-partner since he found the golf clubs, so he quits for the day, and runs personal errands instead. Dean does his laundry, and picks up his dry cleaning. The dry cleaners is a part of a strip mall, and outside one of the larger stores is a claw machine called ‘Toy Town,’ with blue lightning bolts painted on the sides, its guts stuffed full of teddy bears.

Dean stops in front of the machine and admires the toys inside. Immediately he thinks of Sam: *I dream about meeting someone who will take me away from all of this.* Dean is struck by a sudden desire to win one. Dean spent a pretty penny on arcade and claw machines in his youth, loitering outside grocery stores and laundromats, avoiding the trek home. He’s good at claw machines, could win one easily, so Dean digs out three quarters from his back pocket and inserts them into the coin slot. He calculates which bear is the easiest, hones in on its stuffed, smiling face, and presses the big red button to go in for the kill. The claw dips, grabs the bear, and dumps it into the vending slot. A buzzer goes off declaring his win, and Dean stoops to claim his prize.

It’s a pink bear, tinier than the rest, white fuzz coming out of its ears and holding a red heart that says
‘I Wuv Hugs.’ Dean smiles at it. There’s pride in winning, and he doesn’t get to do much of that anymore. He retreats to his car, puts the dry cleaning in the back and then takes out his phone. He has messages.

after ur first call I jerked off so hard

still think about it sometimes

do u?

could have been so good together daddy.

2 bad ur a pig

Dean smirks. Yes, he does think about that first conversation. They were both play-acting but Dean was better at it then he’d thought. Like there was something in him eager for the role. It still surprises and scares him. Sometimes, when he reads Sam’s texts, he gets the urge to answer, his role as “daddy” reprieved for a few dark seconds. Usually he resists the urge. But with the bear in his hand, a part of Sam’s dreams of some older man and a better life, he gives in.

I started your collection, he texts, along with the photo of his prize.

This is the first time he’s engaged Sam since those photos on Saturday night. Dean hits send and waits for a reply, but Sam never responds.

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Wednesday morning the new engine arrives. Dean sets it aside and finishes some detailing work on the car, but leaves the remaining work for the next weekend Ben is with him. Then he spends the rest of the day at the gym.

Four o’clock in the afternoon, Dean is at the bench press when a man he doesn’t recognize hovers over him with dark, piercing eyes.

“You Dean Winchester?” the man asks.

Dean looks up to see a red, fat-faced man twice as big as him. Dean shakily heaves the barbell back onto its stand with a resounding clank.

“Who wants to know?” he asks, lying back on the bench, breathing heavily. Dean’s usually very careful about the gyms he chooses. He tries to avoid cops or anybody that might recognize him.

“Just me. And a few friends,” the man says, gravely pointing behind himself. There are two other men huddled together at the far end of the gym. Their eyes are dark and they stare hatefully.

Dean’s throat tightens. He sits up. “I don’t want any trouble,” he says, with sweaty, placating palms.

“No trouble,” the man assures. “But you’re going to leave. Now.”

Dean clenches his fists. His instinct is to fight, but Dean knows better now. The first time he was cornered like this, he’d ended up in the hospital. Again. He doesn’t remember the fight, he’d blacked out quickly, but the humiliation is a bare wire in his mind, writhing and crackling dangerously. Dean
knows his pride will cost him. So he lowers his eyes and nods obediently.

“Sure, whatever, just let me get my stuff.”

“Leave it,” the guy barks.

Dean swallows another hot wave of rebellion. Fine. He keeps what he needs on a lanyard around his neck anyway. At least this has happened so many times that he’s finally gotten smart about it.

“I’m leaving. See? I’m going,” Dean huffs.

He swings his legs over the bench and makes straight for the exit. Dean pulls the lanyard off his neck and pushes the keys between his knuckles - just in case. The men follow close behind him. Dean hears one of them mutter, “Benny was my kid’s godfather, you sonofabitch,” and the sound nips at Dean’s heels as he all but runs out of the gym.

Out into the parking lot, they continue to pursue him. Dean knows this is the moment that determines his fate; either they wait until he leaves, or they make a move. He tries to discourage retaliation by keeping his head down and his eyes lowered. On the outside, he is quiet and obedient, but inside Dean is boiling with rage.

He fumbles with his keys as he stands in front of his car, palms sweating, heart racing. He looks back to see if they’ve made a decision yet. Will they wait, or will they fight? But Dean only sees two men in the lot, and then his head is being slammed onto the hood of his car.

For a second, the world goes black. Then everything comes back in an agonizing rush, filling up Dean’s head until he thinks it might burst. He lies limp against his car in head-splitting agony. At some point he realizes the man that first confronted him in the gym is now screaming at him, but Dean’s head is ringing so bad he can only make out parts. Not that he needs to hear it, he’s heard it all before.

“--and all they did was switch your department?” the man yells. “Un fucking believable! You deserve to be in that coffin 10 feet underground you hear me? You! Punk-ass piece of shit. You’re not even fit to wear the badge. Benny, the dirty cop? Benny ?! You’re a liar, and a fucking coward!”

Then there’s a sharp pain in his gut and Dean crumbles to the ground. He registers more yelling, threats to never return, and then something wet and slick on his cheek. He’s been spat on, but Dean is so broken down he’s grateful that’s all there is. He lies there until the men go back into the gym. Then Dean carefully peels himself off of the pavement and escapes into the safety of his sedan.

Inside the car, everything is still. Then, Dean begins to sob.

The flood of emotions catches him off guard, but he can’t hold it back. Dean grips the steering wheel, teeth clenched to prevent another cry while tears run down his face, and his chest shakes from wanting to burst. He hates those men, but mostly he hates himself. He hates the impotence he feels at their hands, weak and helpless. He shakes with shame, and anger, and the feeling he’s finally getting what he deserves. Those stupid fucks, he thinks.

Dean shakes and cries and slams the flat of his palm against the steering wheel. The horn blares. It startles him out of his sorrow. Embarrassed at his breakdown, Dean wipes his cheeks, starts his car, and pulls out of the lot. He drives home, takes a shower, and finally collapses onto the couch with a bottle of bourbon.

Dean drinks.
The sky is dark. The noise outside is reduced to a few passing cars and howling cats. The city is a void. Dean feels empty. He puts the bottle of bourbon to his lips and drinks deep. The amber liquid sloshes back and forth. He wants to fall into that void as well. He wants to sink into oblivion, until everything turns black. Dean raises the bourbon bottle to his face and stares down the narrow neck. It’s hard to see an end to any of this.

_Ping!_ He has a new message. Dean blinks and lowers the bottle from his lips. _Ping!_ Another new message. Cars pass outside the window. Slowly, Dean takes the phone out of his back pocket and stares at the screen. It’s a text from Sam.

Dean feels as if he’s being pulled from a deep, heavy sleep. He had almost forgotten about this part of his life, about Sam, floating on the periphery of his vision like a speck of dust. He hasn’t heard from Sam since yesterday. Constant texting, to total silence, it puts a sour taste in Dean’s mouth. But still, he reads the messages.

*_Bonnie & Clyde’s on TCM,* is the first. _Turn it on,* the second.


As if on autopilot, Dean reaches for the remote and turns to the channel. The movie has already begun, flashing old sepia-tinted photographs of the real Bonnie & Clyde across the screen. Then, Dean’s phone begins to ring. He picks it up and stares at the number, puzzled. It’s Sam. _Sam is calling him_. Dean’s heart jumps in his chest, beating nervously. Why is he calling? Dean stares, frozen, unsure. His phone rings, and rings, and rings, and rings. He misses the call. He sighs, starts to calm down. But then his phone rings again and Dean’s chest beats just as wildly as the first time. Compulsively, he accepts the call and Sam’s voice spills over the line like a babbling brook, excited and oblivious.

“You got it? I like this film, it’s a classic. I read it introduced a new wave of on-screen violence cause they die bloody at the end; _spoilers, ha_! But really, I think it’s romantic because, like, they understood each other so well…”

For a moment, Dean wonders if he’s not already drunk and hallucinating. The boy he arrested a few days ago for prostitution is calling him on his phone and wants to do something as dull and mundane as watch a movie together, on cable, after some meathead just slammed Dean’s skull against his car. It’s surreal. Exciting. But also dangerous.

“-violent romance I guess,” Sam continues. “It’s hard for some people to understand that but I think they’re one and the same thing. And like, it’s only the people who are really in tune with each other that can go there. Cause they’ve seen into each other’s souls, you know, the darkest parts and they accept that-”

“What are you doing, Sam?” Dean suddenly interrupts.

The movie begins. Slowly, the camera pans away from the wide expressive eyes of Bonnie Parker. Her face is open, and tender, her lower lip quivers.

“Just watching a movie,” Sam says, like it’s a simple, innocuous thing for a cop and a prostitute to do together. “It’s one of my favorites. I saw it was on and thought of you. See, there you are.”

Bonnie turns to the window and sees a man outside trying to steal her family’s car. She rushes outside to stop him. It turns out to be Clyde Barrow, fresh out of prison.
“Why am I the criminal in this?” Dean frowns.

“You have to be Clyde, because I’m already Bonnie.”

Dean laughs.

“I am!” Sam insists. “She’s beautiful, but dangerous. Don’t you think that’s me?”

Dean thinks back to their first meeting and all of Sam’s selfies, his lips, his eyes, his body. No. He doesn’t think Sam is beautiful, not like the actress in this movie, with her painted lips and big eyes. But Sam is fascinating and there is something in Dean that wants to unhinge his jaw and swallow Sam whole.

“I don’t know,” Dean concludes. “I agree you might be dangerous.”

Sam giggles. Dean remembers he’s supposed to be protesting this call, but Sam has woven them into a story together and he forgot. He remembers now, but his urgency is dulled. After all, it’s not everyday a sprite calls you on the phone. It could end well, or it could end badly. Dean decides he’s willing to gamble.

“So how am I like Clyde?” he prompts, taking another long drink out his bottle of bourbon. Maybe not so dangerous after all, he tells himself. Maybe just harmless.

“Well,” Sam thinks aloud. “I think Clyde tried to be a good guy, but it just didn’t work out. He slipped up once—shoplifting—and then everybody treated him like shit. So then he thought, well, if I’m being treated like a criminal, I might as well be a good one.”

“And you think that’s me, huh?” Dean smirks.

“I heard the way those cops talked about you when you weren’t around,” Sam says, his voice low, like sharing a secret. “It’s not just the black guy that doesn’t like you. None of them do.”

Dean sobers. His floating smile disappears.

“Why don’t they like you, Dean?”

Dean’s heart beats fast again. He’s been ensnared into a game he doesn’t want to play. Sam ended up being dangerous after all.

“Because they blame me for something I didn’t do,” he finally admits.

“See? You’re a criminal,” Sam concludes. “To them, at least. They’d probably lock you up right next to me, if they could.”

Dean snorts. It’s true. They hate him, god, everybody hates him, people he doesn’t even know.

“I don’t know why I do this anymore,” he confesses, feeling lost and unmoored. Floating. Groundless. “I’m never-” Dean stops himself. He was about to admit what he’s always known but tries to suppress: that things will never be the same, that he’ll never get his job back and he’ll be stuck with Gordon and Bobby. Or worse, with none of them, a complete failure. But Dean can’t admit that because it could mean losing Lisa and Ben as well. And Dean can’t lose that. He refuses to think about it.

Dean swallows, his mouth dry. “It’s been...a rough couple of years. But things could change. I think they’ll change.” There, that’s the lie he likes. The one that dulls his fears and puts him to sleep at
night, like the bottle of bourbon in his hand.

“You could do something else,” Sam suggests, as Bonnie and Clyde begin their infamous career of robbing banks.

“My father was a cop,” Dean explains. “I was always supposed to be one, like him.” He’d never thought of a career change. Not being a cop meant accepting that he’d failed, at everything.

“Well I was supposed to be a mechanic,” Sam says lightly. “And now I suck dick for cash.”

“You should do something else,” Dean insists.

“Maybe we should both quit,” Sam says whimsically, the same way you start a bedtime story with ‘once upon a time.’

Dean wraps himself in the fairy tale where he doesn’t have to worry about Bobby, or Gordon, or men in gyms, and he smiles. And then, with silly fantasies on his mind, he remembers the prize he had got for Sam.

“Oh. I uh, won you this teddy bear out of a claw machine the other day,” Dean recalls, staring at the stupid thing from across the room. “I thought you’d like it, but you never replied.”

“Once upon a time,” Sam says, so quiet Dean has to strain to hear.

“You could have it,” Dean suggests. “I could give it to you.”

“Keep it,” Sam dismisses. “Win a few more for me.”

Dean sits in silence. He hadn’t expected Sam to turn him down.

Then there’s a love scene, or an almost-love scene. Bonnie and Clyde roll around passionately in dingy hotel sheets, but Clyde can’t seal the deal. He gets off the bed while Bonnie sits up, sheets held to her chest, eyes wide and frightened with understanding.

“Told you I ain’t no loverboy,” Clyde says mournfully.

Dean sits in silence, sweating. Sam says nothing.

The final scene with Bonnie and Clyde ends in a hailstorm of gunfire, in an empty meadow, on a bright sunny day. Blood flies across the screen as their bodies are riddled with bullets (Dean starts to tense at the sound of gunfire again but the scene ends quickly). The pair falls dead, and then, silence. Slowly the Sheriff’s Department peeks up from their cover. The camera pans across the dead lovers draped across the frame of a Ford V8. The movie ends. The credits roll.

“I think everybody’s got the itch to rebel,” Sam concludes. “But we’re just too scared to break out of what we know. But they weren’t scared. They had each other. In life and death.”

But by now Dean is hardly paying attention. This whole time he’s been thinking of Sam, not Bonnie and Clyde. “Tomorrow,” he says. “There’s a fair out in the ‘burbs, near you. We could meet there. I could win you something else, anything you want.”

Sam says nothing, for what feels like forever. The credits end. Another movie begins to play.

“I’m still at the country club you dropped me off at,” he finally says. “And I’m...busy.”
Dean’s first impulse is to ask why. And then, he remembers. Sam isn’t his own and it makes Dean’s stomach knot. “Don’t,” he says.

Sam laughs.

“I mean it.”

*Bringing Up Baby*, that’s the next film. Black and white, starring Katherine Hepburn and Cary Grant. It begins with light and happy music but the bodies of Bonnie and Clyde are still raw and bloody in Dean’s mind.

"I wouldn't have to if you'd actually been daddy, instead of a cop," Sam says. "But you still want to pretend you're the good guy, so, that's that I guess. Night, Dean. It was fun while it lasted.”

Sam laughs, then hangs up. Dean stares emptily at the tv while Katherine Hepburn and Cary Grant play-act falling in love. The phone slides out of his hand. Had he just been rejected by a whore?

The moon is out. It makes his living room preternaturally bright. His rediscovered golf clubs lie propped against the window and shimmer in the light.
Chapter 6

Dean Winchester dallies in the lobby of the Northmoor Country Club like an absolute fool.

“I’m sorry sir, today is for members only,” says a stiff-necked woman sitting at the front desk. Her lips are a bright magenta, and she’s wearing a beautifully tailored dress. It’s a stark contrast to Dean’s faded khakis and polo shirt. “Non-members are allowed to play in the first half of the week,” the attendant says, “but Thursday and weekend play is reserved exclusively for.”

“Yeah okay I get it,” Dean interrupts, glancing over his shoulder to confirm he’s the only witness to this humiliation.

“And membership is invite only,” she adds, twisting the knife in his gut.

Dean bites his tongue and mirrors the same fake, plastic smile on the attendant’s face. “Well I guess that clears things up, then. Thanks for all your help,” he says, tugging at the brim of his ball cap like a salute. He can feel her bright, beady eyes watching him as he walks back out through the marble-floored plaza, footsteps echoing hollowly as he leaves.

Outside, the sun greets him in a blaze of heat. Dean squints and surveys the country club’s parking lot. He confirms his silver sedan parked in the corner, his re-discovered golf clubs still in the back. Head hanging, Dean begins his slow retreat.

He’s only beginning to realize what a spectacularly stupid idea this was. He’d simply thrown his clubs into the car and driven out to the first country club in Highland Park he could find. Because Sam said he was going to be at a country club. Dean shakes his head. He replays last night’s conversation but fails to find any evidence that might explain his impulsive road trip. Sam had all but told him to stay away. And yet, Dean hadn’t been listening to what Sam said. He was listening to what was underneath, some living thing, breathing between their pauses, and writhing beneath their words: a spell that had been woven with Sam’s silver tongue, and now he was cursed.

Dean stands in front of his car and lays his head on the roof. He’d been cursed. He could feel it like poison in his veins, like the need for a cigarette, always on the tip of his tongue. Is there a way to break the curse, or will he be forever haunted by this intangible need?

A car door slams nearby and Dean’s head jerks up, alert. A young boy in a plaid shirt gets out of a Lexus and starts removing a cart bag filled with expensive clubs. He fumbles with the bag, almost drops it, swearing under his breath. His clothes are loose but Dean can still see the lithe young body underneath, notes the flushing of the boy’s cheeks as he struggles with the clubs.

Someone is paying for Sam today, Dean thinks, and the ache in him trembles.

“That’s my grandson’s friend. He owes me a favor after slamming a baseball into our window. The rascal. Look at him, he’s never worked a day in his life!”

A rough voice erupts next to him. Dean turns to see an old man with a white beard pocket the keys to his Lexus. His skin is wrinkled and orange from too much time in the sun. He slips on a pair of white leather golfing gloves and smiles at Dean. “But if his father threatens to take away the smartphone as punishment, suddenly a day’s labor doesn’t seem so bad.”

The boy, who can obviously hear them, keeps his head down and continues to remove gear from the
Dean smiles politely, looking between them both. “It’s hard to find good help,” he quips. “I was just wondering where I could rent one myself.”

If that was out of line, the old man laughs anyway and offers his hand. “Samuel Campbell,” the man introduces.

“Dean Winchester.”

“Winchester,” the man says, enunciating the name slowly, like it has a unique flavor. “I know that name.” Samuel points to the Marine Corps Reserve logo on Dean’s cap. “Any relation to a John Winchester?”

Dean’s fingers ghost over the logo. “My father. He served in ‘Nam, and then he was in the reserves.”

“You don’t say,” Samuel wonders, and then his face lights up with recognition. “So you’re John’s boy? Dean? Hell, boy, I haven’t seen you since you were a scrappy little teen!” He laughs and claps a hand on Dean’s shoulder.

Dean winces at the touch, but tries to hide it with a terse smile.

“I was in the Marines with your father,” Samuel explains. “And I was there when they put him in the ground, too. Damn good man, son. It’s a shame.”

They both nod solemnly.

“I heard you had a close call yourself,” Samuel adds, and Dean must blanch because Samuel waves his white-gloved hands like a flag of surrender. “You don’t have to worry about me, son. I may be old but I’m not senile. I don’t believe everything I’m told.” He grins to show his goodwill, but Dean is still reluctant. The memory of being beat in a parking lot is still fresh in his mind.

“How about a game?” Samuel suggests. “You’re not leaving yet are you?”

Dean looks up past Samuel to the sprawling, well-kept green. “I was just about to,” he confesses. “I’m not a member. I can’t play today.”

“Well then it’s lucky you ran into me, isn’t it? I’m a member. I’ll get you in. Joseph!” he calls out, impatiently waving a hand at his indentured caddy. “Get this gentleman’s clubs out of his car, please.”

Joseph, weighed down with one cart bag already, rolls his eyes and groans.

Dean acquires a golden ticket into the Northmoor Country Club in the form of Samuel Campbell, who entertains Dean with stories of his and John’s past in the Marines as they ride across the club’s manicured green, playing 18 holes of golf. Dean only listens to Samuel with half an ear. He’s heard most of these war stories before, from different perspectives. And while Dean enjoys hearing about his father in his prime, it’s hard to divorce John’s successful career from Dean’s own failures. Even Dean’s game is rusty, and he’s behind by a good ten strokes when Samuel finally says, “Do you
mind if I ask you what happened at your job?”

Dean’s been anticipating this question since he agreed to play. He knows Samuel didn’t invite him along just to tell old stories. What he really wants to know is why Dean’s such a fuck up, when his father was such a shining star. And while that would normally be insulting, Samuel is the first man to offer a quasi-sympathetic ear to him after his partner’s death, and he's anxious to tell his side. So at the sixth hole’s green, Dean begins to talk.

“Benny Lafitte was my partner when I got assigned to Narcotics,” Dean begins. “I was the new kid on the block, and he took me under his wing. We hit it off immediately. We started hanging out, and then, suddenly, we became inseparable. We ate together, we drank together, we even played golf together.” Dean smiles ruefully as he takes his stance, and aligns his putter. “He was my best friend. I mean, it was hard not to like the guy, everybody liked him.” Except Lisa, Dean remembers. His wife never quite trusted Benny.

“You’re dad was a big shot, too,” Samuel reminds.

Dean strikes the ball. They watch it roll across the green, sink into the hole; a decent shot.

“Sure they were both well-liked, and they were both good cops. They had that in common,” Dean agrees. “But that’s about it. People liked my dad because they could trust him. But people liked Benny because…well, he liked to have fun. A lot of fun.”

Samuel takes his turn, and then they climb into the golf cart and drive to the next hole.

“But for all of his fun, Benny could be a loose cannon,” Dean continues. “I found out he had a drug problem—it was a secret to everybody else but me—and I told him to get help. He was pretty embarrassed by the whole thing, so he promised he would, told me he was going to meetings and everything and I took his word for it.”

“You never reported the behavior to your Captain?” Samuel asks.

“I thought I was protecting him,” Dean defends. “He was a good guy and a damn good cop. I gave him a chance to get clean without it hurting his record. That’s what a partner should do, look out for the other guy, watch his back.”

“Drug habits are dangerous,” Samuel counters. “And it goes against everything you were working.”

Dean nods, like the old man’s the part of his conscience that’s been missing for half his life. “Yeah, well, it was a lapse in judgement,” he agrees. “And believe me, I’m paying for it now.”

They stop at the next hole. Joseph scrambles out of the cart and sets the tee for them.

“What, continue,” Samuel prompts.

“He relapsed once, and stayed over at my place so I could watch him. My wife didn’t know what was going on, exactly, but she was less than happy. Still, I looked out for him. It’s what partners are supposed to do,” he repeats, like a mantra.

“You’re loyal, son,” Samuel observes. “Maybe to a fault.”

Dean is silent as he takes his turn, and as Samuel follows him.

“Well, during all of this we were working a case together, following a pair of brothers, the Rugaru brothers - I know, sounds like they made it up, right? They were dealing dope to white kids in blue-
collar areas. You might have heard about the epidemics on the east coast, well, we got it here, too. So we start building a case. We’ve got an undercover guy giving us tips and when we think there’s enough evidence, then we set up a sting. We do everything by the book but somehow it goes bad. It’s like they knew we were going to be there and they started opening fire.”

If Dean closes his eyes he can still hear the gunfire, can still see his partner’s body draped over the front of a car, riddled with bullets. Like that scene in Sam’s movie; it’s death for Bonnie and Clyde.

“And Benny dies in the crossfire,” Samuel concludes.

Dean nods, blinking away the images from his nightmares. “I took five to the leg. A few others were hit too, some critically, but everyone survived, except him.”

They stand for a moment together in silence, out of respect for the dead. Then Dean climbs into a sand trap where his ball fell.

“By now everyone knows it was a setup, and that there was a rat. How else could the sting go bad? I’m his partner so they talk to me first, for information. I tell them everything I know about Benny, except the drugs. The man just died, I’m not gonna air his dirty laundry.”

“Loyal,” Samuel repeats.

To a fault, Dean hears in his head as he swings and hits the ball out of the trap. His father taught him how to be loyal. It’s some kind of universal joke that, in him, it turned out to be a bad quality.

“But then one day they show up at my house with a warrant,” Dean continues. “I’m pissed because they could have just asked, but I didn’t think I had anything to hide, so I don’t resist. That’s when they find it.”

“The drugs.”

“A suitcase full of dope,” Dean concludes. “Only it’s Benny’s suitcase, so I know exactly who put it there and when: the week I let him stay over when he relapsed. Now I’m in the hotseat. I’m interrogated like a criminal and this time I don’t hold back on what I know about my ex-partner. Except now they don’t believe me, they think I’m making it up to save my own ass!”

Samuel and Dean walk to where there balls have landed. Samuel scores an eagle and Joseph marks it down on his card. Dean is less fortunate.

“When people hear that I’m under suspicion for ratting out Benny, the whole goddamn department comes down on my head. Not everybody believes I’m guilty, but nobody believes Benny was an addict and they hate me for even suggesting it. I’m harassed on the street. Our house is trashed on more than one occasion. We get death threats. My boy was even beat up by some kids because of me!”

“But finally I get a break,” Dean continues. “They tested Benny’s blood after I last talked to the investigators, and six months later the results come back positive - it’s never as quick as it is in the movies. And then, when they look into Benny’s life everything against me falls apart. Turns out there’s a long history of drug ‘evidence’ missing with pretty clear links to Benny. They never told me everything they found, exactly, except they think Benny was dealing to people on the street. In fact I heard whispers that he had connections to the Rugaru brothers themselves and that he’d tipped them off about the bust, only instead of running they came back with guns.”

“So your partner was crooked,” Samuel concludes. “Didn’t that clear your name?”
“Enough so that I didn’t get arrested, but the damage was already done. Nobody wanted to accept that Benny was rotten. And with me, they just thought, well...where there’s smoke, there’s fire.”
Dean sighs heavily, reviewing his version of events. He’s repeated it so many times, he half-believes it himself.

“I was eager to get back to work,” he continues. “I wanted to find those bastards and put them away. But the situation was toxic. I was basically on permanent leave, forever. It’s only because I knew a captain in the Vice department that I’m still on the beat at all.”

“I should wonder why you’d want to be after all of that,” Samuel remarks. “If everyone still believes you played a part in the death of a cop, you’re not walking uphill, Dean, you’re Sisyphus pushing the rock.”

Dean hangs his head. “I worked my whole life to be a cop. If there was just some way I could prove myself....”

Samuel looks at him with pity. He thinks Dean could have been a good man if fate hadn’t dealt him a bad hand. As it stands, Dean is probably a lost cause. “Well, I admire your fortitude, son. Perhaps if you stick with it, things will look up.”

It’s part of the lie Dean tells himself daily but coming from the old man it’s as tenuous as the papery skin stretched over Samuel’s aging bones. Dean looks down at the scoresheet in their caddy’s hands. The disparity between strokes is a chasm Dean can never close, could never hope to. He has to finish the game knowing well in advance that he’ll lose.

“Yeah, maybe things’ll look up,” Dean repeats.

They finish the game. Samuel wins and Dean thanks him for the invitation to play. They part ways with empty promises to meet up someday and talk again. Now with full access to the country club, Dean decides to tour the grounds, looking for Sam, in every caddy’s face, or every idle boy. Dean ends up searching the club, twice. He hates himself for this sudden obsession, but tells himself all he needs is to see Sam, just once. Then he can go home. But Dean has no luck. He never had much to begin with.

Reluctantly, he quits his search, but not before a cigarette, something to take the edge off of his craving. Dean retreats to the corner of the open-air pool, on the eastern wing of the club. There’s no one else around, and Dean chooses a tan lounge chair where he lights up, leans back, and exhales. His privacy is suddenly cut short by an old man and a young boy in a pair of tight swimming shorts. The man is trying to chase the boy but he’s fat and runs out of breath quickly. The boy continues to run, however, taunting the man as he goes. He runs around the pool, towards Dean and suddenly Dean is sitting up straight because he recognizes the boy. It’s Sam. Sam is running right at him!

As Sam runs, they lock eyes. The boy recognizes him and comes to a complete halt.

They stare at each other, Dean’s cigarette half hanging out of his mouth, Sam’s eyes narrowed like he’s not quite sure if it’s Dean or his imagination. Dean removes any doubt. He takes off his Marine Reserve cap and runs a hand through his hair. There’s no mistaking him now, and Sam’s eyes widen, shifting his weight from foot to foot like a wild horse that might buck and run away screeching.

The old man at the far end of the pool coughs and lowers himself onto a lounge chair as well. He hasn’t noticed Sam staring at someone else, and this gives Sam confidence. He tosses his hair, and with a little smirk he slowly, silently, walks past Dean, just out of reach, around the pool, and back to the old man.
Dean is frozen to the spot, afraid to move, even to breathe, lest the shimmering mirage in front of him disappear. He watches Sam with the eyes of a predatory hawk, his heart beating like a leaden object in his chest.

Sam returns to the old man and removes a bottle of suntan lotion from a bag. Then he begins to lather up the old man. The old man turns on to his stomach, and Sam applies the lotion to his back by climbing onto the lounge chair and straddling him.

Dean is disgusted, but he doesn’t turn away. He forgets he’s holding a cigarette until it falls out of his hand, onto his lap. Dean hisses in surprise, throwing the cigarette to the ground and grinding it under his foot. When he looks up again Sam has climbed off the old man, and with the bottle of suntan lotion, he takes a seat several lounge chairs away from Dean and begins applying the suntan lotion to himself. The old man is still on his stomach, eyes closed, oblivious to Sam as he bends over so Dean can see the swimming trunks stretched tightly over his ass.

Dean is wise to Sam’s game, and leans back into the lounge chair with a smirk. He replaces the ballcap on his head, the shade hiding his obvious gaze.

When Sam finishes ‘lotioning’ his legs, his chest, and his neck, he suddenly stands up and walks towards Dean. “Hey mister,” he says lightly. “Can’t reach my back. Can you help?”

Dean stiffens. “Why don’t you ask your dad?” he deflects, and they both look at the old man.

“Cause he’s asleep,” Sam says with a lazy grin. “I already wore him out.” Sam tosses the bottle of lotion into his lap and sits on the lounge chair next to Dean’s, back to him.

Dean stares at the soft, pale skin offered to him. He feels like he did while watching the movie together, drugged and dreaming. But Sam isn’t on the phone this time, he’s in front of Dean, asking to be touched. Tempting him, inviting him. And Dean doesn’t even pretend to resist.

“It’s kinda cheap,” Sam remarks, when he hears the bottle squirt into Dean’s hands. “So, you’ve gotta rub it in really good.”

He touches Sam with his fingertips first, gently trailing down his skin. Then he presses his full palm against the boy’s back. The lotion gushes out from under his right hand and Dean quickly uses his left to wipe it up and rub it in. Sam makes a soft noise of approval, leans into his touch.

This is Dean’s first time touching Sam, really touching him. Sam may have climbed on top of him during the sting, but this is the first time Dean has voluntarily reached out for contact. The boy is small. Dean marvels how his palms, side-by-side, could wrap about the boy’s waist. Sam is fragile, Dean sees this now. If Dean wanted to, he could hurt Sam as well, easily, and all of that snark, all of that attitude from this feisty little boy wouldn’t mean a damn thing. And it would be nice, he thinks, as his hand drifts up Sam’s spine, to the back of his neck where he slowly starts to apply pressure. I would be nice to take, instead of waiting for it to be given.

“You know mister, it’s kinda funny but you remind me of this guy I know,” Sam says playfully, oblivious to the vein of darkness in Dean’s touch.

Dean relaxes his grip. “Is that right?” he asks absently.

Sam nods, his eyes closed. “Mhhmm.”

“How do you know I’m not him?” Dean asks. The lotion is thoroughly rubbed in, but he’s reluctant to let go. His fingers are like claws, drawing down Sam’s back.
“No,” Sam sighs. “‘Cause he wouldn’t be stupid enough to come here. Not when he knows I charge by the hour.”

“By the hour?” Dean asks, pretending to be surprised. “But wouldn’t that make you...some kind of whore?”

Sam laughs and turns around to face Dean. He likes the game they’re playing. “And he couldn’t afford my prices. So. That’s why you can’t be him.”

Sam’s smirk is a challenge, egging Dean on.

“Maybe...he doesn’t want to be a client,” Dean says carefully. “Maybe...he wants something else.”

Sam snorts. Dean's answer must not have been the right one because he disengages, pulls away and stands up.

Dean’s hand falls away. The tips of his fingers ache from the loss.

“That’s what they all say. You think you're any different?” Sam accuses, eyes narrowed coldly. Their game is over. “I played you, Dean! And all it took were some texts and a phone call, and here you are practically drooling. You only want one thing. But I don’t do charity cases, so fuck off!”

Sam lifts his head, tosses his shaggy brown hair, and walks away from Dean, imperiously.

Suddenly, the wind picks up, and the clouds overhead have become thick, and dark. It begins to rain, the cement spotting in dark drops. Sam tugs at his client, who wakes at the feel of raindrops. The pair decide it’s pointless to remain at the pool and quickly retreat back into the club. Only Dean remains outside as the rain picks up.

Lightning cracks, the thunder sounds right through him. It was so beautiful, before. Where did the storm come from?
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes


Sorry for the delay! I thought I would have this done by Friday but I rewrote a few sections and my beta was gracious enough to look through it again on short notice. Unfortunately I’ve run out of pre-written chapters at this point, so updates will continue but they’ll be a little bit more sporadic. Feel free to follow me on my tumblr (same username) for more updates.

The rain is anxious, the wind vengeful as the storm that started over the Northmoor Country Club expands rapidly. Now, five miles outside of Highland Park, lightning rips across the night sky and illuminates the parking lot of the Tower Lodge Inn, where Dean Winchester stands in front of a tired motel door with a gun in his hand.

Dean shudders at the storm within him while the storm outside rages. Something dark is overtaking him, like when Sam first called him daddy, or when Sam let Dean wrap his hands around his throat. He taps a silent melody to the tune of Led Zeppelin’s “Ramble On” with his trigger finger. “For now I smell the rain, and with it pain,” he mouths, as his finger beats against the silver barrel of his 9mm. This is a tune his father would sing when he was happy, and now it’s something Dean tries to sing to bring him peace. But it doesn’t work. Because Dean is anxious and vengeful and he wants to rip across the night sky.

He was rejected by a fifteen year old whore and Dean thinks it might be the thing that finally breaks him. He’s had to suffer too much over the past 3 years to accept ‘no’ from a flighty little brat. After all it was Sam who started this whole godawful affair to begin with. Sam who texted him back first. Sam who crossed the line and called him late at night. There was nothing innocuous about what the kid was doing. Sam knew. They both knew. And yet, he had dismissed Dean like a pauper!

Anger flashes inside him, hot and white like the lightning above his head. Every interaction with Sam has peeled back one more layer of his pride. Sam has degraded him in front of his fellow officers. In front of Ben. In front of that old man by the pool who was allowed to touch Sam, when he was not. But no more. Dean vows that Sam has humiliated him for the last time.

It’s his turn now, Dean thinks, to catch the little boy with his pants around his ankles. His turn to take control and call the shots. He’s going to scare the shit out of Sam and his client by reenacting an undercover sting. There’s a fake badge in his left hand but there’s a still a real gun in his right. That will ensure cooperation. No fighting, no resisting. Dean will handcuff the man’s wrists to the bedposts and leave him there. But Sam, Sam is coming with him, whether he wants to or not. To where? Dean hasn’t decided. He’s all feeling now and no thought. All he wants to do is wipe that stupid, leering smile off the boy’s face. The rest is just details.

“‘Twas in the darkest depths of Mordor, I met a girl so fair.” His anthem for peace has become one of spite as Dean steels himself for what he’s about to do. He knows this is a disproportionate reaction to anything an underage hooker might say, or do - he’s not so far gone that he can’t see it - but it’s so
much more than an overreaction in his mind. Dean’s been shit on so much that he’s finally had enough. Fuck Bobby’s advice to just bend over and take it. If there’s one thing he doesn’t have to accept, it’s this. Because Sam is a whore, and Dean is a cop. On leave or not, he still has weight to pull. Sam forgot that, but Dean’s going to remind him. Then he can leave this whole sorry episode behind.

With a shaky breath, Dean clenches the badge in his left fist and pounds his hand under the silver plaque inscribed with room number 15.

“Police!” Dean shouts over the rain, more animal than cop. “Open up!”

He waits for a reaction, hears chairs scraping, raised voices; the expected panic of someone caught in the act. He smirks, imagining the old man trying to shove his dick back into a pair of tailored trousers, fumbling with the zipper as he races through harried lies about why there’s a naked boy in his bed.

This is justice, Dean thinks. Both of them deserve this.

That’s when the gunfire starts.

The door suddenly explodes with dozens of bullet holes, and the window shatters. Dean throws himself to the ground, startled and panicked. Seeking cover, he scurries behind the BMW he followed to the motel, bullets ricocheting off its steel body at the same rate as Dean’s wildly beating heart: rat-a-tat-tat, rat-a-tat-tat. Terror consumes him, the image of his partner’s body bloodied and blown open dances before his eyes. He blinks furiously but can’t push away the fear of his near-death experience as every muscle locks, leaving him frozen in place.

“Fuck. Fuck. Fuck!” he half-growls, half-sobs. Now is not the time for a panic attack! But his body won’t listen to reason. Dean’s suspended against the car as the door of room 15 is kicked open. A pair of men shout at each other and retreat across the parking lot, firing a pair of semi-automatics.

At the threat of being discovered, Dean wills himself to move, painstakingly crawling under his current shelter where the smell of an oil leak brings a wave of nausea. From beneath the car, he sees the two men running in the opposite direction of the BMW. He tries to get a better look at them as they climb into a black pickup truck and peel out of the parking lot, but they disappear into the storm before he can even memorize the car’s plates.

When the truck is gone, the night falls eerily silent, quiet again, except for the pounding of Dean’s heart, now just as loud as the rain. Slowly he crawls out from under the truck, his 9mm still uselessly curled in his right hand. What the fuck was that?

He turns back to the motel room to survey the damage. It’s like a bomb went off inside: the door is riddled with bullet holes, swinging open by only one hinge, the windows are shattered from the inside out, glass scattered on to the pavement, and the curtains, once closed, billow wildly in the storm. Through the curtains Dean finally sees inside of room 15 at the Tower Lodge Inn. The first thing he identifies is a body, face down on a bed. With another gust of wind, he sees the walls painted red, with blood.

“Shit,” Dean hisses. Gripping his gun with both hands, he looks around the lot. If there are witnesses to what happened, they choose to remain hidden. This is good, for Dean. No one can identify him. In fact it would be smart of him to leave now and pretend this whole fucking thing never happened. But the body in the room fills him with sick dread, because neither of the two people that left this room were Sam.
With his gun held out in front of him, Dean investigates. Rain pounds in his ears, glass crunches under his feet. He squeezes past the open door to get a better look at the body, and immediately recognizes the man. “Jesus,” Dean breathes. It’s Sam’s client from the country club, naked, and prostrate with a hole in his head. What’s missing from the hole is splattered on the wall.

Dean lets the gun fall back to his side with a twisted sigh of relief. He doesn’t care about the man who paid to use a boy. But the question of Sam is still unanswered. Dean turns away from the body, eyes darting around the room. He sees clothes and loose bills, things that didn’t make the mad rush to escape by the men who were here before. On the nightstand Dean notes a lighter, a burnt silver spoon, a bag of needles and some white powder. The bitter smell of vinegar still hangs in the air.

A stone sinks to the pit of Dean’s stomach. This is bad. *This is very bad.* Sam wasn’t just fucking clients, he was involved in *something else*.

“Sam!” Dean calls out, growing more anxious by the second. But only the storm answers him, a violent gust of wind making the curtains dance like ghosts. The bathroom door blows open as well, and Dean turns his attention towards the last room he hasn’t checked.

“Sam?” Gun at the ready, Dean approaches, nudging the door the rest of the way open with his foot. Immediately, he finds the same paraphernalia that was in the bedroom, scattered on the bathroom counter. He also discovers another body, submerged underwater, and this time he knows it’s Sam.

“Fuck!”

Dean shoves the gun into his waistband and reaches into the tub, pulling the body of the teenager out from the murky bathwater. Sam’s head lolls to the side. There’s a dirty shoe lace tied loosely around his upper arm. Dean lays him on the bathroom tile to check his vitals and discovers there’s no pulse.

“Oh no you don’t,” Dean growls. Jumping into action, Dean pinches his nose, breaths into the boy’s mouth and follows that by quick compressions against Sam’s chest just as the Academy trained him. He repeats the process until the boy finally gives a tired, sputtering cough, vomiting water and the other contents of his stomach. Sam gasps for breath, which is good, but Dean checks his pupils and sees they’re blown wide. Sam’s high as a kite! And the way he’s breathing so shallowly, Dean guesses he might have overdosed, which caused him to fall unconscious in the tub and nearly drown. Because that’s what heroin does to you, it slows everything down until you come to a grinding hault.

Sam’s just another kid he’s rescued a dozen times before in other anonymous hotels scattered across Chicago. And yet, Sam is different. Dean feels tied to him. He cares whether or not Sam lives or dies.

Sam needs medical attention, and quick. That means Dean has a choice to make. He can leave Sam here, and hope the paramedics are already on their way. He can bring Sam to a hospital, and risk linking himself to this clusterfuck. Or, he can bring Sam home.

Dean is soaked from head to toe but his throat is dry.

He has the tools to reverse an overdose at home. He’s kept a bottle of what saved Benny ever since his overdose, but Dean’s never administered it before, let alone to a boy. There’s a risk it won’t work. There’s a risk that Sam could die. But leaving him here is a death sentence too, and bringing Sam to the hospital is a death sentence for Dean. There’s hardly a choice at all: he’ll have to try and save Sam himself.

Dean jumps into high gear, ripping a towel off a shower rod and draping it over Sam. He scoops the boy up into his arms, marveling at how light he is as Dean carries him out of the bathroom, past Sam’s dead client, and out into the rain. Dean runs to his car, throws open the backseat and gently
lays Sam inside. He readjusts the towel over the boy before tugging his dad’s jacket from under his own seat and laying the beaten leather over Sam’s small, pale body. Brushing a wet strand of hair away from his face, Dean checks Sam’s breathing: slow and labored. The boy’s eyes are open, but if he recognizes Dean, he’s staring past him into nothingness.

“C’mon kid,” Dean pleads, shutting the door and climbing into the driver’s seat. “Don’t wuss out on me now.”

The drive home is torture. Dean’s eyes are peeled for state troopers but he treats the highway like his personal Autobahn, recklessly racing past any cars unfortunate to be out this late at night. Usually, his radio is on full blast, but every neuron in Dean’s brain is focused on getting him and his cargo home safe. Instead of the radio he finds himself still singing Led Zeppelin as he anxiously checks his blind spot, switching lanes again, and again, and again.

“I can't stop this feelin' in my heart,” Dean mutters. “Gotta keep searchin' for my baby. I can’t find my bluebird!”

He’s fucked this up, royally. The bitterness in his gut turns to bile and threatens to spill out of him. He was supposed to be in control! Take a part of his life back, but he couldn’t even do that right! Every time he encounters Sam, something goes to shit. He should have left the kid back there. He should’ve gone home instead of following the BMW. He should’ve sat on his ass instead of going to the country club. He should’ve rejected that phone call. He should’ve ignored those photos. He should’ve given Sam money for a bus ticket. He should’ve told Gordon where to shove it.

Dean’s list of sins scrolls behind his eyes. What sort of man has to prove himself to a fifteen-year-old whore? He does, apparently. Dean grips the wheel tightly. For a moment he glimpses under his own skin and sees the blackness beneath it. Is this really who he was? Did the shining star of the Sheriff’s Department raise a monster?

“Yes, sir,” Dean repeats in his head. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Yes, sir!

Forty-five minutes of speeding down the highway later, Dean pulls into his apartment’s parking garage at a quarter to one. He rips off his seat belt and reaches back to check on Sam. Still breathing: good, good. But the tips of his fingers have turned purple: bad! Dean throws the back door open and gathers Sam into his arms. Racing up the stairs, adrenaline allows him to ignore the pain in his leg. Finally, he reaches his apartment and quickly lays the boy down onto his bed.

As Sam is lowered onto the mattress, he whimpers softly.

“You’re a real pain in my ass, you know that,” Dean mutters, brushing hair out of the boy’s face again.

He leaves Sam and rushes to the bathroom where he digs out the small bottle of Naloxone and the needle to inject it that he’s kept for these kinds of emergencies (although he never imagined using it to save a fifteen-year-old prostitute). Shakily, Dean reads the chicken scratch notes he’d made to himself. He’d asked a nurse what drug it was that they had pumped Benny full of after he’d OD’d, and then Dean paid her to swipe him some. He’d made instructions for someone Benny’s approximate height and weight, but Sam is a quarter of that, so Dean draws a quarter of the dose with nervous, sweating palms.
The needle primed, Dean returns to the bedroom. He removes the dirty shoelace around Sam’s arm and replaces it with another tourniquet: his own belt. Dean tightens the belt and straightens the boy’s elbow, looking for a vein. Unfortunately it’s easy to find, purple and enlarged where Sam has shot up multiple times before. Carefully, Dean inserts the needle and injects the drug into Sam’s blood, to counteract the other drug shutting down his respiratory system.

Chemicals. That’ll fix what’s wrong.

When he’s finished injecting, Dean checks Sam’s breathing: still slow and tortured, but there’s nothing left to do but wait. So Dean discards the needle, removes his belt. He rearranges Sam on the bed, gently rolling him onto his side in case there are any nauseous side effects to the drugs. Then he gets rid of the motel towel, soaked through from dirty bathwater and rain, removing his father’s jacket as well and dropping it to the floor. Dean props Sam’s head onto a blanket, and lifts the covers to drape over the boy’s body.

Then he hesitates.

Dean’s eyes trail over Sam’s pale skin. It strikes him, suddenly, that Sam is here, in his apartment, on his bed, vulnerable, naked. Despite the circumstances, Dean had technically gotten his way. He can touch without protest, take without fighting, and the gravity of it makes Dean tremble. Slowly, he reaches out his hand, and lays across Sam’s cheek. He expects a sudden shock, something to ward him off, but nothing happens. Sam only continues to breathe, steadier now, deeper. Good. He brushes his thumb against Sam’s lashes, his lips. Then his hand travels lower, over Sam’s shoulders, down the small of his back. Dean can feel the throbbing of his heart in the tips of his fingers as he thinks about letting his hand travel lower. But he stops.

This isn’t the kind of man he wants to be. Some kind of lunatic that takes out his aggression on a little boy? A broken boy who shoots up after he sells himself. Dean turns away from Sam. The man who has a wife, and a kid, a home in the suburbs, and a job he’s proud of. That’s the man he wants to be, again. That was success. Whatever poison had affected him, whatever dark clouds he’d conjured - no, he would resist.

Dean stands and looks down at his bed. There’s still a magnet in his chest that draws him to the naked boy there. He doesn’t know if it’s sex, or some other perversion, but the desire to hurt Sam and to kiss him gently on the forehead are one and the same.

Sam is toxic. Dean realizes this now. If he wants to get his old life back, he needs to get rid of Sam; the two are incompatible. But getting rid of Sam should be easy. The boy’s a drifter, offer him enough money to set himself up in some other part of the country and he should jump at the chance.

Dean sighs. That’s a conversation for the morning. Until then, Dean pulls the covers over Sam. He shuts out the light, and closes the bedroom door. Numbly, Dean glides through the living room, and into kitchen. He reaches inside the fridge, removes a beer, opens it, and takes a drink. Then he sits down on the couch and turns on the television. Infomercials about the latest diet pill play on repeat.

Everything will fine, Dean thinks, as he drinks his beer. He can figure this out. Everything will be fine.
Chapter 8

Dean wakes to the muted ringing of his cell phone. Deep Purple plays unintelligibly until he rolls over and tugs it out of his back pocket, then it’s blasting so loudly Ritchie Blackmore might as well be playing in his head. Dean groans at the intrusion. Squinting at the caller ID, exhaustion blurs the name. He has to a blink a few times to see straight. Sleepily, Dean registers that his captain, Bobby Singer, is contacting him at the ripe hour of six am on a Friday morning. Suddenly, that wakes him the fuck up, triggers stormy memories of last night: the boy in his bed, a dead man back at the motel. “Shit!” Dean rolls off the couch onto his knees, onto the floor, and then finally stumbles onto his feet.

A call from Bobby Singer at six am means something serious, something urgent. The song on his phone is a ticking time bomb, counting down to some awful news. Dean needs another minute to compose himself -heart racing, hands already sweating- but he’s convinced if he misses this call, it’s an admission of guilt (of stalking a hooker or something worse?). How Bobby will know, exactly,
how bad he fucked up, Dean can’t say for sure, but if he doesn’t pick up, Bobby will know something is wrong. So Dean clears his throat and hits the accept button.

“Sir?” he barks into the receiver, like a good soldier.

“Rise and shine, son,” his captain says. “I’ve got some news you’re gonna want to hear.”

Bobby sounds grim. Dean gulps.

“I got a call this morning from a buddy of mine in homicide about a shoot-out at motel outside of Highland Park.”

Dean begins to shake. Oh god. They know.

“-called the Tower Lodge Inn.”

Oh god!

“There’s video feed. They know who the shooter is.”

Dean shuts his eyes and waits for his life to finally come to a grinding halt.

“Son, it’s the Rugaru Brothers.”

Dean trembles. He was expecting sirens in the background and irons around his wrists, but instead, something else has happened, and Dean has to spin his brain around 180 degrees to catch up.

“What?” he asks, breathing heavy, like he’s already been running from the cops, his own brothers.

“The Rugaru Brothers,” Bobby repeats. “The video footage is actually shit, not much of anything but their car speeding away, but there’s a positive ID from the manager that sold ‘em the room. It’s them, boy, they’ve surfaced.”

Dean forgets how to breathe as the gravity of last night hits him for a second time. The Rugaru Brothers were at the Tower Lodge Inn? He was just face-to-face with the men that killed his partner, and almost killed him! How was that possible? Why would they be uptown, in a motel room with a fifteen-year-old hooker? “I don’t understand.” Dean exhales. “They’ve been quiet this whole time, since the sting.”

“They haven’t been up this far north, that’s for sure,” Bobby agrees. “Some kind of territorial bru-ha-ha maybe? The Feds think that’s what the shootout was about, there’s a third player they can’t identify.”

A third player they can’t identify. Dean wipes the sweat from his brow. “Any uh, video footage of him?”

“No,” Bobby admits. “But he’s not the big fish.”

Dean’s legs finally turn to jello. He has to sit back down. His head is swimming. “You said the Feds were involved?”

“Mhmm,” Bobby confirms gravely. “They’ve been on this case since the sting. You know as well as I do how seriously we take a dead cop.”

No fuck.

“All departments are cooperating, including ours,” Bobby adds.
“Ours?” Dean echoes.

“The dead guy they found at the motel was the manager of a well-known nightclub in Boystown; name was Joey Boy. He pimps out some of his workers, but what his connection to the Rugaru Brothers is, I dunno.”

Dean glances at his bedroom, where Sam is still asleep. “Have you talked to any of his...workers?” he asks.

“Not yet,” Bobby confides. “But that’s what you have to look forward to when you come back.”

“Am I coming back?” Dean asks.

His Captain grunts. “We’ll see,” he says. “If I need all hands on deck, it might be a good excuse to forget that little incident of yours a little early.”

Dean grits his teeth. He hates feeling like a child, dependent upon his father to decide if he’s been punished enough. But some things never change.

“In the meantime, just hang in there,” Bobby says. “There might be a light at the end of this tunnel after all, son.”

“Yes, sir,” he says, as Bobby hangs up.

Dean feels his chest balloon with hope. The Rugaru Brothers are on the run! And his department is in pursuit of them as well. If his department helps find them, they could be celebrated. And if Dean himself helped find the brothers, then he would be celebrated. Maybe even as a hero.

Dean savors the thought, and smiles. If he’s clever enough, he can turn his mistakes around. Maybe last night wasn’t so bad after all. The storm has passed and brought with it a calm morning. Dean can’t see the skyline from his apartment but the buildings across from his reflect the rising sun. A square of light moves across his floor and touches the bedroom door, where the boy he rescued is still sleeping.

Sam is his ticket to being celebrated. Sam was working for that dead guy in the motel; Sam’s pimp and not his client. But Sam’s pimp was with the Rugaru Brothers and Dean wants to know why. He wants to know everything Sam knows.

And then he wants to get credit for it.

Sam wasn’t toxic. Last night, Dean had been wrong about the boy. Getting rid of him would be a misstep. In fact, keeping Sam close is what he needs to do now, because as long as Sam knows something about the Rugaru Brothers, the boy is valuable to him. Priceless, even.

Dean is excited about his prospects. For once, excited about his future. He raps his knuckles against the bedroom door, eager to begin interrogating Sam about last night. “You up?”

The living room is bright, but his bedroom is dark. The blinds are closed. Dean searches for Sam in the muted light and finds him on the bed, wrapped in white sheets, gravely still.

“Kid?” Dean says a little louder, his heart beating faster in his chest. He sits on the bed and shakes the boy’s shoulder. “Sam!”

To his relief, Sam opens his eyes. He looks up at Dean, but there’s no recognition, blinking at his surroundings in murky confusion.
“You’re at my place,” Dean explains. “You overdosed last night. I found you in the tub. You’re lucky to be alive.” He leaves other, more incriminating details—like how he followed and tried to fake arrest Sam—for later. “We need to talk,” he concludes. “I know you’re tired but it’s important. You can rest later.”

This elicits a groan of protest.

“C’mon. Sit up,” Dean prompts. He pulls a pillow from the other side of the bed and places it behind the boy, who props himself against it with a shaky sigh. Dean scans Sam’s pale, tired face. He notes the circles under the boy’s eyes, his red-rimmed irises. He vacillates between pity and impatience.

“Are you hungry?”

Sam says nothing. His face is empty, and distant: a ghost of his former self.

“Breakfast,” Dean suggests. “Your stomach’s empty. You should eat.” When Sam is silent again, Dean stands. “I’ll make you something,” he declares and heads to the kitchen.

The only breakfast food Dean has on hand is a giant box of Fruit Loops, meant for his son. He pours a bowl of the sugary rainbow loops, and with the addition of milk and a spoon, he brings it back to Sam.

“Here,” he says, holding the bowl gingerly like it’s a secret ambrosia.

Sam takes one look at it and turns up his nose.

“Eat,” Dean insists, pushing the bowl into Sam’s lap.

Sam struggles with it, grips both sides to make sure the bowl doesn’t spill. He shoots an indignant glare back at Dean, but this only makes Dean more obstinate. “C’mon!” he growls. Dean scoops up the spoon and waggles the cereal under the boy’s nose. “You’ll feel better when you get something in your stomach.”

But Sam’s head is still murky and confused. His stomach has tied itself into knots at the mere thought of food, and Dean’s badgering only makes it worse. When Dean wags the cereal under his nose the smell triggers a violent wave of nausea. Sam tries to lunge out of the bed and retch but Dean, thinking Sam is trying to escape, holds him back. Helplessly, Sam empties the remaining contents of his stomach—water, mostly—into Dean’s lap, along with the bowl of cereal.

Dean curses and jumps to his feet. This is not what he had in mind when he thought of Sam spilling his guts. He looks down at Sam with a deep scowl. The boy’s head hangs off the mattress, his body shaking as he heaves and cries at the same time. His tattoo is exposed, the name ‘Baby Boi’ shaking and shivering as he retches.

Pathetic, Dean thinks, filled with disgust. Does his future really rely on such a weak little boy? Dean’s worked hard his whole life not to be what Sam is in this moment: vulnerable, defenseless. His father had strict punishments for any such perceived weaknesses: chores, hard labor, or worse. John proclaimed he was beating ‘the man’ into him.

“I’m tired of your whining!” John shouts in his head. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Yes, sir!

Has anyone done that with Sam? The boy is loose, and reckless. He overdoses on drugs and lets men use him. Maybe a firm hand is what he needs. Someone to correct Sam, and not indulge him in his vices. Dean could be that man, he thinks, to save Sam from himself. Not exactly a father figure, but a corrective figure. Because if he was going to keep Sam close, if he was going to get him to talk,
Dean couldn’t allow the boy to be that wild horse, kicking and screaming in his car like Sam had been that first night. Sam had gotten the upperhand then. But now, Dean concludes, it’s his turn to take control.

“Stop whining,” Dean says sternly, after Sam’s spell of retching dies down, and the boy collapses, exhausted on his bed with a soft moan. “Let’s get you cleaned up.”

Dean picks the boy up off of his bed. Sam makes a bewildered noise as he’s scooped up from the mattress and carried to the bathroom, but he doesn’t resist, can’t. In the bathroom, Dean sets him down on the lip of the tub. He begins running water, holding his hand under the faucet to test the temperature.

“I can’t have you falling and hurting yourself. So I’m going to help you shower,” Dean declares. Perhaps he could have suggested a bath, but he’s loathe to leave Sam by himself, afraid of his one chance at redemption drowning itself again.

When the temperature is to Dean’s satisfaction, he pulls the diverter and steps back as water spews from the showerhead. He closes the curtain half-way, to where Sam is perched, and then begins to undress. Dean removes his soiled shirt, and pants. He keeps his boxer briefs on, and dumps everything else in the sink. Then he climbs into the shower and holds his hand out for Sam.

“Up,” he commands, when Sam doesn’t move. He sees fear in the boy’s eyes, which Dean doesn’t have patience for. “Now!”

This prompts Sam onto his shaky feet, knees knocking together like a newborn foal. Dean wraps an arm around the boy’s waist to support him. “Stop it,” he hushes, when Sam whimpers as their bodies touch; the boy’s pale, smooth chest pressed against his own. “This will go by faster if you’re good,” Dean says. He doesn’t say what will happen if Sam is bad.

Dean reaches for the soap and begins to scrub at the boy’s skin. Sam winces at his roughness, but he heeds Dean’s warning.

“Good,” Dean praises, turning Sam around and continuing to clean him. The boy remains quiet until Dean reaches between his legs. Then Sam yelps loudly and tries to pull away. Dean tugs him back with an annoyed grunt. “What did I just say?” he barks, a firm hand on the inside of Sam’s thigh. But Sam doesn’t listen, he squirms helplessly in Dean’s grip, trying to get away. Impatient, Dean strikes Sam once across his backside, hard. Sam gasps, and suddenly stills. Dean presses their bodies together again, speaking firmly into the boy’s ear.

“You let those men touch you, but you won’t let me?” he says harshly. “They rape you, take everything from you. But me? I’m trying to help you. Let me help,” Dean says. And then he inserts two soapy fingers inside of Sam.

The boy gasps, grips Dean’s arms tightly, but doesn’t try to pull away. “I’m going to clean you,” Dean explains. “And then we’re going to talk about last night. If I like what you have to say, then I’m going to offer you something, something that could turn your life around. No more whoring yourself out, you could live a normal life, boy.”

Sam whimpers. Dean is surprised to feel the boy’s sudden arousal against his leg. But he spurns it. Dean doesn’t want sex from the boy, and he cleans Sam roughly to make that point. He wants to wash off the taint of last night, of the past weeks, from them both. Today marks something new between the two of them.

“I’m not going to use you like those people used you,” Dean promises, or maybe threatens. “I don’t
want anything from you, boy, but your obedience. Understand? Let me help you. And you won’t regret it.”

Dean removes his fingers. Sam whimpers and immediately relaxes against him, breathing hotly against his wet skin. The water washes away the soap from inside the boy. “There,” Dean says gently. “You’re clean now. Shhh, shhh. Hush.” Dean comforts the boy, who’s begun to cry. Sam shakes, and Dean touches the small of his back. At this moment he feels genuine pity for the boy, but Sam’s tears confirm his original conviction that Sam is weak, and needs someone to guide him.

“Hush, be quiet,” Dean says, more firmly this time. He steps away from Sam and turns off the shower. Then he pulls a towel hanging off the rack just outside the curtain. Sam stands in the center of the shower with red-rimmed eyes watching Dean suspiciously. It’s hard to tell if he’s still crying, so Dean dries the boy’s face first, and then moves on to the rest of him. Neck, chest, stomach, hips, dick, balls, ass, taint, legs: he cleans each part of Sam with military efficiency.

“You’re being very good,” Dean praises. “I promise this will all make sense.”

When he’s done drying Sam, Dean wraps the towel around the boy’s waist. “Now go to the bedroom,” he instructs. “My son keeps his clothes in a dresser drawer by the window. Pick something out.”

Sam hesitates, but only for a moment. Dutifully, he climbs out of the shower and goes back to the bedroom.

When Sam has left, Dean steps out of his boxer briefs. He rings them out and throws them into the sink, along with the other stained clothes. Dean looks down at himself, at his flaccid, useless manhood. Pathetic, he thinks, and quickly pulls a second towel off the rack to cover himself.

He rejoins Sam, who has already slipped on a pair of beaten up jeans, in the bedroom. The boy is about to pull a red shirt over his head when Dean stops him. “Not that one,” he says, tugging off the Abercrombie emblazoned logo and throwing it on the bed. “This one.”

Dean digs at the back of the drawer and removes a vintage Deep Purple t-shirt, gray with a sepia print of the band stretched across the front. He’d bought it for Ben as a Christmas gift years back, but it had taken its place here in Dean’s apartment and never seen the light of day. Dean can’t remember Ben ever having worn it, so he gives it to Sam instead. He watches, with pleasure, as Sam drapes the name of Dean’s favorite band across his body. It hangs off of Sam like a tent but Dean readjusts it with a satisfied smile.

“Good,” he concludes. “Feeling any better?”

Sam nods slowly. Dean guesses it’s a lie, but that doesn’t matter.

“Then wait for me in the living room.”

Sam leaves, and Dean dresses quickly. He’s asked for Sam’s obedience, but he doesn’t trust it. Sam might run before he has a chance to squeeze the kid for answers, and then this would have all been for nothing. So Dean hastily slaps on a pair of jeans and a black shirt, only to find Sam on the living room couch, legs curled up against his chest. Sam peeks up and watches Dean approach. They regard each other suspiciously, Sam’s face still pale and ashen.

Dean sits across from Sam on the living room couch. Now he can finally question the kid about last night.

“So I guess you’re expecting me to be all grateful or something for saving my life?” Sam spits,
before Dean can say anything. The first sentence the boy’s spoken this morning, and of course it’s
full of spite. “Well I never asked you to do that. I’m not gonna be your sex slave, or whatever kind of
sick shit it is you’re into. You’ll have to kidnap some other kid and molest them instead!”

It’s fear, not anger, pouring out of the boy in ugly shapes. Sam is gripping the edge of Ben’s jeans
and trying to be as loud and insulting as he can. But Dean sees through it. He sees Sam’s bravado for
the false charade it is. Dean smirks at the boy’s insults. He’s impervious. They don’t affect him.

“Hush,” Dean says. “I’m not your enemy. Okay? I said I was trying to help you, and I meant it.”

Sam remembers the shower, and wraps his arms around himself. He stares at Dean with hate and
distrust.

“Those men in the hotel room, those were your enemies,” Dean insists. “The Rugaru Brothers are
dangerous, so is a pimp, and neither of them give a shit about you, kid.”

“And you do?” The fear in Sam’s voice is even more palpable. He wasn’t expecting Dean to know
who was in that motel room.

“I pulled you from that tub because I think you could be important,” Dean continues, spinning the
truth to make his case. “I know those two gangsters, Sam. I was after them when I was in narcotics.
They murdered my partner, and they put five bullets in my leg.”

Dean extends his bad leg. Pulling up his jeans he shows off the wound, the gap in his calf where the
muscle won’t grow back. Sam winces.

“The Feds are after them too,” Dean continues. “This is serious.”

Sam looks empty and drained of everything but his fear. “Am I...am I under arrest?” he asks with a
quivering lower lip.

And Dean almost laughs. Because it’s so simple, so childish. Had Sam forgotten he was on leave?
Maybe he didn’t realize Dean had no authority to make arrests. Or maybe mentioning the Feds was
akin to invoking the Bogeyman. Either way, Dean doesn’t correct Sam. Instead, he plays on those
fears, to get the boy to talk.

“I can’t say,” Dean says gravely. “That’s why I need you to tell me everything you know. Then I’ll
see if I can protect you. But only then. And only if you’re honest. You’ve got to tell me everything.”

Sam nods like he already knows this part of the story. The part where the good kid gets rewarded
and the naughty one gets punished. And every kid wants to be the good kid, even the naughty ones.
So Sam uncurls from the couch, and begins to talk.

“I tried to keep you away you know,” he begins, quiet and sulking. “‘Cause they said they’d killed
cops before ‘n...I dunno. It was just for fun anyways. Texting you. Figured you’d tell me to fuck off
’n then you didn’t ‘n then...I dunno,” he repeats with a shrug. “Wasn’t supposed to go this far.”

He peeks up at Dean for a reaction, but Dean’s face is stone.

“So you’ve been working for them this whole time?” Dean asks. His anger is barely masked.

“Not really for ‘em,” Sam sighs, turning his attention to a hole in Ben’s jeans that he picks at. “More
sort of with ‘em. S’all Joey’s schtick anyways.”

“Your pimp,” Dean clarifies.
Sam shrugs. “Sure, whatever.”

“So you and your pimp work with them. What do you do?”

“Well gee, if you’re so smart then you’d already know the answer to that!” Sam leers.

But Dean is no mood to be teased. He glares at the boy sternly until he continues.

“I sell drugs, duh!”

Dean is suspicious. “You’re a mule?”

Sam groans, like Dean is eight feet thick. “No! Ugh. I just sell ‘em, you know, when I hook up. Like, when I hook up with a new daddy.” The boy bites his lip and bats his lashes: drug dealer, seductress, and brat all in one.

“Were you going to sell them to me?” Dean asks, curious. He thinks back to their first meeting; dangerous territory.

“I don’t push on the first date,” Sam laughs. “M’not stupid!”

“Could’ve fooled me,” Dean shoots back. “So when do you starting selling? On the second date?”

Sam is still playing seductress. Batting his lashes, he smiles darkly at Dean. “When I know they’re in love with me,” he admits. “Then I push. I’ve only got a little with me, see, so then we’ve got to go out and get more. And that’s when they pay. Then they get hooked and I drain ‘em of all their cash!” Sam ends his story by laughing. He revels in the misfortune of all the men he’s scammed.

Dean shares no pity for the men that fell in love with this vile little boy (he hesitates to admit that he was almost one of them). And yet, part of him is also impressed by the darkness in the boy’s soul. It reaches out and touches something in him, buried deep.

“How are the Rugaru Brothers involved in this?” Dean asks, hungry for more information.

“It’s their stuff I’m pushing.” Sam explains. “Joey just said we were gonna try somethin’ new. Like, more powerful or whatever, and that my cut would be good.”

“So you sold their drugs to your clients,” Dean summarizes. “How long has this been going on?”

“’bout a month,” Sam says.

“And how many clients have you had in a month.”

“Three.”

Dean is surprised. “You’ve ruined three people’s lives in one month?”

Sam grins triumphantly. “I had a marriage proposal from one. Adoption from another. Pretty sick, huh? I don’t even have to work that hard. They practically throw themselves at me. Yeah three in a month. But that’s pretty average. That’s why Joey wanted me to do this. ‘Cause I’m good at it.”

That’s a poor thing to be good at, Dean thinks. “And you’re the only who’s sold their stuff?”

Sam nods.

“Are you the only…boy, who knows about it?”
“Joey was pretty hush, hush.” Sam admits. “I only met those guys once before.”

“At the club?”

Sam shakes his head.

“Where?”

Sam gazes at Dean with hooded eyes, looking for a crack in Dean’s armor that he can exploit, the way Dean has been exploiting his. “Somewhere,” he teases, smiling mysteriously. He must be feeling better after all.

“Sam ,” Dean warns.

“I thought you said you were gonna help me out!” Sam challenges. “So far I’ve been doing all the blabbin’ and you haven’t given me shit!”

Dean frowns down at the boy imperiously. “If you give me information that leads to their arrest, I will help you. If you waste my time for another second, then I’ll dump you in the middle of the road and you can go back to hitchhiking and dick sucking.”

But Sam isn’t intimidated in the least. He purses his lips and tartly replies. “I can waste more than a second of your time with my dick sucking, Dean.” And then he bursts into laughter.

Dean’s jaw clenches as the boy laughs. He pulls back, stands up, and recalculates how to bring Sam to heel. “Do you know what witness protection is?” he suddenly asks.

Sam’s laughter fades. He looks Dean up and down. “Like. In the movies?”

“Yeah, in the movies,” Dean says quickly. “When there’s a witness that might face retaliation for testifying, they get put into witness protection. They put you somewhere the bad guys are never gonna find you. And sometimes that means a new name, a new identity, a new life.”

Sam narrows his eyes suspiciously.

“If you give me something that helps the Feds get the Brothers, I can get you witness protection, Sam. I can get you that new life .”

“You want me to narc!” Sam scowls.

“I want you to help yourself.”

“But you said it yourself, they’re dangerous! If they found out, if Joey finds out-”

“Joey’s dead!” Dean suddenly growls. “They put a bullet in his head! And you would have been next if they hadn’t thought you were dead in that tub already.”

Sam’s defiance drops like a brick. The fear springs back to his eyes in the form of tears.

Dean jumps on the opportunity. “I know you’re scared, but this is could be your way out,” he coaxes. “You’ll have protection. They won’t find you. And you can start over.”

Sam shakes his head, tears streaming down his face. Dean leans over him, puts a hand on Sam’s back and goes in for the kill.

“Remember what you told me in the car? About that dream you have of a man sweeping you up and
taking you away from your life?” Dean kneels beside him and says gently. “Let me be that man, Sam. Tell me what you know, and let me make it all better. I can do that. But only if you tell me what you know.”

Finally, Sam breaks, a ragged sob pulled from his chest. He nods his agreement, and Dean waits eagerly to see what else comes out.

Sam confesses everything. That it wasn’t one month, it was six, peddling their drugs. That it was so powerful it sent some of them to the hospital - but of course they wouldn’t report him, Sam confides, if they got caught fucking a minor they’d be in more trouble than him. And then he admits that they met the Brothers on more than one occasion, always at a house in Highland Park and that, in fact, that’s where Sam had gone the night Dean had dropped him off.

“Course I didn’t tell ‘em you were a cop, just said you were a dud. Cause ‘m’not stupid,” he repeats. And that’s it, it’s done, it’s over. Sam lays his head on his knees and sniffs loudly. Dean remains calm but his heart is dancing gleefully. This kid is a gold mine of information, and Dean’s going to be the shining star that brings him in.

“Good, Sam. That’s good,” Dean says gently. “You did a great job, really. Hey, shh, stop.” He wipes the tears from Sam’s eyes, and then lifts the boy’s chin. “It’s going to be okay now, Sam. You did a good job. I think this will really help. And let me tell you something, alright? You’re safe here. The Brothers don’t know you’re here, and neither do the cops. No one knows either of us were at that motel last night. So you’re going to stay here, with me, okay? Until it’s time to reveal what you know, I don’t know for how long. I have to talk with my supervisor, and then he’ll talk to the Feds. Then we’ll work something out, and get you protection. Understand?”

Sam nods but then he studies Dean carefully. “No one knows I’m here?” he repeats.

“Yeah,” Dean confirms.

“And no one knows you were at that motel last night?”

“...no.”

Sam’s pouting lips suddenly split into a wicked grin. “You don’t want to get in trouble,” he concludes with a laugh.

Dean scowls and pulls back.

“No, no, it’s fine,” Sam assures quickly. “I won’t sayin nothin’. Just...funny how you care so much about these creeps, is all. Thought you were all about luring in hookers.”

“I was in narcotics,” Dean reminds. “And they killed my partner.”

“So...you’re going all renegade cop to avenge your partner?”

“Yes,” Dean lies.

Sam frowns and looks bored. “Oh,” he says, like he’s disappointed with the answer.

“So. What’s it gonna be?” Dean asks. “Are you gonna do it?”

Sam hesitates, goes back to picking at Ben’s jeans. “Don’t see how I have much of a choice,” he concludes. “Damned if I do, damned if I don’t, ya know?”
And that’s good enough for Dean. “Good boy,” he says, ruffling Sam’s hair fondly.

Sam smiles up at him. Dean smiles back. For a moment he forgets he drove the boy here through a storm of regret. For a moment he forgets his son’s birthday party is tomorrow.
Chapter 9

Dean wakes up the next morning convinced the universe is finally aligning itself in his favor. The sun is suddenly brighter, his coffee less bitter, his car even stops sticking between park and drive: little things that Dean interprets as a long-awaited karmic change.

It all started with Sam, who's agreed to cooperate with him and the FBI. Now Dean sees stars in his future. He can imagine, step-by-step, how everything will start going his way. First, Dean will bring Sam to the Feds, and Sam will tell them where the Rugaru Brothers are. Then, the Rugaru Brothers will be caught, and convicted. Everybody in the Sheriff’s Department will know it was Dean who found the evidence, and Dean will be a hero. All of the questions about his involvement with Benny will be cleared, and finally, Dean will transfer back to narcotics where he’d first started, where his father had been a hero as well.

Then he can get Lisa back. The idea swells Dean with pride. She won’t see him as a loser anymore, as a liability to their family. Lisa will kiss him. She’ll be in that baby blue nightgown again, and he’ll see her breasts, but this time his dick will work. He’ll fuck her and remind her of what kind of man he is: strong, not weak. And then she’ll love him again.

Dean’s vision of the future has the finality of cement. He can feel the pride in Bobby’s smile, taste the yearning in Lisa’s kiss, as if it had already happened. He’s impatient for it to happen. That’s why his son’s birthday, today, is so special. Today is the first time, in a long time, that Lisa, Ben, and him will be together in the same place, celebrating something as a family. It’s even more poignant because they’re celebrating at a paintball park in East Dundee where Lisa and Dean brought Ben after his middle school graduation. Paintball, cake, and Ben grinning like mad when he tagged his own father out (little shit): Dean remembers the day fondly. And today will be just as good, a glimpse into his solid cement future.

The only hiccup in his plan, however, is Sam. Dean doesn’t trust leaving Sam alone at his apartment. The boy could call the cops (and the irony doesn’t escape him), or worse, call the Rugaru Brothers and tip them off. If the Brothers run, Dean’s dreams about getting back into the department’s good graces will be flushed down the tubes. Dean considers handcuffing the kid to a pipe in the bathroom, but he can’t be 100% sure Sam isn’t wily enough to escape that as well. So Dean brings him along to Ben’s birthday party, sure that Sam, and his family’s reunion, are fully under his control.

“Don’t forget you’re a witness to a trafficking case,” Dean reminds, going over Sam’s invented backstory for the party as they travel north up I-90. “But you’re scared, and you’re shy, and you don’t say much. That way all you have to do is keep your mouth shut and let me do the talking.” Dean marks his point with a stern glare. But all it gets him is a bratty roll of the boy’s eyes.

“Whatever,” Sam mutters, curled up in the passenger seat of his car, wearing Ben’s same clothes that he’d put on the day before.

“Don’t be chatty. Don’t be funny. In fact try to avoiding being yourself as much as possible,” Dean concludes as they pull into the parking lot of Paintball Explosion.

There’s a crowd of his old neighbors--parents and their kids--gathered in the lot. He recognizes Deborah and Todd, who were desperately trying to get pregnant, Deborah now with an enormous belly. Then there are Elias and Eli, a pair of blonde twins that nobody could tell apart. Now one of them had bright blue hair (Dean still can’t tell which). Shawn and Dennis were both Ben’s friends from track, Ryan and Matthew from band, and Brian McCullough, the neighborhood punk that everybody thought was cool for no good reason. When Dean spots Ben and Lisa among their old
neighbors, he quickly exits his car to greet them.

“Dad!” Ben cries happily, leaving his mother to give Dean an eager hug.

His son embraces him. Dean smiles at Lisa. Lisa smiles at them both. The sun is bright. The planets are aligned. Everything is going his way.

Then Ben pulls back from the embrace and looks up at his father. “Isn’t it awesome, dad? Jim got me a car!” His son points to another car in the lot, a brand new white Prius crowned with a red bow where the crowd of his former friends is gathered.

Dean sees the gift and goes numb.

“He had it dropped off here right before the party, as a surprise for Ben,” Lisa explains. She and her son exchange delighted looks.

Jim. Dean hasn’t seen their neighbor Jim since before the divorce, and his name evokes the smell of candy canes and eggnog; their Christmas party three years ago, that’s when Jim and he last spoke. Jim stumbled up to Dean in an ugly-ass knit sweater, holding one of those glass moose cups filled with eggnog like in Christmas Vacation. He’d stumbled up to Dean and leaned on him drunkenly. “You’d better keep an eye on her,” Jim had warned, pointing to a seat across the room, next to his wife. “Cause that seat’s not gonna stay empty for long.” Dean had brushed the incident off at the time, but now, after the divorce, it sounds alarm bells in his hindbrain; the ugly feeling that another man is encroaching on his territory.

“What the hell did he do that for?” Dean spits. He scans the crowd again but Christmas Jim isn’t there. Dean is both satisfied and disappointed at once. But Ben and Lisa are both confused by his sudden spike of anger. “I bought our son a car,” Dean reminds them both. “Why would he need another?”

“This one is safe,” says Lisa.

“You car isn’t done yet,” says Ben.

Maybe it’s the “your car” and not “our car” from his son, or the stab in the back from his wife (when he thought they’d had an understanding about how he’d make the Impala safe, wouldn’t put his son in something dangerous), or maybe a combination of both that leaves Dean feeling winded. There are cracks in that solid cement future he was imagining moments before.

“We can still work on your car together,” Ben assures him. “But this one’s got a totally digital stereo!”

Even Lisa mistakes his dismay for good behavior. “I’m glad you understand,” she says with a smile that’s like a patronizing pat on the back. “Ben really likes the new one.”

Dean is furious. He wants to shout and scream and take a tire iron to that fucking car! He bought his son a car. They were supposed to work on it together. Dean thought his son liked the Impala. Dean thought his wife approved of the Impala. But they had both changed their minds when Dean wasn’t looking. And Dean knows all of the shouting and screaming he could do in front of their old neighbors won’t change a thing.

Ben and Lisa had slipped through his fingers. They were no longer in his control. Dean turns to watch his old neighbors chatter and joke in front of the new car that his son ‘really likes’. None of this is under his control. These people have been living their lives just fine without him. In fact his old friends give him wary looks, like they’re unhappy to be reminded of his existence. Everyone is...
perfectly happy with the annexation of his role, and they don’t want him back in. Dean’s old life tells him to hurry up and forget about his old life already.

But he can’t. Black and and white nostalgia of better times is all he lives for.

A car door slams. Dean looks up. Sam exits Dean’s sedan, rounding the car and standing by his side with a sour look. Dean just cut a deal with a prostitute in the hopes of getting his old life back. He can’t back out of that now. His future is supposed to be cemented.

“Dean?” Lisa asks, glancing between the new boy and him.

“This is uh, this is Sam,” Dean explains half-heartedly, stumbling through his explanation carelessly. “He um...he’s working with me - us - the Department, on a case.” Dean stares at the boy, who smirks at his lame excuse. “On a trafficking case,” he finishes.

Lisa and Ben wait for more, and when there is none they politely smile at Sam.

“Nice to meet you,” Lisa says.

“Hey,” Ben adds, glancing curiously at Sam’s shirt.

Sam says nothing because Dean told him not to, and Dean says nothing because he’s in the middle of drowning with cement hopes tied to his feet. Lisa looks at Dean like she’s worried he might ruin Ben’s birthday. Ben tries to remember where he’s seen that shirt on Sam before.

“Let’s cut cake and open presents,” Lisa suggests, touching her son’s shoulder.

Ben looks at his mother and nods.

“We’re through the lobby, outside, in front of ‘Nam Field,” Lisa informs him. “...thanks for coming.”

And then Lisa turns away, bringing Ben with her. They’re slowly followed by other teens and their parents, casting sidelong glances back at Dean and his broken marriage. Soon the lot is empty and Dean is alone, except for the little boy he brought in his car.

“ That’s your ex?” Sam snorts, tossing his wild hair. “She’s not even hot!”

Dean’s dismay turns to anger. He lashes out at the boy next to him. “ What did I tell you about shutting up ?” Dean growls. Roughly grabbing the boy by the shoulder, he steers Sam towards the lobby.

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Past the indoor lobby, the paintball park opens up into several outdoor arenas. Outside Ben’s chosen arena there are picnic tables scattered with party paraphernalia: presents, a cake. Ben goes through the motions of opening presents while his mother politely thanks the parents, and Dean feels as if he’s watching the whole thing from outside of a bubble.

Ben gets video games from his friends, and socks and sneakers from his mother “Thanks Mom,” he says with a shy smile, embarrassed by the practicality of his parent the way kids always are. Ben is happy, and that should make Dean happy, but it doesn’t. Dean keeps examining how it all went wrong. Was it because he refused Ben’s sound system in the Impala? Was it because he complimented Lisa’s blouse and she took offense? Dean picks and pulls, turns sentences over and over again in his head, but despite his best efforts he comes up empty. His family isn’t following the expectations he’s set out in his head. But then, Dean reminds himself to be patient. He hasn’t yet
proven himself, but he will, and maybe all his family needs is some assurance that everything will, in fact, get better. So after they sing happy birthday to Ben, cut, and eat the cake, Dean joins his wife cleaning up the picnic tables while the parents chat and the kids run off to put on gear, preparing for their paintball game. They work side-by-side, clearing paper plate and cups in silence until Dean figures out something to say.

“I think Deborah’s gotten Ben a basketball for his birthday every year since he was ten,” Dean jokes. “I don’t know when she’s gonna get the hint that he’s not joining the NBA.”

Lisa smiles patiently. “She didn’t last year.”

Dean didn’t see his son on his birthday last year. The comment stings, but Dean keeps going. “How are things?” he asks, and then adds quickly, “at work.”

Lisa sweeps a stack of plastic dishes into a garbage bag, disposable, like the fifteen years of their lives together. “Fine,” she answers. “I’ve had to start working some more overtime, to make ends meet. I worry about Ben, spending more time by himself, alone.”

Dean nods solemnly. “He’s a good kid though, we’ve never had to worry.”

Lisa sighs. They continue to clean. He looks for an opportunity to bring up his plans for the future, and eventually Lisa rewards him by asking: “How are things for you, at work?”

“Good!” Dean answers, maybe a little too quickly. “I’m, um, working this case that overlaps with narcotics. It could be good. For us.”

Lisa stills, looks at him seriously.

“Don’t worry, this is good,” he assures her quietly. “We could get it all back. Our old house, our old neighborhood. It’ll all go back to normal.”

But Lisa doesn’t look happy for them. Instead, she looks pained. “Nothing will ever go back to normal for us, Dean. What’s broken here isn’t the kind of thing that can be fixed.” She ties the garbage bag in her hands with an air of finality. “And I wish you’d stop trying.”

Lisa floats away from him like a boat drifting out to sea, taking her shit with her and leaving Dean with his own.

“She doesn’t believe me,” he thinks. She’s just being careful, because of Ben. She wouldn’t turn him down if she knew it could really happen.

“Dad!” Ben calls suddenly, racing towards him and the picnic tables with a paintball gun in his hands, oblivious to the tense exchange between his mother and father.

“Don’t run with that,” Dean chides. He smiles though, to see his son’s energy.

“Sorry,” Ben grins up at him. “Hey um, who’s that kid again?” he asks. “That one you brought? Cause we were trying to get him some gear and he like bit Brian McCullough and then hid in the bathroom. Some of us are trying to get him out now but, like, I dunno it’s pretty messed up.”

Dean groans at the news. Of course Sam couldn’t behave himself.

“Hey, dad,” Ben chirps, following his father as they both head back towards the indoor lobby where paintball gear is rented. “Is that the same kid from those photos? You know... the dirty ones?”

Dean stops in his tracks, muscles tense like he’d been doused in cold water.
“Cause he’s got the same tattoos,” Ben explains.

Dean pulls up the photo they both saw, still etched into his memory: handcuffs, pale ass, and Sam’s call name drilled into his skin with blood and ink. Currently tucked away under clothes, though, unless you knew what you were looking for. “How did you know he had a tattoo?” Dean asks his son.

Ben looks to his left, a tell-tale sign that he’s lying. “I dunno. I realized he was wearing my shirt so Brian was giving him a hard time about it and then...we just saw it.”

No. That’s not what happened. Not to make Sam bite. Dean remembers being a teenage boy, stupid and impulsive, and quick to pick on anybody to make his friends laugh. Dean picks up his pace, his displeasure with Sam switching to concern. Sam is his responsibility, his golden ticket.

Back inside the lobby a group of Ben’s friends are gathered in front of a unisex bathroom. The boy’s have mean faces with dirty looks and Dean catches the tail end of ‘slut’ and ‘cocksucker’ before they see him and slowly back away.

“What’s going on?” Dean growls, standing in front of the bathroom like the heavy iron door isn’t enough.

Brian McCullough, pack leader with dirty blonde hair, eyes Dean hesitantly. “Nothin’,” he shrugs. “Just tryin’ to get him to talk, he won’t even talk.”

Dean bristles, and the boys notice. He wishes he could knock some sense into this McCullough kid, two years older than Ben and a real wild card from what he remembers, but he’s not about to punch a seventeen-year-old at his son’s birthday party, even if the little shit might deserve it. Instead he glares at the kid and raises an arm, pointing at the exit. “Go,” he says sternly. And Brian does, tail tucked between his legs, followed by the rest of Ben’s friends.

Ben glares at his father, embarrassed that he’s taken the wrong side in this. “You gave that kid my clothes. You invited him to my birthday party. After what he did? Dad! You should arrest him!”

This is the first time Ben has been actively upset with him. Dean wants to fold. He wants to apologize. But he can’t. He’s tied to Sam until his fortunes at the Department change. “It’s complicated,” Dean says, pleading for his son to understand. “I already told you that’s how this works, Ben, we go after the big fish and let the little ones go. It’s for the greater good, I promise.”

Ben’s face screws into a knot. He’s not happy with that answer, and he’s upset that his father is even associating with a boy who texts disgusting photos.

“Listen,” Dean says gently, touching his son on the shoulder. “He’s helping me with an important case, let’s just leave it at that. But after that case...you should know, your mother and I are going to get back together.”

Ben’s face screws into a knot. He’s not happy with that answer, and he’s upset that his father is even associating with a boy who texts disgusting photos.

“I know the last few years have been hard but we’ll be together again, soon. Just give me a little more time.” Dean smiles and waits for Ben to be happy, or to smile back, but it never comes. Instead his son shakes his head and pulls away like Dean had slapped him.

“You didn’t even ask me what car I wanted, you just bought the one you always wanted, the one your dad had. Mom told me all about it!” Ben spits, and then takes off running.

Dean watches him go, bewildered. A piece of himself becomes unmoored and slowly, irreversibly,
floats out to sea, joining Lisa, far away from him.

Dean is alone again except for the little boy he tied himself to for the greater good, for his good. Although none of it seems very good anymore. “Sam?” Dean calls, knocking on the bathroom door.

He waits but there’s no answer. Impatient, Dean takes a credit card out of his wallet. He wedges the card past the latch, and the door swings open. Dean spots Sam’s head poking up behind the toilet, wedged between the toilet and the wall, legs curled up against his chest, head stuffed into the space between. The door closes behind him, locking, and Sam’s head shoots up like a frightened animal. He sees Dean, but the wariness in his eyes stays, like there’s no difference between him and the boys with nasty faces.

“They’re gone,” Dean assures him. He scans Sam quickly for signs of rough housing. “Did they hurt you?”

Sam shakes his head, wiping his nose with the back of his hand. “No,” he sniffs, trying to sound hard and in control. “They were just being stupid. Boys like that are always stupid.”

“Yeah, they are,” Dean agrees. He remembers being punched and spat on in the parking lot of a gym. He remembers feeling helpless and angry like there was nothing he could do about it. He doesn’t like to see Sam helpless and angry like there was nothing he could do about it either.

“We’re going to go play a game of paintball,” Dean concludes.

But Sam shakes his head. “I don’t want to go back out there with those jerks.”

Dean smiles. “What if I told you that you could smash a paintball into their chests, hmm? If you’ve never played before then you don’t know how much that can hurt. But believe me, it can hurt.”

Sam looks up at him cautiously, but Dean sees his interest. He offers the boy his hand. When Sam takes it and stretches out his arm, it isn’t the blind obedience from yesterday, from the shower, where Sam was motivated by fear. The boy extends his trust this time, along with his hand, and Dean grips it firmly.

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Helmets, plastic guns, paintball rounds: Sam and Dean gear up and then wait outside of their paintball field along with the other boys and their parents. Brian and Ben are on the Blue Team, Sam and Dean are Red. An instructor comes out and lays out the game they’re going to play - capture the flag - and the rules that apply. Because there are minors, it will take three tags on the arms or legs to qualify as out, or one hit in the chest. If the target is less than fifteen feet away, do not shoot. Absolutely no shooting in the back, and so on.

During the instructor’s speech Dean pulls Sam aside, lifts up the visor on his helmet. “Follow me,” he says. “I’ll give you a good shot.”

When the instructor is finished, each team enters on opposite sides of the field. ‘Nam Field is half an acre filled with plywood shacks meant to mimic indigenous huts and a crashed helicopter from the Vietnam war. Dean thinks of his father. John fought in a real war, with men who depended on him. Dean is surrounded by fake shacks and a little boy he plucked out of a motel.

The Red Team gathers at their base to discuss how they’re going to capture Blue Team’s flag, but Dean and Sam don’t pay any attention. They split off from the group the second the game starts. Dean leads Sam down a ravine, cutting through the field, emerging beside a wooden tank.
Dean lifts up his visor. “I’ve played this field before. They have to pass this to get to our base. We’ve got the best chance of spotting Brian from here. Then we can close in. Got it?”

Sam nods that he understands, and sure enough members of the Blue Team begin to approach, clumsily, and with none of the urgency that Dean had in weaving his way through the ravine (he only noticed the limp, once). In fact Sam has a hard time watching the woods through his tinted visor because he finds himself admiring the cop on leave next to him. Dean is like a bear, twice his size in muscle mass alone, ferocious and ready to pounce. Sam’s used to bears, the hairy men that usually want to pounce him. But Dean is different, it really feels like he’s on Sam’s side, dragging them through a wooded field just for a chance to get back at some loser kid that pulled up Sam’s shirt and called him a cocksucker. Sam smiles under his helmet. There’s a ticklish feeling in his gut, something that makes him feel kinda high, except he’s not. It’s the same feeling he had when Dean texted him a photo of a teddy bear he’d won for him. The same kinda feeling that made Sam know that this was wrong, and that he should stop, except he hadn’t, and now here they were.

“There!” Dean says, motioning sharply to his left.

Sam turns to see the ugly red shirt Brian was wearing (kinda dumb, come to think) moving through the trees. It’s over fifteen feet and Sam thinks Dean’s gonna take a shot now, but he doesn’t. Instead he ducks down and motions for Sam to follow him. So Sam does. They end up behind a tree, and some cement blocks piled up as a barricade. Brian is in front of them, with another team member beside him. They’re a hard stone’s throw away from Sam.

“Take the shot,” Dean says to him, lifting his visor.

Sam is surprised. “I can’t!” he hisses, watching Brian and his other teammate. “They’re too close.”

Dean comes up from behind Sam and steadies his gun, aims it at Brian. “I know,” Dean whispers to the darkest parts of him. And that makes Sam relax, right into Dean’s black-clad arms, like they were one person and not two.

“Aim, breathe out, shoot,” Dean instructs. “Hit him and the other guy, quickly. Don’t hesitate, don’t be afraid. You’re a natural...just like Bonnie.”

Sam feels light-headed at that, all giggly and stupid over a part of his favorite movie that Dean remembers. But he controls himself, remembers the boys at the boarding school he used to go to. His hate becomes the ball of paint and he shoots Brian McCullough, in the back, at ten feet away, everything they weren’t supposed to do. Aim, breathe, shoot. Then he turns and hits the kid beside him as well. Doesn’t even remember if that was one of the kids pointing and laughing but fuck it, they were all the same to him. Sam shoots and they both go down in strangled cries of pain.

“Yes! Good!” Dean cheers. But it’s an illegal move, so he pulls them out quickly, retreating back to the tank, and then the ravine.

On the way they’re ambushed by more members of the Blue Team. Dean grabs him and veers off towards the right, further into Red Team territory. Paintballs whiz by Dean’s head like bullets (makes his chest tighten, head dizzy, but he ignores it). He pushes Sam ahead of him, through a clearing into a white plywood hut on the edge of the field. They both collapse inside of the small space, listening to the pat pat pat exchange of paintball fire. They wait, holding their breathe. But they weren’t pursued, they’re clear. They turn to each other and laugh.

Sam removes his helmet, hair damp from sweat, bangs sticking to his forehead. “That was mean,” he declares with a vengeful smirk. “I liked it.”
Dean removes his helmet as well. “You’re a brat. Of course you liked it.” But he smiles so Sam knows it’s in jest.

“We should celebrate,” Sam declares and removes a pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes from his back pocket. He wags the box in front of Dean’s face until Dean recognize it’s a box of his cigarettes, the box he keeps stashed in the glovebox. Dean plucks the box from Sam’s hands and ignores the high pitched “awwww”.

“You’re too young to smoke,” Dean declares, pulling a cigarette loose for himself.

Sam doesn’t protest, only watches Dean light up, eyes smouldering like the burning tip. “Why’d you let me do that anyways?” he asks. “I thought you’d be mad about the bathroom thing.”

Dean takes his first, long drag. He doesn’t know how to explain to Sam that they’re tied together now, that Sam’s fate is his fate and Dean’s fate is Sam’s fate. He doesn’t know how to explain to Sam that him feeling helpless, is Dean feeling helpless, that Sam striking back (however petty) is Dean striking back too. Striking back at what, he doesn’t know, maybe the whole universe that keeps giving him the middle finger.

“I dunno,” he says quietly, exhaling smoke. “I guess I don’t like them that much. And today has been shit.”

“Cause of your ex?” Sam guesses.

“Hmm,” Dean agrees. Another drag. More smoke. It makes the interior of the shack feel warm, intimate. Outside he can still hear the sound of paintball fire, of laughter. Outside is Ben and Lisa. Inside is him and Sam. Outside is his old life that he wants back. Inside is the life he has now.

Dean stares carefully at the little boy he’s tied himself to in order get everything on the outside back.

“Do you want to know a secret?” he asks, feeling hot and wicked like the smoke curling in his lungs.

Sam nods.

“I told you that my partner was shot, right?”

“By the Brothers.”

“Right. Well, they shot him because he was crooked. Because he was dealing their drugs and taking a cut, then he tried to pull one over on them and they didn’t like that too much. He tried to back out on a deal and get them arrested instead of giving them their cut of the money and then pop-pop! They killed him.”

Sam listens quietly, but he doesn’t care too much about some other dead cop.

“I told the department investigating me I didn’t know he was crooked. But I did. I knew the first night we were pissed together and he offered me some blow.”

“Why didn’t you tattle?” Sam asks, little smirk cause he thinks he’s being cute.

“Wouldn’t of done me any good,” Dean dismisses. “I was new, and Benny was the beloved. If they had investigated him, he was smart enough to cover his tracks, while he was alive at least. Then everybody would have known I was a rat, and they would have hated me. Same as they do now, I guess. Only difference, Benny is dead and now I have a chance to clear my name.”
Dean takes another slow, thoughtful drag. “That’s where you come in.”

Sam smiles just as slow and thoughtful. “Are you crooked, Dean?”

“I never did any of that shit,” Dean dismisses. “Just covered for him once or twice.”

“That doesn't make you innocent.”

Dean says nothing.

“I think you're just playing cop,” Sam concludes. The funny thing is he doesn't say it like it's a bad thing. He says it like he hopes he's right, and maybe a little arrogantly because he knows he is. “You act like a white knight trying to save me and stop the bad guys, but really you don't care about anybody but yourself, do you? You're not white, you’re black on the inside. Black like tar.”

Their eyes meet. Sam sees the darkness swimming in Dean, the same darkness that whispered to him to shoot Brian in the back. It shimmers and dances in front of Sam. He wants to reach out to touch it, to fall into it, for it to enter into him and touch the hole he sees in his own heart. If Sam recognizes their sameness, though, Dean does not. He turns away from Sam, the hand with the cigarette lying limply against his leg.

“Lisa must see it,” Dean says mournfully.

But Sam refuses to let Dean look past him like he’s not even there. He asserts himself, crawling over his helmet, across the plywood floors and pressing himself between Dean’s legs. Dean stiffens but before he can pull away Sam grabs his hand with the cigarette and twists it so the filter is by his mouth, wraps his lips around the tipping paper and draws the heavy black tobacco into his lungs. Dean watches as Sam pulls back and slowly exhales with hooded eyes and seductive lips.

“I see it,” Sam says. “The way you are, and not the way you want to be... Clyde.”

Bonnie and Clyde looked into each other’s souls. They saw the darkest parts. And they accepted them.
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Another reminder that this is a dark, fucked up fic. This chapter contains implied past child abuse, and a brutal spanking that is pretty much child abuse. Tags have been updated. Thanks for your patience <333

A stuffy room with a floral print and beat up furniture, this is where he’s supposed to open up. Part of his commitment to the Chicago PD, they wanted him to see a therapist for his leg and his head.
“Let’s talk about your father.”

Dean drags a hand across his face and groans. “We’re supposed to talk about what happened,” he reminds the mousy woman sitting on a stained chair in front of him, as if his insurance isn’t paying her enough to get some better goddamn furniture -- they’re sure charging him enough. “You know, how I almost died?”

His therapist nods, adjusts her glasses. “You refer to your father a lot. Do you realize that?”

Dean sighs and stares blankly at the wallpaper across the room, pastel colors fading and changing into amorphous shapes like a live action rorschach. “Well, he was a hero. At least that’s what everybody tells me.”

“You don’t think he was?”

Nice try. Dean’s not going to fall for that one, lady. “Of course I do. He was in ‘Nam after all. And he cleaned up the streets while he was in the PD. Everybody loved him.”

“That must be a lot of pressure, to live up to your father’s legend.”

Dean laughs.

His therapist looks up from her notes. “Is that funny?”

Dean shakes his head. He doesn’t say anything for a long while. Finally, “I never wanted to be like him.”

That gets him a funny look. “No? You’re wearing his jacket, Dean. His dog tags. You’re a policeman because he was. You even told me you’re looking for the exact model of car he used to drive.”

Dean had mentioned that off the clock, outside of the office. Using that as ammo against him later? Stupid bitch. “That’s going to be a birthday present for my son,” he corrects, wants to move on but he’s getting a stern look that means he can’t just crack a joke and hope she’ll forget about it like he usually does. “I never thought I could be like him,” he clarifies.

“Why not?”

Dean closes his eyes.

John, above him, his face red in fury, wielding a belt in his hands. “I’m tired of your whining! You’re the one who doesn’t want to take responsibility for your actions, Dean. And no one respects a man who can’t accept responsibility. Do you hear me, Dean? Are you even listening?”

“Yes sir!” Dean cries on his knees, meticulously scrubbing the bathroom floor with a toothbrush, his toothbrush, punishment for some other task he didn’t perform to John’s satisfaction. Nothing was ever good enough for John. Nothing would ever be good enough.

“Yes sir. Yes sir. Yes sir.”

“I just didn’t,” he says to his therapist.

John had known from the beginning that there was something wrong with his son, something broken in him that made him work different, had told him so more than once. You’re lazy, you’re worthless, you’re weak -- Dean had heard it all, even had this silly notion that he would prove John wrong. But
under his thin layer of defiance, Dean knew he was a loser, knew everything he touched was doomed to fail. It was just a matter of time before he would be forced to suck it up and face the facts.

“Was your father always a success?” his therapist continues. “You said he handled his divorce badly.”

Dean scoffs. “No shit.”

Again, his therapist waits for him to divulge, but Dean stiffens and bites his tongue. “Whatever you say here is confidential,” she reminds.

Dean shakes his head. “It’s not important. We’re supposed to be talking about the shooting and my fucking bum leg.”

“Alright. How’s your leg?”

Dean blinks, surprised it was that easy to veer away from the touchy subject of his father. “Um...alright. For a bum leg, I guess. The pain meds help.”

“Is the Xanax still having negative side effects?”

Negative side effects, that was her delicate way of talking about his impotence. “To be honest I...well, Lisa and I...let’s just say I haven’t had a chance to really, you know, check.”

“You were in the hospital for six months, physical therapy for over a year. The circumstances of your injury are...controversial. That would put a strain on any relationship. Do you worry about the possibility of a divorce?”

“...yes.”

“And how does that make you feel?”

Typical therapy bullshit question. Dean sinks into the couch, into the hole in his chest. He has been thinking about it, though. And he’s more willing to answer this then anything about John. “Like I want to hit something,” he admits. “Everything keeps slipping between my fingers. I’m tired of feeling out of control. I want to have something that’s mine. That I own. That does what I say.”

John wielding a belt in his hands. *Do you hear me, Dean? Are you even listening?*

*Yes sir. Yes sir. Yes sir.*

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There is something wrong with Dean. He’s always known it, but the depth of his depravity is beginning to scare him.

It all started with Sam.

His first time talking to the boy, Dean was playing a part: a cop pretending to be a john. But the part had played him. Dean’s own actions surprised him, some darkness in him that came rippling to the surface. The call left him dismayed, and confused, but Dean had ignored it and filed it away. Still, it kept coming back, this ugly desire to wrap his hands around the boy’s neck and *possess*. Dean had
blamed Sam. The boy was a whore, and had made a living seducing and then tricking men. But Sam had not made Dean follow him to the country club, or pluck him from the motel where Dean had serious doubts about what kind of man he was.

But the more time Dean spends with Sam, the more he doubts less.

“We should run away together,” Sam says, leaning against the Impala’s open hood as Dean finishes installing the new engine. The boy has a lollipop in his mouth and works it noisily. Ever since the birthday party, Sam’s been prancing around Dean like a question mark in cut-off shorts Sam made from his son’s jeans, his shirt looped through the collar to show off some midriff. Something changed for Sam at the party. Suddenly he wants Dean to touch him, to posses and own him. But that’s a dangerous offer to someone like Dean, who still remembers, with glee, what it was like to wrap his hands around the boy’s neck at the Northmoor Country Club pool.

“We’ll take the Impala and drive across the country,” Sam continues. “Your Baby Boi inside your Baby Girl.”

“ We’re not doing anything together,” Dean resists. “Once I get called back to work, I’m handing you over to the Feds.”

This is the plan he put together after pulling Sam from the motel, but things have also changed for Dean since the birthday party. All his hopes of success have been sucked from him. Even if he gets a nod from the higher ups, even if he can get his position back at Narcotics, Lisa wants nothing more to do with him. He’s just starting to realize nothing may ever change that. And then, what was the point? The crutch he’d been using to prop himself up with has crumbled. Dean thinks about what he has to do to make this half-assed scheme of his work and he feels numb about it. Not sure that it’s what he really wants anymore. Not sure what he wants at all.

“If I was your kid I wouldn’t act ungrateful for the car,” Sam continues. “I mean who would want a freaking Prius over a ’67 Chevy? If I was your kid, I wouldn’t even settle for seeing you every other weekend. I’d wanna be with you all the time. By your side.”

“You didn’t want anything to do with me before,” Dean reminds.

“That was different,” Sam laughs. “I thought you were nice. But it turns out you’re mean. I kinda like it.”

“You’re a sick kid,” Dean says, and Sam smiles like an invitation.

What would it be like if Dean accepted, reached out right now to wrap his hands around the boy’s throat? What if he pushes the boy over, runs his hands over the young lithe body that Sam taunts him with? Would the boy accept? Would he resist? Dean sweats thinking about his hands on the boy, taking from him—what? Sex? He couldn’t perform if he wanted to (and doesn’t want to think about it, honestly). But he does want to take from the boy, push him to the floor with a belt in his hands while Sam screams ‘yes sir yes sir yes sir’. Dean shudders at the thought. He’s wanted that since the first phone call when Sam answered with cherry-flavored sweetness and a voice like an open promise.

Dean had wanted to beat that sweetness into the floor and have it look at him and say ‘thank you’. He’s not happy about that part of himself. Dean runs from those thoughts. No matter how many times Sam insists that he’s Clyde, Dean says no. He’s not ready to accept his darkness, so he disappears into the night, driving the Impala up and down Chicago’s highways. But because Sam is his responsibility now, the boy has to ride him with too. Every time Dean glances into the rearview mirror, there’s Sam, haunting, like the ghost of his dead father. Dean presses the gas but he can’t put any distance between them. It’s almost a joke. Riding in the night, with the boy in the backseat,
solidifies Sam’s fantasies of escape, until Sam physically crawls from the back into his passenger seat, grinning. It’s a cheshire cat grin, mocking him, and Dean trembles because he knows he won’t be able to resist much longer. Knows that he doesn’t want to. So when it grows late, and Dean becomes tired, he turns the car around and heads home.

In his parking garage, in the dead of the night, Sam undoes his seatbelt and then leans over to press his lips into Dean’s lap. Dean freezes as the boy mouths at his denim-clad dick. He lets the boy try, willing something to happen, but when it doesn’t he shoves Sam away from him violently.

“No,” Dean growls, launching out of the car, back towards the apartment.

Sam follows him loyally, but with a bitter face. He’s guessed right that something in Dean has changed, but not at what. Dean shudders all the way up to his 7th floor apartment, filled with a desire he doesn’t know how to fulfill.

Inside, Dean abandons the boy to smoke on the fire escape. The tar on his tongue does little to take the edge off.

“Are you a prude or something?” Sam demands, sticking his head through the open window. The tendons in his body are pulled tight like wire. “You can close your eyes and pretend it’s your wife, ex-wife, whatever, if that’s what gets you off.”

Dean marvels at the boy’s boldness. He has no shame.

“That’s not what I want from you,” Dean says heavily.

“When’s the last time you jerked off, or even came?” Sam asks, because all he understands is sex. The men who like him, fuck him. He assumes Dean wants the same, and his refusal irritates and confuses Sam.

“Drop it,” Dean warns.

“No really! You walk around like you got a stick up your ass only you don’t enjoy it. I bet it is your wife,” Sam insists. “Did she neuter you? ‘Cause the way you were giving her puppy dog eyes at that party, it was like you were waiting for a command. Except the only thing she told you to do was to fuck off!”

Smack! The sound echoes across the fire escape, down into the alley below. Sam shrinks back into the apartment, touching his reddened cheek with wild, wet eyes.

“Don’t you ever fucking talk about my wife, or my son, ever again,” Dean barks, trying to control his rage and failing. “You are nothing compared to them, do you understand? You are not Bonnie. I am not Clyde. You are a whore, and I am cop with a family. Get it through your thick fucking skull, Sam!”

Sam stumbles backwards, tears welling in his eyes. The back of his legs hit the coffee table and he trembles with rage. “Your wife’s a cunt and your son’s a little bitch!” he shouts.

Dean glares at him, enraged. Sam stares back. There’s fear in the boy’s eyes and it ignites a vicious flame in the pit of Dean’s belly. He throws his cigarette aside and starts to climb back through the window. Sam sees him coming and runs, pushing and knocking things over as he goes. The door to freedom is just off the kitchen but instead of making a break Sam runs straight into the kitchen and starts smashing plates, screeching “Fuck you! Fuck you!”

Dean scrambles back inside his apartment, into the kitchen. Sam tries to run but he corners him,
grabs his wrists. Sam screeches again, *tries to bite Dean*, but Dean grabs a fistful of the boy’s hair and slams his head onto the counter.

“Lemme go!” Sam shouts, writhing in his grasp. “Lemme go you fucking pig or I ain’t gonna tell them nothin’ ‘cept how you tried to rape me!”

Dean’s rage explodes like a volcano. Here’s Sam, the thing that was supposed to be able to fix his life, threatening to tear what little of it is left into shreds. Sam was supposed to be the one on *his* side. Sam was supposed to be the thing he could control. But now the little boy has gone wild, forgotten his place, thinks he can threaten Dean! No, no, no. That’s not how this is going to end.

“Quiet!” Dean bellows, because Sam won’t stop screeching, not for a second. He shouts again and then he strikes the boy, hard, across the ass, just as he had in the shower after Sam had nearly drowned. Sam stills when he’s hit and Dean takes advantage of this, striking him two, three...five more times, gets a yelp from the boy and then silence.

Dean is panting, and Sam whimpers softly into the counter.

“Rape you?” he growls, indignant. “You have done nothing but *throw yourself* at me you little slut.” Dean knows full well that Sam is a minor and not legally allowed to consent, but those laws are for boys like his son. Sam is something else entirely. “I was helping you, and you dare to threaten me? Dare to *insult* me? I think you’ve forgotten who you are little boy. Nothing but a whore with an attitude problem.”

“Bite me!” Sam spits.

Dean responds with another strike across the ass.

“You’re used to getting what you want, Sammy,” Dean pants. “But not anymore. That ends today. I’m going to teach you how to be a good boy. And every good boy knows that for *bad* behavior there’s a punishment.” Sam whimpers as Dean draws his fingers over the reddened flesh of Sam’s cheeks, his ass peeking out between the cut off strands of his son’s jeans. “You’re going to learn a valuable lesson tonight, little boy, one you won’t forget for a long time.”

Dean pins the boy’s wrists behind his back and then yanks Sam’s shorts over his hips, exposing bright, reddened cheeks. Dean pushes his legs apart and reveals the flushed cock hanging between the boy’s pale thighs. Dean ghosts his hand over the arousal and laughs.

“Just as I thought. You like mouthing back don’t you? Why, because you think it’s sexy? Because the men that paid for you got angry and then fucked you?” Dean strikes the boy’s ass again unkindly. “No. This is *punishment*. It is not reward. It is not pleasure. It is not sexy time in disguise. It’s meant to hurt. So next time, you think twice about disobeying me. Do you understand?”

“Dean,” the boy snivels, pushing his ass towards him like an animal in heat. But Dean ignores him, and removes his belt, looping it in his hand.

“I’m going to punish you and you’re going to thank me for it,” Dean instructs, raises his hand.

“Daddy!” Sam begs.

“Sir,” Dean corrects, and then he begins to beat Sam. His leather belt strikes Sam’s soft flesh again and again: *thwack thwack thwack*. Sam tries to bear it but Dean is merciless and soon the boy is screeching and cursing again. Dean holds him still and continues to punish him: *thwack thwack thwack*. The leather belt leaves long red marks up and down Sam’s thighs. If Sam moves, if his balls are exposed, Dean hits those too and that gets the ugliest noise of them all.
Dean beats the boy until his arm is tired, until Sam's ass is as red and raw as his throat, screeching through it all. Dean beats Sam until Sam is tired of screaming, until Dean is tired of hitting. Until Sam’s arousal shrinks and his little boy prick is as limp and useless as Dean’s. Only then is Dean appeased. Then, finally, he stops. He lets go of the boy, who sinks to his knees with a sob, cheeks wet, ass red and bleeding.

The air is heavy with the sound of their panting. Dean’s head sings, and his blood pumps furiously. It feels like sex. Better, or just as good. Sam is quiet. The look on his face isn't hate but something else, strange and almost like love. Dean put that look there. Better than sex. Dean feels a deep satisfaction that fills the black hole in him.

“Say thank you,” Dean instructs.

“Thank you,” Sam whispers. “...sir.”

“Good boy,” Dean says, and means it. Something stirs from within the dark lake of himself. Almost love, but covered in too much oil and waste. Dean is moved by the feeling and he holds out his hand to help Sam stand. The boy does so, wobbling like a newborn foal. His shorts are still around his ankles, his shreveled prick lying neat and untouched between his legs. Sam looks at him with a flush on his cheeks like they’d had sex and Sam was surprised to find he could feel this way. Dean is moved again, and touches the boy’s cheek.

“Thank you,” Dean says. He says it to Sam who looks confused and then begins to cry. It bursts from him with an ugly wail but it does not surprise Dean. Instead, it comforts him. He brings the boy to him and lets Sam’s tears wet his chest. He knows this is not Sam resisting him but instead, breaking under him.

“Sshh,” Dean hushes, running his fingers through the boy’s hair. “I know. It's okay, everything’s okay. Sshh. Let’s...get you ready for bed now, hmm?”

Sam nods and Dean steps back to thread the belt through his jeans again, flecks of blood on the leather. When Dean is done he ducks down and sweeps Sam up, carries him gently from the kitchen to the bedroom. Sam allows himself to be carried, buries his head and fingers into the soft fabric of Dean’s shirt. Any anger for Sam is diffused, replaced by a warm fondness for the quiet, well-behaved boy with the blood-red ass in his hands.

Inside the bedroom, Dean lays Sam down onto the mattress, onto his front. He discards the shorts and removes Sam’s shirt, tossing them aside. He leaves, returns quickly with a rag and alcohol and then begins dabbing at the wounds he created. He does it with the almost-love he dredged from within himself, fascinated by Sam’s sudden malleability and the satisfaction that hurting and then helping the boy gives him.

When he’s done Dean throws the bloody rags away and pulls the covers over Sam. The boy makes a soft cooing noise and touches his arm. “Stay,” Sam says, gentle and quiet, brushing his fingertips over Dean’s arm.

Sam sleeps on the bed, Dean sleeps on the couch, the same arrangement as his son, and Dean has no intention of changing that, especially now. “This is the bed Lisa and I shared. I haven’t slept on it since the divorce.”

He waits for some snarky comeback, but Sam only flutters his lashes and removes his hand, sinks into the sheets and closes his eyes. No resistance, no fight. And all from some behavioral correction!

Dean is drunk on his own pleasure. He runs his hand through Sam’s hair. The boy sighs and Dean’s
insides twist. He kisses the boy goodnight on the forehead, on the cheek. Sam cracks open his eyes and turns his head. Dean lingers, bent over him, doesn’t move, barely breathes. And then Sam sits up just a little, to make it easier for Dean to kiss him, and Dean does. Lips pressed against lips, chaste at first, gentle. Then Sam sighs again and opens his mouth. Dean kisses him hungrily, aching for the contact. Presses himself onto the boy who yields to him and makes Dean shudder with pleasure.

As suddenly as it started, he stops. Dean rips himself away from the boy, who stares after him with swollen lips. Dean wipes off the evidence with the back of his hand and leaves the bedroom without a second glance, muttering “goodnight” before he closes the door behind him.

Silence, almost oppressive. Dean stares at his apartment lit by nothing but the faint glow of street lamps. Even in the dark he can see it’s a mess, a trashcan upturned and shards of broken plates scattered half way across the living room. Dean walks through the debris and takes it in. This is his life, upturned, chaotic. Every attempt to clean it up only leads to the same, messy result. For a long time Dean blamed his mess on other people, circumstances, general universal unfairness. But Dean knows better now. He knows there’s something wrong with him, a deep fundamental flaw that there is no fixing.

Sam was right. Dean is black on the inside. He hadn’t wanted to be but here it is, time and time again, the same old darkness rearing it’s ugly head until it isn’t just a part of him he tried to hide, it is him. He could try ignoring it for longer but the sickest part is...he doesn’t want to. He had liked what he’d done with Sam. It had made him feel complete in a way that nothing had for such a long, long time. And now that he’s had it, he doesn’t want to give it up.

Dean sighs. It is not a happy thing, to discover this about himself. And with it comes the aching knowledge that he can’t be around his son anymore. Ben doesn’t deserve to know this about his father, or his blood. If Dean really loves his son, he will remove himself, maybe even run away like Sam had fantasized. But the thought of leaving Ben hurts too much for one night. He’ll think about his options tomorrow.

The couch creaks as he leans back, adjusts the pillows under his head for another long night. Dean shuts his eyes and tries to fall asleep. He tosses, turns, for maybe an hour. And then he sits up. He takes one last look at the chaos around him, and then Dean retreats to the bedroom, closes the door behind him. Sam lays on the bed, quiet and still. Dean removes his shirt, his pants, and crawls under the sheets until he feels the warmth of Sam cradled against his chest. Dean listens to the soft breathing of the boy in his bed and falls asleep.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The bubble bursts. Suddenly, and violently. Deep Purple again, announcing a new call. Dean sits up with a weary grunt; it’s his Captain. He rubs the sleep out of his eyes and comes to attention. “Sir,” he answers, as fucked up as the last time Bobby called except that everything has spiraled out of Dean's control since then.

“I want you in the station today,” Bobby grunts. “Get dressed and meet me in my office. ASAP.”

And then the call ends, as suddenly as it started. Dean feels a sharp stab of fear in his gut. Bobby is angry with him, what could have changed?

“Who was that?”

Dean looks down at the pale body beside him. Sam peeks up through long bangs, bats his eyes and stretches his legs. The covers slowly expose his backside, washed black and blue from the beating last night. Dean drinks in the sight greedily. The skin is raised where the belt struck, welts that stretch across the boy’s ass and thighs, the name Baby Boi in black ink like an artist’s signature. It’s an ugly tapestry but Dean feels good looking at it, content. It looks like it belongs, a permanent fixture like the tattoo.

“Work,” Dean explains. “My Captain called, I have to go in.” And suddenly Dean realizes he doesn’t want to. Dean’s been waiting for weeks to get called back to work, to execute his plan, to get his old job back, to get Lisa back. But something has changed. Ben’s birthday party opened Dean’s eyes. Lisa does not want him back, she never will. And since last night, Dean doesn’t blame her. For Ben’s sake, he should stay away from them both. His plan, then, to use Sam’s testimony is useless. There’s no point in returning to work. His old life feels hollow, and pointless.

“Don’t go back,” Sam says, like he can read Dean’s thoughts. “Stay here, with me.”

But Dean has no choice. He climbs off the bed and dresses himself. Shirt, pants, shoes. Dean feels the boy watching him, is aware of every breath he takes because they’re in unison, every thought tumbling through the boy’s head because it’s the same as his own. What now? Does Dean pursue his plan? Does he abandon it? Dean hears a chain rattling, a chain that goes from his belly to Sam’s. They’re bound together. Sam is a part of him, his ugliness made manifest.

“You have to stay here,” Dean says. “I’ll be back. I just don’t know when.”

“Don’t bring the Feds into this, Dean. I want to stay with you,” Sam pleads.

“Hush,” Dean says. He digs out a pair of handcuffs from his work detail and he threads them through the metal headboard of his bed, securing them around Sam’s wrists. “Stay here,” he repeats. “I’ll be back.”

Sam lies there, doesn’t resist. Dean looks over the boy’s naked body. It might as well be Dean himself, exposed and vulnerable. Sam has forced him to confront his own darkness and he will either resist it, or allow it to consume him. Dean’s heart beats like a hammer in his chest. He’s afraid he already knows the answer. The chain that connects them rattles.

“Dean-”
“I’ll be back,” Dean promises, fumbles with his keys and leaves Sam naked and cuffed to his bed.

It happens in slow motion, that’s how Dean will remember it. Sitting in front of Bobby’s desk when his Captain places the phone in front of him and asks if he recognizes it. Something is wrong, Dean realizes. Something’s about to go terribly wrong. That’s when Bobby shows him print-outs of text messages, photos. “It was in the pimp’s car,” Bobby explains and Dean knows his career is over. Before he could even think about smothering the monster inside of him, it gets exposed, a spotlight shined on to it for his Captain to see clearly.

“Thought you’d like to know what we found before it goes up the chain, before it gets public and nasty. Give you a chance to tell Lisa, before the shit hits the fan.”

Dean stares numbly at the print-outs. Sam’s ass spread, his hands in cuffs like they are at his home. Let’s keep work and play separate. And that’s not even the worst part, Dean thinks.

“What now?”

“There’ll be an investigation,” Bobby explains. “Then it depends on how hard they want to throw the book at you but the photos alone could get you up to 15 years in the big house, boy. And the uniform’s not gonna help you this time. Everyone will want to see your face rubbed in the shit.”

Dean closes his eyes. It doesn’t hurt. He feels nothing, except maybe relief. A decision has already been made for him. “How long?”

“Tomorrow, or the day after. Take advantage. Make your peace. I’ll try to protect your family the best I can, but you should take what’s coming to you, boy,” Bobby warns. “Don’t lawyer up. Don’t fight it. For their sakes.”

Dean nods slowly. “I’ll make it easy on you, I promise.”

What else is there to say? They’re past apologies or pleas of forgiveness. It wouldn’t be genuine anyway. Dean doesn’t want to be forgiven, only to cut himself from his life of lies. There is a future for him, but not here.

“Get out of my sight,” Bobby says.

Dean obliges, rises and leaves. Inside his car it hits him, the finality. Everything is over: his family, his career. Everything he’s dreamt of having back, pushed out of his grasp forever. But Dean isn’t sad. He regrets that his son may find out something awful about his father, may wonder if he is inclined to the same fate. But Dean spared his son the kind of childhood John had tortured him with. It will hurt Ben to find out that his father is a monster, but his son will be alright. Dean takes respite in that, inserts his keys into his car, and takes a detour to Crestwood before returning to his apartment.

Sam is on his bed, right where Dean left him.

“I’m going to take the Impala and leave Chicago,” Dean tells him, sits next to Sam on the bed. “And I was thinking...maybe you should come with.”

The handcuffs jingle in time with Sam’s vigorous nodding.
“Okay. Good,” Dean breathes. “But I have conditions, Sam, and they aren’t negotiable. If you say yes...there’s no going back. Do you understand that? What I need, it’s not a game.”

“I understand,” Sam says. But how could he? Dean himself hardly understands.

“If you come with me, I will take care of you,” Dean promises. “I will feed you, clothe you, protect you. But in exchange, you will obey me, completely, do what I say, when I say it.” Dean touches the boy’s stomach, slowly digs his fingernails into the boy’s skin. “You won’t get it right, at first, but I’ll teach you. I will be fair to you, Sam. You’ve already seen that bad behavior has its punishments, but good behavior...” here Dean dips his hand between the boy’s legs. Sam sighs happily. “Good behavior can be rewarded.”

Dean feels the boy’s cock fill in his hand, strokes him firmly, noting how easy and pliable the boy is when he’s aroused.

“Of course, eventually you won’t need this,” Dean continues. “Your only pleasure will be obeying me. My smile will make you as dizzy as my hand on your cock.”

Sam pants, spreads his legs wider. Easy to control, yes, but maybe not as attentive as Dean requires.

“Eventually,” Dean repeats. “I will break you and mold you into something that pleases me. Whatever you are now isn’t worth saving, Sam. Right now you’re garbage. Men have been throwing you away for years. But I won’t. I’ll take your empty shell and pour all of me into it. You will like what I tell you to, wear what I choose, and eat what I order for you. This is what I need from you, Sam. Absolute obedience. And I will get it from you, one way or the other. But only if you say yes. I am giving you this one chance to say no.”

Then, at the height of Sam’s arousal, Dean digs his nails into Sam’s cock and twists the boy’s genitals cruelly.

“Sshhh, hush,” he says when Sam yelps and tries to lash out. “I need you to listen. Were you listening?”

Sam yanks at his restraints. There are tears in his eyes. Impatiently, Dean waits for a response, digs his nails in even deeper when he doesn’t get one. “Yes!” Sam finally spits. And Dean nods approvingly.

“Then what did I say? Repeat it.”

Sam’s eyes are wild and indignant but Dean can see him struggling to recall. “You’re leaving and you want me to come with but only if I behave,” Sam paraphrases quickly. “You want it be like last night, right? To be strict, for me to listen.”

“Yes,” Dean sighs, seduced by his own vision.

“You want a good boy, and I can be good, Dean. If that means you’ll take me with you. Please. Please!”

It’s not fair to put an ultimatum like this in front of a kid whose handcuffed to his bed, half-aroused and half in pain. Dean knows that full well. He knows John’s cruelty and the passion for control that’s burning in his blood, but Sam can’t fully consent to what Dean’s asking of him.

“So...is that a yes?”

“Yes!”
And yet, Dean doesn’t care. He offers this moment to Sam not to be fair, but to hold it in front of the boy when he inevitably rebels. Sam had his chance to leave and he spurned it. Now Sam belongs to Dean: mind, body, and soul.

Dean groans. If he could feel arousal he would touch his own cock. As it is, Sam’s will have to do. Finally, he stops twisting the boy’s genitals. Sam whimpers, relaxes. Dean grabs the boy’s cock again and leans in to kiss Sam, harsh, with teeth.

“Please take me with,” Sam whines between kisses. “I’ll be good, I’ll do anything.”

Dean tightens his grip on the boy’s cock and pumps furiously. Sam’s hips buck, the bed creaks.

He knows Sam will break under the force of his own will but Dean is also breaking. All of his restraints are giving way. The darkness dammed up inside of him is rushing to escape. But without Sam he can’t fulfill his desires. He needs the boy, as much he will make the boy need him. He is weak, so weak. But he doesn’t tell Sam this. Sam must always think Dean is the one in control, even when Dean knows that without the boy he has nothing.

“Be a good boy and come,” he pants, drags his teeth across the boy’s neck while he jerks Sam off. “Don’t make me wait. Don’t make daddy wait.” When Dean says ‘daddy’ it’s like something snaps. Sam comes immediately, unraveling under his fingers like a spool of thread. “Good boy,” Dean growls with satisfaction. “My good boy, my baby boy.”

He continues to stroke Sam’s sensitive cock. The sensation becomes too much for the boy and he squirms in his grip, closing his legs, shifting his hips.

“Shh,” Dean hushes. “Be grateful for the attention. If you want this again you’ll have to earn it. But I may not think you deserve it for a long time. Maybe never. Accept what I give you, ssh, accept it.”

Sam tries to still himself but the pleasure quickly slips into pain. He whimpers and pulls at his cuffs until Dean finally lets go. Sam collapses against the bed, panting. Dean raises a cum soaked hand to Sam’s face and he laps at it greedily.

“Remember what I said about being grateful,” Dean prompts.

“Thank you daddy, er, sir,” Sam corrects, kissing Dean’s hand when he’s done licking it clean.

“Good,” Dean concludes. “Now it’s time for us to go. Come along, you can help me pack.” Dean kisses him again, and then releases the cuffs.

They pack quickly, shoving shirts and underwear into a pair of duffel bags. Dean leaves the bedroom and pushes his stock of pills into a small plastic bag. He checks the contents of his prescriptions and frowns. He needs to refill them soon, but he won’t have a chance. He plans on maxing out his credit cards, withdrawing whatever he has left in the bank and running. That is, after a short stop at Lisa’s. Dean pauses, listens to the sound of his boy shuffling about in the bedroom. He’s freed Sam from the headboard but kept both wrists locked in the cuffs. Sam will have to prove himself before Dean chooses to trust him. In the meantime, there are other means of control.

Dean removes two prescription pill bottles from his plastic bag and removes a total of three pills: two sleeping pills (from his bout of insomnia) and one heavy-duty pain pill. He cups them in his left hand, puts the bottles back inside the bag and brings everything to the kitchen where he fills a cup full of water.

“Sam!” he calls, waits for his boy to emerge from the bedroom and then motions him over. “Take these,” he instructs, handing the pills to Sam.
What...are they?” Sam asks warily, notices the bag under Dean’s arm, bulging with pills.

“To help you relax,” Dean explains. “Now swallow them quickly.”

Sam hesitates, but then swallows the pills, washing them down with water.

“Open,” Dean instructs, lifting the boy’s chin.

Sam opens his mouth, even his lifts his tongue. He squirms a little as Dean sticks a finger in his mouth, feeling around, but he did as he was told, which gets Dean’s nod of approval. “Good,” he says. “Now go back to packing.”

“Can I, like, wear something?” Sams asks. His wrists are cuff ed in front of him and he’s still completely naked.

Dean smiles, touches his cheek. “No,” he says. “I have to make sure you don’t try and escape.”

Sam wrinkles his nose. “But I told you I was going to be good ‘cause I wanted to come with!”

Dean nods in agreement. “You did, but you’re also a fifteen-year-old whore, Sam. I’m not magically granting you my trust, you have to earn it. Now shoo, finish packing and quit wasting my time.”

Sam scowls, but he obeys, turns around and retreats to the bedroom.

Poor boy, Dean thinks. He really has no idea what he’s in for. But Dean doesn’t feel sorry for him, that window has passed. This will be be their lives together, like Sam had wanted, though maybe not as he’d envisioned.

The Impala is waiting for them outside. He’d exchanged cars in Crestwood and left the dad-mobile in the garage. He stuffs the duffel bags in the trunk, and Sam in the back. Sam lays down with a yawn, wrapping himself in the blanket Dean has allowed him. Dean gets in, adjusts the rearview mirror with a rush of adrenaline.

“This is it kid, you ready?”

Sam looks up at him and smiles. “You better not get pulled over,” he warns. “‘Cause I’m gonna tell the cops you kidnapped me.” He turns over in the seat and the handcuffs jingle.

“Huh,” Dean smiles. “Or maybe I’ll say I’ve got you under arrest. There’s a dangerous criminal in my backseat.”

Sam laughs. “You can’t put me under arrest Dean. I don’t think you’re a cop anymore.”

Dean’s smile fades. The truth is simple and blunt. “I want you to stay down like that until we get out of Chicago,” he says, sticks his keys in the ignition, and lets the engine roar.

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A short detour to Lisa’s house. He calls beforehand and she meets him outside, gives him an ugly look as he steps out of the Chevy Impala that crawled down her street rumbling like a monster.

“What do you think you’re doing, showing up unannounced?” his ex-wife spits.

Dean tuts. “It’s not unannounced, I called.”

“You can’t do this, Dean. We had an arrangement. The lawyers -”
Dean waves away her concern. “I just want to see my son, Lisa. For ten minutes, out on the front lawn of our old house. That’s not asking much.”

Lisa narrows her eyes. “Are you drunk?”

“Jesus Christ,” Dean hisses. “I only ask for one fucking thing and -” but he catches himself. This is too important to mess up with his temper. “Five minutes, Lisa. And then I promise I’ll never ask another favor from you for as long as I live.” It sounds cheeky, but he means it, doesn’t want to give anything away though or she will think he’s drunk. It’s important to Dean to see his son one last time.

Lisa sighs. “Fine. But I swear to god, Dean, if you pull something like this again I’m calling the cops.”

Dean grins and spreads his arms. “You might find they have great things to say about me!” he jokes.

Lisa ignores him, retreating inside the house and sending Ben outside to greet him.

“Hey kiddo,” Dean says gently, wants to embrace his son but Ben stands an arms-length away, looking at him unsteadily.

“Hey Dad,” Ben says, quiet. It’s almost enough to shake Dean from his own nightmare. Maybe he could make things work with Lisa? Maybe he could explain to Bobby it was all some deep undercover shit with Sam? But no. No it’s all over and all he can do now is savor his own regret.

“Hey,” Dean repeats lamely. He had a whole speech prepared in his head but it escapes him now. Looking at Ben shoots pain into every nerve of his body.

“The...car?” Ben says, pointing behind him, at the Impala. “It um, it looks pretty cool. Did you come to show it to me?”

Dean hesitates. If only that were true. If only he could take Ben for a ride around town. But his sin is in the backseat. He has to keep Ben away. “Not exactly,” he says. “Listen, Ben. I know I don’t see you for a few weekends yet, but I’m...going away for a while and...I’m not sure when I’ll see you again.”

Ben frowns, looks confused. “Is everything okay?”

Dean hangs his head, tries to quiet the screaming in his brain. “Yeah everything’s fine,” he lies. “You’re dad’s just going on a long trip, and I thought I’d say goodbye before I go.” He opens his arms, an invitation for a hug. Ben hesitates, but then, eventually, he accepts.

“M’sorry about the birthday, and the car,” Ben mutters into his chest. “Didn’t mean to make you mad.”


The embrace ends. Ben steps back. “Are you really getting back together with mom?” he asks.

Dean’s heart stutters in his chest. “I have something I want to give you,” he deflects. Reaching into the pocket of his leather jacket Dean removes a pair of dog tags. “These were your grandfather’s,” he explains. “Vietnam. Just like the paintball field huh? Anyways I wanted to give these to you. I always wore for them for luck but...they never did me much good. Maybe they’ll work for you better.” He hands them to his son, but Ben looks wounded.
“Why are you giving these to me?” he asks, like Dean had slapped him or something. His father has had these dog tags forever, would show them to Ben and talk about his grandfather the same way little boys talk about superheroes. It feels strange, and wrong, for Dean to show up in the middle of the afternoon and demand Ben take them.

“Because this was the one, good, honest thing my father handed down to me,” Dean explains. “And this is the one, good, honest thing I can hand down to you, hmm? Remember that, okay Ben? If anybody ever says anything to you...just remember your father gave you one good, honest thing. Alright? Promise me.” Dean grabs his son’s hand and folds the dog tags into them.

Ben looks torn between anger and grief. His father isn’t making any sense and part of him wishes Dean would just go away. “Um..okay,” he says, doesn’t fight his father’s gift.

“Good,” Dean says quietly. “Good...good.”

Ben wonders if his father has gone mad. Is he dangerous? No. His father is just tired, and sad. Infinitely sad. He sees it in the way Dean’s shoulders are hunched forward, like there’s a boulder on his back, something he’s forced to carry so it doesn’t fall on to his family. Ben has always felt this way about his father, but tonight the impression is more profound.

“I have to go now,” Dean declares, retreating back to his car. “Take care of your mother, Ben. Eat your Wheaties. Stay in school. And um...don’t do drugs?” He lingers at the driver’s side, smiles one last time at his son. “Goodbye, kiddo.”

Ben watches his father get into the midnight black car he drove here in, stands back as the engine comes to life. Lisa steps back out onto the front lawn to join Ben as Dean pulls out.

The car roars again like a monster and speeds off. Dean adjusts the rearview mirror. He sees Lisa and Ben standing together, Sam passed out stone cold in his back seat.

END OF PART I
PART II

PART II VIOLENCE

Bumpity bump-bump. Like the sound you make on a mattress when you’re fucking. Humpity hump-hump. Only under the mattress there’s creaking and grinding, power, torque. Vr-Vrrrrrr-Vroooom! Deafening. Can’t block out the sound cause he can’t move, paralyzed while the world goes humpity hump-hump underneath him. And there’s something else too, mixed in with the vrooom-vrooom, or maybe laid over it. Electric longing. Familiar and human. Listen, shhh, listen!

Mine’s a tale that can’t be told...

Music. Lyrics. Sam clings to the words like a rope.

...my freedom I hold dear.

He tugs on it, starts to climb out of this pit he’s in. It’s a struggle. His limbs are weighted with sleep. But still he climbs, slowly, out of the inky quagmire of sleep.

’Twas in the darkest depths of Mordor...

Eyes are finally open. He sees black vinyl. A car seat, a window. Then it all comes rushing back: the Impala, the backseat of Dean’s car. Dean.

...I met a girl so fair.

Dean’s voice, strung together with myth and chords. Sam lies on the backseat of the Impala and listens as his other senses start to return. The pinprick of his fingers signify the awakening of his hands. Sam flexes, shifts, feels something cut into his wrists. He remembers, then, that he’s still cuffed. Stretches his legs. And naked. Vulnerable. At the mercy of the man driving this car. The mercy of Dean.

Sam feels warmth spread across his chest, like blood soaking a shirt. He always knew Dean was going to run off with him, was only surprised by how quickly Dean came to the same conclusion. That’s how Sam knew this was real, though, the beating, bloody thing between them. It was so sudden and violent they didn’t have time to think, to question, or doubt. They just let it take them, blind them, giddy with the feel of it. Like teenagers. Like criminals. Violent romance. The only kind of love Sam is made for.

He sighs. His ass still really fucking hurts.

“Hnnghh.” Sam struggles to push himself upright. His body is still heavy and uncooperative, though. He leans against the window for support. The cold glass is refreshing. Outside, the sky is pink, the sun beginning to set.

“You’re awake.”

Sam looks up, meets Dean’s eyes in the rearview mirror. He reaches over to the stereo to turn down his music. “You look out of it,” Dean says. “I would know. Mixing those pills knocks me out cold, but it’s the waking up that’s always a bitch.”
Dean laughs and it fills the emptiness inside of Sam. He has a whole new life to look forward to, with someone who promises to take care of him. He feels lucky to be half-drugged and handcuffed in the backseat. There’s been a lot of shit in Sam’s life, and very little of it he felt he could control. Being with Dean is his choice, and for once Sam’s excited about the future.

“We’ve been on the road for…’bout six hours now,” Dean continues. “Crossed the Illinois border back there. Few more miles and we’ll pull over for the night, check into a motel, get something to eat. How does that sound?”

Sam’s heart stutters when Dean uses ‘we.’ He nods, makes some sort of unintelligible noise to indicate that he agrees.

Dean says, “Good,” and then turns his music back up.

Sam lets his body sink against the window, watches the highway speed past. They pass a sign that says Rolla is 10 miles away, but he has no idea where that is. Dean said they’re outside of Illinois, but does that mean they’re headed south, east, west? Sam doesn’t know. He also doesn’t care. He’s happy to leave Chicago behind, there’s nothing left for him there.

As a runaway from Lawrence, Kansas, Sam drifted towards the Windy City because he wanted a new start, away from his dad, away from the shame of being kicked out of school. He was hoping to start over, but the same troubles that had haunted him at school followed him on the road. Hitchhiking to Chicago is where Sam first learned to sell himself. His shy smile and puckered lips were currency to lonely truckers, and Sam had run away without a penny to his name. Their offers for sex surprised Sam at first, but then it made a kind of sense. After all, his father had told him he was different (with a sad resignation that still makes Sam bristle). The kids at his boarding school knew too, his teacher….Sam started to understand there was something about him that invited men to leer, and to look, something he couldn’t control, something that was innate, that was simply who he was. Sam already knew how to have sex. Those truckers must have sensed it. So when they offered him money, or a "free" ride, Sam accepted, performed what he’d been taught, and learned pretty quickly that his effect on men could be twisted to some kind of advantage.

Chicago is where he learned he was a whore. Not just an occupation, but what he was. Men spat on him and confirmed it. Men also lavished him with gifts and declarations of their love but it was all the same: they all wanted him to shut the fuck up and stick his ass in the air. So Sam did. He let men fuck him because they knew what those truckers knew, what his father knew, what those students and his teacher knew: Sam was different, and because he was different, he deserved it. He let those men slap him, punch him, hurt him as punishment for what he was: a fag, a whore, a slut. Sam accepted it, lived fast and hard because he wanted to get to the end of it all, and quickly.

When the Chicago PD finally pulled him into that police station, it was supposed to be Sam’s reality check. But he wanted to laugh in their fucking faces. ‘You could die Sam,’ so they said. ‘You could overdose! Get a disease!’ Yeah no fuck. The Crisis Counselor shook her head at him like he was one more teenager that thought he was immortal, but no, that wasn’t it. Sam knew he was going to die bloody and violent, knew he was hurtling towards his end like a comet with its ass on fire. Why couldn’t those cops accept it? Asking him if he wanted a safe space to stay like a bunch of idiots, like they didn’t realize it was Sam that was the problem. They should have locked him up for being immoral, permanently corrupt, but they bought the lie his body told: that he was innocent, young, and he could still be saved. Bully on them, when Dean finally let him go, Sam ran back out onto the street and kept doing the same old shit, except this time when the next cock was up his ass, Sam thought about Dean, specifically his stupid self-righteous spiel, and laughed.

Sam had no idea, at the time, that it would end up like this.
Dean pulls off the highway at the Rolla exit. They pass through town until they find a dilapidated motel on the outskirts, across from a car dealership and some Chinese takeout place. Dean pulls into the gravel lot and turns off the engine. There are only three other cars besides theirs in a lot that could accommodate thirty.

“I’m gonna check us in,” Dean declares. “And then I’ll grab some Chinese from that place across the street.”

Sam’s lethargy has passed. He’s awake enough now to wrinkle his nose in protest. “That stuff’s full of grease and fat,” he points out.

“Did that sound like a question?” Dean adjusts the rearview mirror with a frown, then finally turns around to him in the backseat. “Remember what we talked about before we left. You do what I say, no questions asked.”

“But, Dean!”

Dean sighs, turns a sharp look to the boy in his backseat.

“I’m still not wearing anything,” Sam reminds, shrugs at the blanket around his shoulders. “What if someone sees, while you’re gone?”

“Who?” Dean laughs, looks around at the empty lot. “Stay still and no one will notice alright? I’ll lock you in so you’re safe.” The driver-side lock clicks in place, the other doors are already secured. Dean scoots forward in his seat, ready to leave, but lingers for a moment, eyes roaming across Sam’s skin. “You’ve got to stop second-guessing me like this, sweetheart. I don’t want to ruin the honeymoon by hurting you, but I will.”

Dean’s threat is syrupy sweet. Sam bites his lower lip and plays coy. “Sorry daddy,” he sighs, tosses his head and sinks back into the vinyl seats, the perfect picture of acquiescence.

Dean smiles at the display, nods, shuts the door. Sam watches him disappear into the motel lobby.

If he really wanted to, Sam could have lived happily-ever-after with a dozen or so daddies that had promised they loved him. But Sam didn’t love them back, couldn’t. He hated how they bought him gifts: flowers, chocolates, rare editions of his favorite Bowie albums, whatever they thought he might like. But Sam shredded every gift and threw it back in their faces. He didn’t want their doe-eyed proclamations of love, their sickly sweet yearnings. He despised them for it. He wanted to slide their cocks inside a pretty young teenager and thought he would love them for it, thought he would sigh and moan be good for them when all Sam wanted to do was to scream and to gnash his teeth.

He tried to be good, once or twice, just for the money. But it never lasted. He couldn’t quiet the demon inside him; would always turn violent and then these fat fucks wouldn’t know what to do with him. They’d stare at his tantrums and let him break their shit while Sam was screaming obscenities like prayers to heaven. Afterwards they would be the one apologizing to him! It made Sam laugh. They offered him more shit, trying to make him happy but their appeasements only made his temper worse.

The soft ones said they loved him but they didn’t really. They only knew the pretty boy trying to con them. They didn’t know about the dark, bottomless pit inside of Sam. All they saw was his winning smile. When the mask slipped, they were scared shitless by the darkness in him. But Dean wasn’t. Dean grabbed the demon in him and brought it to heel. Only someone with a demon at least as vicious as his could have done that. Sam was left bruised that night, bloodied. But it was his heart that hurt more than his backside. He had been hoping this whole time that Dean could be different.
than the rest. And he was. It was a fairy tale romance straight out of the Brothers Grimm.

When Dean exits the lobby with a pair of room keys, Sam presses himself against the passenger window, eager for his return. He waits to be let out but Dean just stands there. Impatiently, Sam tries to unlock the door, but he fumbles with his hands in cuffs, and fingers still heavy from the drugs.

“Let me out,” Sam whines.

Dean steps back and shakes his head.

He’s teasing me! Sam thinks, and loves it. “Pleeeasssseeee,” he begs, batting his eyelashes and pursing his lips.

Dean puts a hand to his ear like he can’t quite hear him.

Sam grins wickedly. With his face pressed to the glass he exhales and draws a heart in the center of the condensation. Dean waves it away like he’s not impressed, so Sam tries again. This time he draws a fat dick with a pair of balls. Sam bats his eyes at Dean and then kisses the tip, sucking lecherously at the imaginary cock.

“Cut that out,” Dean scolds, knocking on the glass. “I don’t want your spit on my friggin’ windows!”

Sam sticks his tongue out. Dean flips him off, unlocks the trunk and gets their bags while Sam’s heart beats steadily to thoughts of I think I love you, I think I love you. With one duffel swung over each shoulder, Dean finally unlocks the driver’s side door, then reaches back to unlock his. Sam waits, pulls the blanket about himself tighter. Finally Dean opens the back door and slides his arms under Sam, lifts him out of the car like he’s a paper doll. He adjusts the bags about his shoulders with a shrug, shuts the door with his hip.

Dean carries Sam like a bride across the threshold of the motel room where they’ll spend their first night together, and Sam is so happy he thinks his heart might burst. “Your honeymoon suite, milady,” Dean jokes.

It’s a small room with off-white walls and blue carpeting, one tiny window near the door and two beds, which Sam hopes is mostly for show. Dean drops him onto the bed nearest the bathroom, a toilet with a door and sink outside, and sits down next to him. Sam is spread out on the paisley flower bedspread, naked under Dean’s eyes. He folds his chained wrists over his chest and parts his legs.

But Dean sees his arousal and turns his back. “I’ll get us something to eat,” he says. “But I have to cuff you to the bed while I’m gone.”

Sam’s heart sinks, disappointed. He wants Dean to consummate this, them, but his man is always ambivalent to offers of sex. What, then, can Sam offer him?

“Dean…”

Dean acknowledges him with a grunt, pulls at a small chain from around his neck. The handcuff key appears from under his shirt.

“M’sorry about talking back, before,” he says. “Know I wanna be good for you, right?”

Dean turns back to him, unlocks Sam’s right hand. “You’ve got some work to do,” he dismisses.
Sam lets his hand fall to his side, bites his lip and exposes his throat like an animal displaying its submission. “Show me?” Sam prompts, the same way he asks for sex.

That, finally, gets Dean’s attention. He narrows his eyes, suspicious, but hungry for Sam’s meekness in a way that he wasn’t for Sam’s body. “Show you?” Dean repeats, reaches out and touches Sam’s neck. Sam sighs like it was his cock.

“Mm-hmm,” he says, soft and lascivious. “You want to, don’t you? Make me behave.”

Dean massages Sam’s neck roughly, digging his thumb into the side of Sam’s throat, pressing down on his Adam’s apple. He smiles thoughtfully at Sam, like he’s wise to his seduction. “You’re a funny thing,” he says softly. “Do you like to get hurt, is that what gets you off?” With his hand around Sam’s throat, Dean tightens his grip. Sam feels his air supply cut off, but it comes back quickly.

“How does Sam explain it? But maybe he doesn’t need to. Dean nods like he understands anyways, and then leans down to kiss him.

Sam loves the taste of this man! Loves the feel of Dean’s beard scratching his mouth, the way Dean bites at his lips, his tongue, and then possesses his whole mouth. Loves the threatening hand around his neck that squeezes and releases in a gentle rhythm like they’re fucking. Ah, Sam loves! He feels stupid and silly for being consumed with it so quickly, but there’s no denying it. Love. Yes. He loves the way Dean forces him to feel, vulnerable and helpless like a child. He thinks he might love Dean. Sam trembles. Yes, he just might.

“Hurt me,” Sam chokes, after another few breathless seconds. “Do it.”

Dean’s nostrils flare. “I don’t take orders,” he reminds, applying more pressure to Sam’s throat.

Sam swallows, it’s difficult. “Yes. But just so you know, I want you to.”

“Oh my little boy,” Dean sighs, burying his face in Sam’s neck. “Look what do you do to me, hmm? The monster I’ve become…..”

More pressure. Sam gasps for one last breath before his air supply is cut off. With only one hand Dean holds him there, pinned to the mattress and unable to breath. This is what Sam gives to him, his life in Dean’s hands. He knows he’s going to die anyways but if Sam has any choice in how it’s done, this is what he chooses, to let Dean decide. Dean knows this, and it overwhelms him.

“This is right, Sam. You and me. It’s just right. I know it. You deserve this, right here, just like this, under my hand.”

Sam begins to feel light-headed. His mouth gapes like a fish, desperate for air. Involuntarily he begins to struggle. There’s a buzzing in his ears, and the jingle-jangle of the cuff still around his left wrist.

“I’ll decide everything for you, Sam. When you sleep, when you eat, when you breathe.”

Sam chokes. His hands flail. There’s a sudden, rising panic that he might actually die and a tiny voice in the back of his head screams no, please not yet! It surprises Sam, to discover he has any fucks left to give about his own life.

“Shhh, hush, accept what I give you,” Dean whispers as his grip tightens.
The last thing Sam sees is Dean’s peaceful face, choking him until the world goes black.

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When Sam wakes, Dean is gone. He waits patiently until Dean returns, and the room reeks of cheap Chinese takeout. His throat is on fire--it feels like he drank acid and his breath comes out in slow, labored whines. He tries to swallow and the pain brings tears to his eyes.

“Hey.”

A hand against his face, a thumb wiping away his tears. Sam turns his head to see Dean again, looking with his forever calm, placid face.

“Sit up,” Dean instructs. “I brought dinner.”

Dean helps him upright. Sam sees his right arm is still free, but his left has been cuffed to the metal bed frame like Dean had promised.

Touching his throat gingerly, Dean examines him. “This will bruise. We’ll have to cover it up. Maybe tomorrow we can buy you your own clothes. But for now, you need to eat.”

Dean reaches for the bag of Chinese on the set of drawers between beds. Sam thinks about the pain of swallowing and whimpers.

“It hurts,” he says, voice ugly and raw.

“I know.” Dean digs into the takeout bag and pulls out a plastic container of hot and sour soup. He opens it up, digs out a spoon, and holds it out for Sam to take.

But Sam wrinkles his nose and turns his head.

“It’s warm. It’ll make your throat feel better,” Dean prompts.

That’s not why Sam refuses, though. “S’like a shit load of sodium,” he rasps. “I don’t want it.”

Dean stares for a long minute, like he’s been slapped. “I told you to eat. The soup, Sam.”

It’s a warning and Sam knows it, knows he should fold under Dean like he’s supposed to, but part of him stubbornly resists. “I don’t like take-out,” he repeats.

Dean narrows his eyes into slits. Sam waits for the outburst but then Dean suddenly laughs. “Oh! That’s right!” he says, shaking his head like silly ol’ me. “You don’t like take out. I guess I forgot! Because um...you told me and then...what was it I said, right after that?”

Sam watches Dean carefully, his heart beating faster, but not in the fluttering happy way it had before. “Y-you said to do what you say...no questions asked.”

Dean’s smile drops like a heavy brick. “Right. So. Let’s try this again.” Dean scoops up a spoonful of the soup and holds it out to Sam. “Eat.”

Sam stares at the food in disgust. His throat closes up. Dean has never hurt him. Not without cause, at least, and not in a way Sam couldn’t stand. All of the hurt that has happened, Sam has willingly invited. This too, he thinks, will be pain he invites, if he refuses to eat. But the fear of the unknown is like a rubber band stretched taut between them. What will Dean do when he snaps? Dean hasn’t caused Sam pain that he couldn’t handle, but Dean could. The threat is in his hulk, the tone of his voice, the way he grips Sam and digs his nails into his flesh. Dean is telling Sam to be careful,
watch out, *or else*. That ‘or else’ hangs in the air now. How bad is it, and what is Sam willing to wager to find out?

As it so happens, not a bowl of sweet and sour soup. Sam opens his mouth and allows Dean to feed him.

“Yes. Good boy,” Dean praises, warm and soothing like the soup down his throat. It hurts to swallow, but it’s not as bad as Sam thought. And, as it turns out, he’s quite hungry.

“Thank you,” Sam says, after the soup is gone.

Dean smiles, dabs at Sam’s lips with a napkin. “You’re welcome.”

The empty container gets shoved onto the chest of drawers and Dean crawls onto the bed beside him. Sam lays his head against Dean’s shoulder, as far as his shackled hand will allow him. Dean kisses him on his forehead, runs fingers through his hair. Sam sighs through his raw throat, shifts his hips to the side so his ass hurts less, and remembers his earlier thoughts about loving Dean.
Chapter Notes

This chapter contains abuse to minors, enemas, stuffing weird shit up poopholes, and basically it's all super fucked up. Or, as my beta put it, this chapter is INTENSE. So be warned and tread carefully.

Everything is magical. Perfect. Like a Disney film drawn in blood. Because those are the only kind of happily-ever-afters that Sam imagines himself in, the ones that end before the credits roll, the ones where everyone shakes their heads and says “where did it all go wrong?” But that’s missing the point because there isn’t a beginning to people like them, just an end. And Dean has it marked clearly on a map.

“This is the trail of Bonnie and Clyde,” Dean explains, pointing to a map sprawled out across both their laps where Dean has a drawn a line through the towns they’ll visit. “We start here in Missouri, make our way to Oklahoma, Texas, then loop back up to Louisiana.”

The meandering line stops at Gibsland, Louisiana. A heavy red X marks the end.

“That’s where they died, you know,” Dean reminds.

Sam interprets the red X literally, like a lifeline on his palm. How many miles is that? He tries to measure how much time they have left together. “We don’t gotta drive right through,” Sam asks. “We can see the sights?”

Dean laughs like the devil. “Yeah, we can see the sights.”

So they begin their journey: Sam, Dean, and the Impala, cutting through the states, staying at cheap roadside motels or camping in the car. They eat at diners, or grab something at the nearest gas station. They keep afloat by hustling for cash. Dean plays pool at the local dive bar while Sam lifts the wallets off unsuspecting strangers. They steal clothes when they need to, pick pockets for stray wallets. No robbing banks or killing cops. They may be traveling the path of Bonnie and Clyde, but their violence is kept for themselves.

“Sit up straight. Don’t talk back. Eat your dinner - more, more, no all of it. Bend over. Smile.”

There are rules - strictly enforced. Sam must do as he’s told, immediately, and without hesitation. If Dean even perceives an infraction, he will invent a new punishment to correct Sam, or resurrect an old favorite. Dean’s punishments are harsh, and often cruel. If Sam doesn’t clean his plate for dinner, Dean will order him a new dish and force him to eat until he’s sick which means there’s a pile of Sam’s vomit every 50 miles like a road marker. Or Dean will make him clean the Impala with his own toothbrush (and refuse to replace it) or lock him in a closet for a day, then beat him for the smell of piss. Sam is never without bruises, on his neck, his ass, his chest. He begins to predict when the next beating will happen by how clear his skin is; after one set of bruises heals, another set is sure to follow. But Sam, in his own way, enjoys the marking. Because there are bite marks mixed in amongst the ugly yellow and purple splotches, and Dean’s hand prints from where he gripped Sam and didn’t let go. It feels like being owned, to Sam, and since his own father silently turned his back on him, Sam is desperate for the recognition.
Dean is cruel when he’s angry, but afterwards, his kindness makes the suffering worthwhile. Sam lives for the soft kisses peppered across his lacerated skin, Dean’s moans of pleasure, happy to see the effects of his own hands. There are no apologies, only reminders that Sam brought this on himself. And the worst part, the most wonderful, is that Sam can only accept the pleasure because of the pain. If Dean’s love for him was syrupy sweet, Sam would turn his nose and reject it, like he had all the other men before him. Sam is suspicious of love that is kind. He doesn’t trust those who are compassionate and caring, it’s alien to him. He knows fairy tales are meticulously crafted lies, and that the mundane lives of sitcom characters are denying the cold, hard facts: the world and everyone in it is awful. You carve what you can out of the awfulness and make it your own, that's Sam’s personal psalm. Love must have pain, or else it’s a lie. Knowing this, Sam’s love for Dean overflows with pain, and gives every one of Dean’s punishments a charitable purpose.

“Bend over,” Dean instructs. “Then lay your hands across the bed.”

Ponder, Texas. They’ve been together for three months now and Dean takes every opportunity to correct Sam for the smallest of infractions: a wrong look or a bad attitude. The punishments are stranger, more humiliating.

“Now!”

Sam jumps to attention, bends over and lays his palms flat out on the bed, ass exposed to the air. He’s already nude. There’s a pair of handcuffs attached to a chain, attached to the metal frame of the bed. Dean takes the cuffs and tightens them around his wrists; Sam spends about half of his time attached to something else.

Sam shifts his hips, waiting for what comes next: Dean’s new favorite punishment, the long plastic nozzle and the bag of lukewarm water. When the nozzle gets inserted inside him, Sam braces himself against the bed. Soon, a slow stream of water crawls into his gut, filling him up, stretching his stomach.

Depending on how severe the punishment is, Dean will add things to the water. Today it’s soap. Sam can tell by the way it makes his stomach cramp.

“Ungh,” he complains, tugging at his restraints.

“I told you not to speak out of turn,” Dean scolds. “When we’re out, you only speak when you have permission. How many times do I have to remind you?”

The water floods his insides a little too quickly. Sam bites the sheets as his colon fills but, silently, he accepts his punishment. Sam is surprised by how well he’s contorted himself to fit Dean’s mold. There’s a kind of relief in letting go of himself. In his opinion, there wasn’t much worth hanging on to. What he is now is better than what he was before, and he has Dean and Dean alone to thank for that. Sam is flooded with gratitude just as he’s flooded with water.

“I love you,” he confesses, not for the first time.

Dean smiles as he clamps the hose shut, waits for the last remnants of water to drain into Sam. “That’s not going to save you,” he replies. It’s a call and response that makes Sam’s insides feel all warm and fuzzy, and not just because of the enema.

Dean removes the nozzle and goes to the bathroom, laying the enema bag in the sink. Then he takes a small plug with a wide base, liberally applies some lube, returns, and inserts it inside of Sam like a stopper. He does this with practiced ease.
“Okay,” he says. “Forty minutes, Sam.”

Sam clenches and unclenches his fists. But it’s okay. He’s done this before. He knows he can take it. “Yes sir,” he whispers, repeats it again louder when he sees Dean frown.

“Good boy,” Dean says, grabbing his keys. Sam won’t see him again for that whole forty minutes, and that’s the worst part. Outside the motel, the Impala starts. Sam pulls at his cuffs. The steel cuts into his wrists. There’s blood. Quickly, Sam shifts forward on the bed and laps at the wound. If Dean sees the blood on the sheets he might get angry.

Dean’s control has become absolute. He feeds Sam, washes Sam, dresses and undresses him as well. Dean has a say in every part of his life, rewriting over Sam’s original personality like old data. And no detail is too small. Even Sam’s musical preferences are dictated by Dean.

“Do you know the lyrics?” Dean quizzes.

They’re flying down the highway together while one of only six classic rock albums Dean owns plays on repeat. Dean looks at him seriously and Sam starts studying Dean’s favorite songs like his life depends on the grade.

“This drum solo’s spliced in from two different sessions,” Dean remarks as they listen to ‘Whole Lotta Love.’ Sam commits this piece of trivia to memory in case Dean asks about it later, and soon his whole world is filed with AC/DC and Jimmy Page’s life story. He starts to forget his own favorites, the ones that pulled him out of his darkest times, like David Bowie’s “Rebel Rebel.” Sam tries to silently mouth the lyrics at night when Dean is asleep and he’s cuffed to the bed. But slowly, he forgets. If only he could hear the song one more time! But the best he can hope for is split second of Ziggy Stardust from a passing car.

It might seem tragic, but Sam is impartial to his loss of liberty. It never felt like he had much to begin with. All the major decisions in his life were dictated out of necessity; other decisions, by men. The only difference; that Dean is the man controlling him now, totally, completely, and Sam is at peace with that. It even feels like love. Sam’s own father never put this much effort into correcting him. Sent him to boarding school so someone else could “straighten” him out, and when that didn’t work, his father gave up. Sam shudders, back arching as the soap makes his stomach cramp, or maybe because of a memory. Rain. Mud. His burnt things piled outside on the corner of the driveway. His father’s empty face and Sam screaming until his chest hurt.

The lock jimmys. The motel room door swings open. Dean steps through a curtain of light like a sainted figure. His punishment has ended. Sam looks up, tears on his cheek. Dean’s hard look softens.

“Baby boy,” Dean says, touching his hand to Sam’s cheek. “What did we learn?”

“I’m sorry,” Sam begs, broken and more pathetic than he’d like. “I’m sorry sir, I won’t - I won’t ever -.”

“Sshhh,” Dean hushes, unlocks the handcuffs and gently guides Sam to his feet. “Come.”

Dean leads him to the bathroom and Sam clumsily follows on sleeping feet. They stop in front of the toilet and Dean motions for him to bend over. Sam does. He feels Dean grip the base of the plug and prepares himself.

“Ready?” Dean asks. Sam nods.

The plug is removed. Sam clenches his muscles until he’s allowed to sit, and then slowly lowers
himself onto the toilet. Dean stands next to him, washing the plug in the sink. At the sound of running water, Sam gratefully relieves himself of the soap. It’s an unpleasant process. His stomach continues to cramp. He folds his arms over himself and whimpers.

Dean finishes washing the plug and turns off the sink. He hears Sam whimpering and smiles, like a proud father, or maybe an artist. After all, he created this spectacle. “Does it hurt?” Dean asks, not because he’s concerned but because he’s testing the efficacy of his punishment. Once Sam said it only hurt “a little bit” and Dean immediately repeated the enema, flushing Sam’s bowels with so much soap it made him beg for mercy. Since then, Sam’s learned his lesson.

“Yes,” he says, because it’s true, and because he fears worse.

Dean nods, satisfied. He runs a hand through Sam’s hair, cups his face. His calloused thumb brushes against Sam’s lips. Instinctually, Sam opens his mouth. Dean’s thumb slips inside. Sam sees Dean’s expression jump from tenderness to arousal and his heart beats quickly in confused anticipation.

“Are you done?” Dean asks.

Sam shudders as he pushes the last of the soapy water out of himself, and then nods, careful to keep Dean’s thumb perched on his lip.

“Good boy,” Dean praises. He helps Sam stand, wipes him and flushes the tissue down the toilet.

Sam, head bent in shame and embarrassment, follows Dean back into the bedroom. From Dean’s expression in the bathroom, Sam knows what’s coming next. He climbs onto the bed and, unprompted, presents his asshole again, this time, cheeks spread wide.

Their sex life together hasn’t been exactly what Sam expected. They don’t fuck, not the way Sam knows how. He’s not even sure if what they do counts as sex. Sam is penetrated, and he orgasms, it’s just...everything else about it that feels sort of weird. Like, he never gets to touch Dean, ever. If his hand even grazes over Dean’s crotch by accident Dean will beat him and then refuse to touch him until Sam begs for forgiveness. But Sam needs Dean to touch him, to want him. He has no choice but to go along.

Dean blindfolds him with a slip of silk. The gentleness betrays his intentions. “Ready?” Dean asks and even though Sam is raw and sore from the enema he nods because there’s no other answer he’s allowed to give. ‘No’ will mean pain and abandonment, hours, maybe even days of being left alone. He nods.

“Good boy,” Dean praises, and Sam is left to wait in anticipation.

Dean treats Sam’s body with sick fascination, as if Sam were nothing but a bundle of nerves and open holes, a science experiment gone wrong, an abomination that Dr. Frankenstein himself can only shake his head and sneer at. Dean experiments with him every night, pinches, pulls, and plugs him up just to see what happens. One time Dean created a cage for his cock, locked Sam in it, cruelly stimulating him for days, got tired of Sam’s begging, gagged him, only to keep at it. Another time he made a cock ring out of rubber bands, left it on Sam too long until Sam thought his dick would fall off (and the complaint only made Dean laugh, “What do you need that thing for anyways?” he said). Dean pulls at his balls, pinches at them with clothespins, pricks them, flicks, twists them until Sam weeps and even then it’s no guarantee the pain will stop. But by far, Dean’s favorite experiment is to shove everything, and anything, up Sam’s ass. Hot and cold towels sheathed in a condom, broom handles, produce, a pool noodle, light bulbs, power cords, bottles, and even an inflatable cycle inner tube. Dean inserts what he can find and analyzes the results with a mixture of delight and disgust.
Tonight is another mystery. Sam is blindfolded and already feels Dean’s lubed fingers sliding inside of him. The plug has opened him up, but Dean demands more, shoving four fingers inside of Sam and stretching him further. Sam whimpers, feels as if he’s about to burst but he doesn’t resist. Sam has learned a lot about his body since he left with Dean. Namely, that it’s a lot tougher than he thought. It can be twisted, pulled, stretched, beaten, and bruised, and yet he’s still here, breathing, living. Obstinate? Maybe. Definitely stupid. But Sam has a growing pride in this weathered and beaten thing that encases his soul. It’s the only pride he’s allowed to have.

Dean removes his fingers and Sam hears clacking next, like the sound cue of balls in the bars where Dean hustles for cash. Then, the stretching and snapping of a condom. Sam takes a deep breath when Dean touches him next. Something heavy and wide is placed onto his hole, very slowly demanding access. Sam tries to relax the best he can, empties his head of everything, even the pain. It’s circular, not rough, which is a relief in itself. Sam has been cut by the things Dean has put in him. It’s left him bleeding, in pain, and at the mercy of Dean’s temper. Tonight the plug is smooth but wide, encased in something, though Sam doesn’t know what.

He winces as the pressure grows and his muscles are forced to give way. He even gasps at the widest point! But then his body finally swallows the object. Except, wait, there’s more. Once, twice, three times his ass expands and contracts, like he’s being fucked with the fattest anal beads known to mankind. Inside, the weight is heavy, nearly unbearable. It’s like a bowling ball sitting inside of his colon. Which Dean will find interesting. “How does it feel?” he asks.

“Heavy,” Sam admits. “Big.”

“Sock full of cue balls from that shit bar at the end of town. Guess what numbers?” Dean prods, giddy, almost childish.

Sam grunts. “Dunno.”

“Seven, thirteen, five. That’s the day we ran off together.” Dean drags his fingers across Sam’s abdomen, tenderly pushes at his gut to feel the cue balls inside. “Today is our three month anniversary. Did you know that?”

Dean is cruel and then kind, beautiful, even sweet. It catches him off guard, rips him apart and turns him to putty. “Thank you,” Sam mutters brokenly. He feels like crying again.

Dean hears it in his voice and kisses his back gently. “Shhh. I know baby, it’s okay. C’mon, c’mere.” Dean guides him off the bed again, hands Sam his clothes. Sam dresses with Dean’s help, a finger pressed against his ass to keep the cue balls inside.

Sometimes they ride in the car after Dean is done experimenting with him. It’s cathartic how they blissfully speed down dirt roads, holding hands. Tonight Dean wants Sam to be plugged up while they ride so Sam follows and obediently climbs inside the Impala, buckles himself in with three cue balls nestled inside. Dean joins him, and together they pull out of the cheap motel, away from town, out to nowhere.

They drive until the sun finally sets, until it’s dark and the roads are nothing but country. Then Dean pulls over, and turns off the car. Sam turns to him in surprise, anticipation.

“Unbuckle and take off your clothes,” Dean commands, hunger glinting in his eyes like starlight.

Sam obeys, throws off the seat belt, slowly shimmies his jeans down past his legs and removes his shirt. He looks back to Dean when he’s done, a dog waiting for a command.
“Sit in my lap.”

The command sends shivers up Sam’s spine. His cock, already stimulated by the things inside him, aches. Sam nods, licks his lips and carefully gets up, crosses to the driver’s side and lowers himself into Dean’s lap. Dean growls possessively at the weight, digs his fingers into Sam and pulls him close, closer and closer like he wants to swallow Sam into himself.

Sam moans at the heat along his backside, twitching his hips instinctively.

“Shhh, sit still baby boy.”

Sam does as he’s told, lies still against Dean’s chest, on his lap, their legs twined together, feet hovering over the accelerator like a threat. Dean’s breath is hot and loud in his ear. The moment is still, but violent. Dean presses against his back, an adder about to strike. Sam waits, hoping to be spared, but also wishing for the worst. Then Dean moves, arm shooting out to start the car again. It roars beneath them like a beast. He shifts into gear, steps on the gas and they tear out of dirt, back onto the road.

Sam holds his breath as the wind whips his hair. Dean is hot and furious beneath him like the raging black engines of the Impala. In the driver’s seat, together, practically the same. The speedometer jerks to his right: 75, 85, 90. Sam sees the road speeding towards them, at them, swallowed under them. Sam envisions the map Dean has, where he marked the end and envisions them hurtling towards the giant red X. Sam’s heart beats out the erratic rhythm of his love. He’s so happy to be alive, for as long as that lasts.

“Sammy,” Dean croaks, his pet name for Sam when things are raw and awful. Sam would skin himself and give it to Dean if he could, but what more is there left to give? “Sammy,” Dean repeats, the hand wrapped around him presses against his stomach as Dean hips grind into him as well.

It almost feels like being fucked, and Sam gasps with the revelation. This is sex: Dean penetrating him, owning him. Sam wants that more than anything else in the world. “Dean!” he cries, one hand on Dean’s thigh, the other draped across the hand that’s steering. “Yes! God!”

Dean growls again, nails digging into his skin. There’s an almost-rhythm to it, almost-sex, almost-love. Dean’s hand wavers on the steering wheel. Sam doesn’t notice.

“Fuck me!” Sam cries, over the wind and the roar of the engines. A bug hits the windshield. Its guts splatter across the glass. Sam relates. “Dean, fuck me, please!”

Dean grinds against him, pushing the cue balls in his belly. Sam bounces in his lap as they hurtle down the empty country road. “Your cock is so fat,” Sam whines. “It’s so fucking big, Dean. Fuck. I can’t. Jesus!”

“Sammy!” Dean growls.

It really feels like fucking, the way the cue balls are moving inside Sam, driving him mad, the way Dean is panting and cursing under his breath. Sam doesn’t even touch himself, doesn’t need to, clings to Dean for life because it’s the truth anyways. His body is alight, his senses dulled with pleasure. He barely registers the speedometer hitting a hundred, Dean’s hand missing from the wheel, the way the car drifts to the right. Sam comes just as the Impala careens off the road. He gasps. Is this the end? But Dean’s hands shoot out from around him, grabs the wheel. The car spins madly, but then, finally, it stops.

“Little boy,” Dean moans, actually moans, a rare thing for his daddy.
“I love you,” Sam spits, could say it hundred times and never tire of it.

Dean responds with kisses that turn into possessive bites, peppered love marks along his neck. They sit together catching their breath thinking how close they were to death. Sam knew they weren’t going to die because this wasn’t Louisiana, but still, if they had, it would have been okay. It would have been perfect.

As the dust starts to settle, the ache of the cue balls inside him becomes too much. “Dean,” Sam croaks, and Dean sighs.

“Yeah, okay.”

He might have been punished for voicing his discomfort but something feels different now. Dean doesn’t look cross. Instead he gently guides Sam onto his back, sprawled on the Impala’s bench seat, Sam’s knees drawn up to his chest

“Let’s get this out of you, hmm?” Dean says, lightly pressing on his abdomen.

Sam nods. Dean tugs at the makeshift handle he tied to the sock as a base. He pulls out the three cue balls and with them all of Sam’s dirty noises. The sock gets tossed into the back seat. Dean stares at his boy, the tiny, pale thing that has offered to die for him. Sam sits up and Dean pulls him into a kiss. Sam can feel Dean shaking, sweating. This is new, he thinks, and then suddenly Dean is unzipping his pants and pushing Sam down.

Sam doesn’t need to be told to take Dean into this mouth, he does it eagerly, wraps his lips around Dean’s half-hard cock and sucks. This is the first time, he realizes, the first time he’s been able to touch Dean’s cock, even see it! Does this mean he’s finally earned it? The thought makes him dizzy with pleasure. Sam uses all of his best techniques on Dean, every trick in the book he’s ever learned. He rotates his hands, sucks on the tip, tantalizes, teases, even sucks at Dean’s balls. But as the dust settles back down into nothing, so does Dean’s cock. Whatever pleasure was there slips away and Dean’s moans quickly turn into grunts of pain and frustration.

Sam pulls back, sees Dean’s cock soft and flaccid against his sun-kissed skin. He frowns, confused, makes the mistake of looking back at Dean where raw fury lurks. For the first time in this strange twisted relationship, Sam is afraid of his lover.

“Some fucking whore you are!” Dean shouts. “Can’t even suck cock, what’s the fucking use of you ?!?”

Dean strikes him across the face. Sam’s head bounces off the steering wheel, and buries itself in the vinyl seats. Dean strikes out at him with fists, and with his feet. Sam cowers on the other side of the car but he can’t shield himself from Dean’s onslaught. Fists slam into his head again, and again. Sam cries out for Dean to stop but he doesn’t, he won’t.

Sam had thought of Dean as the perfect paragon of masculinity. It had never occurred to him that there was something deficient. He was waiting to be deemed worthy of Dean, worthy of being touched, being fucked. But that time will never come. Dean’s not teasing him, this is simply who he is and it might never, ever, get better than this.

Sam feels the earth open up beneath him. Unconsciousness comes quickly and, mercifully, swallows him whole.
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains references to underage sexual abuse, homophobic slurs, and minor character death

One Year Ago, Before Chicago

There’s a rock song inside Sam’s head, strobing lights and gyrating hips. There’s glitter in the air and screaming guitar chords. There’s eyeliner, makeup, tight fishnet shirts. Ziggy Stardust sings to him that he’s not alone and it’s so loud it fills up the stadium of his body with it’s energy and rhythm. Rock n’ Roll Suicide is Ziggy’s last song on the Spiders From Mars album. Ziggy, that strange, beautiful man that David Bowie inhabits, fills Sam with wonder and desire. He wants to take Sam’s hands before he goes and tell him he’s wonderful. Sam plays that part over and over again: stop, rewind, repeat. There’s no headphones or speakers, no buttons to push, because this is all carefully preserved in Sam’s memory. They don’t allow outside music at St. John’s Military Academy for Boys. Not that it’ll matter for much longer.

Gimme your hands 'cause you're wonderful. Gimme your hands 'cause you're wonderful. Oh gimme your hands.

Sam traces the Bowie bolt tattoo on the inside of his wrist, badly made and shaky from the self-inflicted pain but it stands as his single act of defiance against this place. The school tried to fit him into a mold but he couldn’t be contained, exploded out of their shell like a star going supernova, the beautiful beginning and end of his short life here.

Gimme your hands 'cause you're wonderful.

Sam is being expelled from St. John’s Military Academy because he’d been a very naughty boy. Sam sneers. Is a naughty boy. Vile. Disgusting. Used up. Broken. Whorefagqueer. He is a disgrace to their prestigious name, to their reputation, so they are sending him back home with a “do not return” label smacked right over his ass.

That is, if they can figure out how to return him.

“Hello Mr. Wesson, this is the secretary from St. John’s. The dean spoke to you about your son’s expulsion, and we’re trying to arrange a time for you to come pick him up. Please call us back, your son is waiting for you in our offices.”

The secretary sighs, hangs up the receiver. She keeps picking at her lip, smudging off that hideous clown lipstick of hers until only half her uneven smile is painted red. This is the second day in a row that his father hasn’t answered the phone and the secretary is getting agitated. Sam is less agitated. His father has been quietly withdrawing from him for the last three months, fewer phone calls, stilted conversation, like he knew this was coming, could taste Sam’s failure in the wind. Henry Wesson has been withdrawing for months, so total radio silence doesn’t surprise him.

“Maybe there are some relatives we can contact?” the secretary asks him, optimistic about dumping him off on someone else.
“I dunno about mom’s side but all of dad’s cousins live in other states. I haven’t seen none of them in forever, anyways.”

“You haven’t seen any of them,” the secretary corrects, then sighs like an apology. After all what did it matter, he was a lost cause. “Is your father home, at least? Do you have access to the house? Then we could arrange a ride for you.”

Sam frowns. He was sort of hoping she would give up after that last phone call, feel sorry for him and let him stay another day. Not that Sam wants to be a prisoner on campus, but he also doesn’t want to go home. Caught in some kind of limbo, unsure and scared of the future. He’s been thinking about running away a lot, builds himself up to it but never follows through.

“There’s a key under the mat,” Sam finally admits. “And the bus station isn’t all that far from my house. I’ve walked there before, rode a Greyhound to campus, summer last semester, by myself.”

The secretary nods.

“n’...I guess I have enough money fer a ticket home.” Sam stares at his feet. His hair has started to grow back, but his bangs are too short to hide his face. He swears he’ll never let anybody cut it again.

“Good, that’s very good Sam. I’ll drive you to the station and you can buy a ticket,” the secretary concludes, grabbing her purse and leaping towards the door.

Sam is a little put off by her enthusiasm to kick him out. If he were waiting for her conscience to kick in, the tiny little angel on her shoulder that’s supposed to tell her turning out a fourteen-year-old by himself is a crappy thing to do, it never comes. Not that Sam’s offended. He’s stopped being surprised by how shit people are.

They leave the administrative offices together, the secretary guiding Sam across campus, towards the main parking lot where he gets one last, torturous goodbye tour of the school he was forced to attend.

St. John’s Military Academy is a sprawling campus with over 200 boys attending grades 6-12. Sam was enrolled when he was thirteen as punishment for listening to his favorite Bowie album, at least that’s the way Sam saw it. He never did anything right in Henry’s eyes, didn’t wear the right clothes, or hang out with the right people, hair too long, body too skinny. And his father always let him know, slinging “fag” and “queer” at him like feces. So Sam learned to hide the things he enjoyed, understood even then that what he liked and who he was were connected, and that his father’s scorn was aimed at both. Then one night Henry found Sam hiding under the covers with a pair of treacherous headphones glued to his ears listening to Ziggy Stardust. That was his father’s “last straw,” and the next thing Sam knew his hair was gone and he was being shoved into a uniform.

Henry Wesson had never been in the military or attended a military school but he believed in all the same things the St. John’s pamphlet spelled out in bright red and yellow lettering. The school had a very particular idea about what kind of men boys should grow up to be, and it wasn’t the thin, glittery androgynous gods that Sam secretly worshipped. St. John’s warned him that those kinds of men were bad, dangerous, dirty, and because Sam liked those kinds of men, he knew that made him dirty too. So when his favorite teacher started touching him, Sam didn’t fight it.

“Gimme me your hands, Sam. Gimme your hands. That’s right. Feels good doesn’t it?”

“You’re special Sam, wonderful. Oh you’re so wonderful.”

“My good little boy. My special baby boy.”
Mr. Lucas was the only one to tell Sam he was good, with his arms wrapped around him like he was the most important thing in the world. Good boy, his teacher had said, you’re such a good little boy. Of course being a good boy meant doing the things Mr. Lucas wanted. But if Sam was going to be dirty either way (and he knew he was, the way his father sneered at him, because there was something fundamentally wrong with him) then at least with Mr. Lucas he was dirty and good. A fag to the rest of the world, but at least he meant something to someone for as long as his private lessons lasted. And that was more than he meant at home.

Later Sam would read how Mr. Lucas “groomed” and “victimized” him, but those words were ugly and they obscured the truth. The truth was Sam would have said yes to the first person who said they loved him or offered a moment’s peace in what felt like hell. The stupid, grubby reporter who wrote those words didn’t understand how shitty St. John’s really was.

Sam’s first day on campus, he was shaved and given an ill-fitting uniform. He was screamed at by instructors and shoved around by fellow classmates, older boys who had singled him out of the crowd like a target on his back had come with the uniform. The rations were meager, meant to teach humility, but it only taught Sam to hoard food. Candy bars, bags of chips, anything that was lying around unattended he would keep under his mattress, in a hole he had cut away. That method got him by for about a month until one of the instructors flipped his mattress, then it was screaming and sweating and a five mile run until he couldn’t breathe. After that the instructors didn’t like him, singled him out as much as the classmates who had never liked him. Shouts of “queer” and “fag” became a part of his daily routine and after three months, Sam just kind of...stopped. He lost his appetite, stopped eating, stopped studying, and began suffering acute panic attacks, sent to the nurse’s office with a scowl. His grades dropped, and that’s when Mr. Lucas noticed him.

The secretary’s heels click-clack-click-clack loudly across the pavement as they cross in front of the middle and upper school classrooms. Sam lingers for a moment, hoping to catch one last glimpse of his former teacher before he’s permanently removed.

Mr. Lucas saw that Sam was suffering and tried to ease it. Maybe that was predatory behaviour, Sam didn’t really care. He doesn’t blame Mr. Lucas. After all, his teacher isn’t the reason Sam is being expelled.

The bell rings. Boys pour out of the three separate schooling halls. Sam stiffens, limbs locked in fear. He scans the crowd wildly, not for teachers, but for boys his own age.

“My mate saw you coming out of the staff’s dormitories the other night. That Mister Lucas arsehole, that true?” Sam remembers his roommate, Crowley, pinning him up against the wall, leering down at him with a feral grin and an accent that was out of place in the boonies of Kansas.

Crowley was the worst bully in all of St. John’s. He commanded a pack of boys like hellhounds, sacking them on Sam, beating him up just for fun. But more recently Crowley’s torture had taken a strange twist. It had confused Sam, reminded him of the things Mr. Lucas had wanted from him but without the asking, just taking, touching. Sam had known he must be dirty because of his father’s scorn, but he had never felt dirty until Crowley.

“Mr. Lucas is tutoring me,” Sam answers, cornered and desperately looking for an escape route.

“Is that what he calls it? Cause I heard he was a queer yeah? Azzy is studying with him too and he says the shit-stabber made a pass at him. Reached between his legs and wanted to jingle his berries, get what I mean?”

Crowley tries to demonstrate but Sam pushes him off.
“You’re lying!” he growls. Mr. Lucas said he was special. The insinuation wounds him, he doesn’t believe it.

“Honest to god, cross my heart,” his roommate mocks, drawing the cross over his chest where his own heart is fucking missing. “And you know Azzy, not all the lights on upstairs are they? Probably why the prick thought he could get away with it. But you...Wesson. That makes you less special than it does eager, hmm?”

Sam tries to shove Crowley away again but Crowley overpowers him, pins him against the wall with an arm pressed against his throat.

“You’re sweet, little Sam, but oh so stupid.” Crowley snakes an arm between his legs. Sam thrashes but he can still feel his roommate’s hand, heavy and insistent.

Crowley laughs, and then tuts. “See, there’s a reason that teacher went after you, sweetheart, picked you out of the crowd and said ‘yes that’s where I want to bury my cock.’ What’s this? Don’t shake your head. I know full well what you’re doing after class. It’s written all over your face. Yes, that’s right, with your mile-long lashes and your cock-sucking lips. You’re a fucktoy, Sam. And everyone but you can see it!”

Crowley suffocates him with his body.

Sam remembers opening his mouth but no sound coming out.

“It’s okay Sam,” the secretary says. “They’re not here today.”

The bright light of mid-afternoon. The happy chatter of boys, innocent, careless. Sam could never be like the boys pouring out of St. John’s’ classrooms again. The school’s secretary sees it too. He’s different from all the rest, dirtier, ruined.

Sam learned how to have sex with Mr. Lucas, but it was Crowley and his hellhounds pushing him into dark corners, in the dorm, on campus, taking from him what he never offered that gets Sam expelled. The dean had called up Sam’s father personally to tell him how his son was caught in some compromising position, how it was below the standards of their school and so Sam would have to be sent home. Crowley was suspended for a month, but Sam was the disease that had to be purged. For the first time Sam considers what Crowley said to him behind Vanier Hall that night and thinks maybe it was true after all. His father had been scared of something, his instructors and classmates too. Maybe they had known all along what he was: a used, soiled fucktoy.

Sam and the secretary finally reach the parking lot. Unceremoniously, they get inside her car and drive to the bus station in silence.

Sam buys a one-way ticket to Lawrence, Kansas. The secretary is gone before it finishes printing out. Sam goes outside and waits for the bus. It’s starting to rain and the overhang is full of holes. An older woman shares her umbrella with him and they talk politely about the weather, about Kansas, about nothing.

When the bus comes, Sam chooses a seat in the back and curls up against the window. He wishes he could sleep but his insides are tied in a knot. Sam doesn’t know what he’s going to find when he
comes home. He’s used to his father’s rage, but his recent silence signals a change, and he doubts it’s for the better.

Henry Wesson is a small, shrunken man with tough, thick skin like an aged gourd. He’s a godly man, though not religious, can quote page-length passages from the Bible, though he’s never stepped foot in a church. Henry believes everything has its place, and everyone has a purpose, like a cog in a machine. Sam guesses that’s why Henry loves cars, because they make sense. Every part works in sync to achieve a similar goal, and every problem has a known solution. Henry used to tell Sam that you could fix up any old wreck you found, but the reason most people don’t is because they don’t think the effort is worth the outcome. Is that what his father thought about him?

The old Greyhound pulls out of the station and rumbles down a poorly paved road. Thunder booms in the distance. Fear drags its talons down Sam’s skin.

When the bus pulls into the station in Lawrence, Kansas, it’s stopped raining but it’s still a five mile walk to his home on the outskirts of town. The last two will be nothing but muddy backroads. Sam takes a deep breath anyway and begins his journey home.

By the time he reaches the edge of town, it starts to get dark. Broken sidewalks disappear into country roads, muddy now from the rain. Sam straddles the slick curb and the muddy ditch, slips after the stars finally show. Scrapes his knee and ruins all of his belongings in three inches of mud. But still, Sam keeps going, until he finally makes it home in the dead of night.

The cicadas are humming familiar nighttime lullabies but there’s something different about the green-sided mobile home he grew up in. There’s a pile of garbage out on their driveway, which isn’t all that strange because his dad dumps scrap metal out on their lawn all the time, but this isn’t metal—it’s clothing, and furniture, and stacks of CDs. Sam squints, realizes they’re his CDs: his clothes, his mattress and the rest of his busted-up furniture out here on the lawn for the neighbors to pick through and the garbage men to haul away. Sam runs to the heap of his life with tears in his eyes and violently pulls David Bowie’s *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* CD from the debris and clutches it to his chest like it’s the only thing keeping his heart from bursting out of his skin.

If Sam was worried about his reception, this message is loud and clear.

The lights inside his house are on and Sam stares at them hatefully. His father is inside, blissfully ignorant of his son’s arrival. Sam’s sorrow is quickly displaced with rage. *Fuck him!* he thinks, adrenaline pumping through his veins. If his dad thinks Sam’s going to go quietly, he’s dead wrong. Sam readies himself for a fight, approaches his house with shoulders squared.

Sam pounds on the door. Waits for an answer. Pounds again announcing himself in a shrill and tired voice. Still nothing. Sam kicks over the welcome mat, tugs out the spare key from underneath and lets himself in with a burst of fury. He’s ready to fight, he’s ready to scream, he’s ready to go down swinging if it means one final fuck you to his puritan father. But there’s a cold wind at his back and it sweeps all of Sam’s anger away.

The living room is quiet except for the hum of the television set on a low. There is a bottle of Jack Daniel’s on the floor, next to his father’s feet. Henry, sitting in his favorite recliner, doesn’t move to greet Sam, or even to admonish him. The silence is loud, deafening.

“Dad?” Sam’s voice cuts through the living room, shaking. Slowly Sam enters his house like an uninvited stranger. He approaches his father, walks around the chair to see his face and gasps.

Henry Wesson looks much like a deflated tire, white as a ghost and sunken in on himself like his bones have disintegrated and collapsed. His father had been withdrawing for a long time. Now he’s
withdrawn permanently; into himself, away from Sam.

“...Daddy?” Sam reaches out to touch, but his father is cold. Rigor mortis has set in. Sam shakes his head. Refusal. Grief. “No!” The gentle hand on his father’s cheek becomes talons, clawing at flesh. “Fuck you! How dare you!” Sam shouts, projected sobs. His father took the easy way out. The man who had enrolled Sam in St. John’s Military Academy to learn about things like honor and respect had died like a coward, without a bang, or even a whimper.

Sam had never resented his father more than in that moment.

The police get called but Sam is gone before they arrive, pulls what he can from his father’s garbage pile and hikes back to the bus station. With the rest of his money he gets about as far as Missouri, ends up at some truck stop near the freeway and hitches a ride by batting his eyes and telling a sad story about his dead daddy. The first trucker feels sorry for him and takes him to St. Louis. The second says he’s going to Chicago and it’ll cost him. He pulls over in the middle of the ride and asks for Sam to pay. He sucks off the driver. He knows what he is now.

Three months later, Sam finds a story about Mr. Lucas inside the Chicago Tribune. The headline reads: “The Shame of St. John’s” and describes a scandal involving several other students. It uses the word “victim”. Sam crosses it out on every paper he can find.

The next week Sam gets a tattoo of Mr. Lucas’s pet name for him scrawled over his ass. Then he lets ten strangers fuck him until he bleeds. Sam remembers Mr. Lucas saying he loved him. He can’t remember his father ever saying that.

On his fifteenth birthday, Sam overdoses. His pimp dumps him off at the hospital. He lives. Sam starts to regret being a survivor. He discovers the movie Bonnie and Clyde and begins having beautiful dreams of his violent life ending violently.
This chapter contains underage sex and drug abuse by adults and minors.
Dean crawls out of bed with a monstrous groan. He stands and then walks to the bathroom, his bad leg dragging behind him making an awful sound. Sam hears the leg and screws his eyes shut. A treacherous shiver of revulsion crawls up his spine.

One week ago today Sam discovered his lover’s dick didn’t work and since then Dean hasn’t touched him: not to pleasure him, not even to punish him.

Water runs in the bathroom, Sam hears his lover washing up.

Betrayal. That’s what it feels like. They had signed a contract together in Chicago. Dean said he would take control, and Sam said he would let him. But when Dean let go of the wheel that night they drove out into the country together, before they had skidded to a halt, before they almost died, Dean had violated the terms of that contract. He’d lost control, beating Sam not to punish him but out of anger because Dean was impotent. And Sam resents him for that.

One week chained to a bed recovering from that beating, his eyes swollen shut for days, and that resentment has started to poison his love for the man he ran away with. It makes Sam notice all the things he ignored before: the ugliness of Dean’s leg, the muscle spasms and the crippling pain it causes him. He sees Dean’s fraying nerves, his agitated paranoia fueled by delusions that every stranger in sight is an undercover cop. He hears Dean whisper Lisa’s name at night and begrudges all the knick-knacks Dean buys “for Ben” but never sends. Every groan, every sigh summons Sam’s disgust. He feels himself falling out of love with Dean and it starts to scare the shit out of him.

There’s only two hundred miles left to Gibsland, Louisiana, where he and Dean will die in a glory of gunfire. Or maybe they’ll drive off a cliff. Sam’s not sure of the details, only the end result. Either way there’s death in his future, love and death, love in death. That’s how it’s supposed to end. That’s how it has to end. But Sam’s not going to get his bloody-ever-after if he doesn’t love Dean. Or, in turn, if Dean doesn’t love him.

Sam opens his eyes, shifts on the bed and watches Dean longingly as his lover trims his beard in the bathroom mirror.

This is all because Dean couldn’t fucking get it up! The thought stings, and Sam feels guilty for having it. He would readily forgive Dean for his breach in their contract if only they could fuck. Sam is aching for it. He wants to be used by Dean as a final testament of their love. He’d suffered without it, happy to wait when he thought Dean wouldn’t, not that he couldn’t. Now Sam is impatient. Now Sam is angry, feels like he’s been lied to, cheated. He ran off with a man who could never consummate what they had.

Sam remembers the look on Bonnie’s face when Clyde couldn’t perform, the anguish, the despair. That’s where Sam and Dean are at right now. But that doesn’t mean the end. Eventually Bonnie and Clyde made love, Bonnie just had to wait a little longer. So Sam is determined to wait longer, too. After all, despite his doubts, Sam is sure he stills love Dean. Loving Dean is his only choice.

Dean exits the bathroom and Sam stares after him, wide-eyed and open-mouthed. Dean ignores him so Sam shakes his wrist for attention, rattling the handcuff attaching him to the bed. When Dean finally looks up, Sam bats his lashes and purses his lips. “Have to go,” he says, nodding towards the bathroom, crossing his legs.

Sam wants to see a sneer, an eyeroll, hear some kind of rebuke but Dean says nothing, unlocks the handcuff around his wrist and stands back like he’s on autopilot.
“Thank you daddy,” Sam says, syrupy sweet and dusted in sugar. He bats his eyes again and gives Dean his best doe-eyed look, hoping for a reaction, for something.

“Hurry up,” Dean says, before turning his back on him.

It’s like a punch to the gut, like a knife carving out his black heart and tossing it against the wall. Sam just told himself to be a good boy and wait for Dean to stop pitying himself but Sam can’t stop from snapping. “Dean,” he says firmly, out of role, out of place.

That catches Dean’s attention. His lover turns back to him sharply. There’s a flash of hot indignation behind Dean’s pallid eyes that gives Sam hope.

“You’re being really... stupid, you know,” Sam accuses. Feels naughty for speaking like this to Dean, his daddy, but the honesty feels good. “You’re pouting like a whiny child!” he insists. “It’s not a good look on you.”

“What did you say?” Dean whispers, a deafening siren to Sam’s ears, a warning to back off. But Sam hasn’t been touched, hasn’t been punished under Dean’s hands in days and he craves the attention, even if it’s bad. Especially if it’s bad.

“You act like the only guy who’s ever had dick problems but there’s a lot of options out there, Dean!” Sam says this quickly, backing away as Dean advances, eyes alight with fury. “I think you just gotta relax, and I could think of plenty, p-plenty of ways to-!”

Dean finally pounces, slamming Sam’s body against the wall with a violent shove. Sam's head knocks against the peeling wallpaper, vision going hazy for a split second. He feels more than sees Dean’s hand shoot out and clasp around his throat. “How dare you!” Dean growls, like a feral beast. It frightens Sam, arouses him. If Dean beat him now Sam would deserve it, even welcome it. Anything to return to happier times. “What gives you the fucking right to speak like that to me?” Dean demands. “I will do as I want, little boy, and you...you!” The grip tightens. Sam gasps for air. “If I want to leave you chained to a fucking toilet all day I will. I own you, understand? Your body, your mind...they belong to me.”

There’s a rush of euphoria as Dean chokes him, a sick thrill running down his spine. But still, he pushes the envelope further. “Not my body,” Sam rasps. “Not yet.”

Dean’s fury flares, and then, goes out. Sam sees the light in his lover’s eyes go black like a smothered flame. The hand around Sam’s throat slackens, falls as dead weight to Dean’s side. Dean stares down at him like Sam has stabbed him, betrayed him. Which isn’t fair Sam thinks, because that’s how he feels.

“I should have let you die in that tub,” Dean says, under his breath, as if to himself.

Sam hears it and it knocks the wind out of him. He falls clumsily to the floor, legs suddenly weak. Dean turns his back once again and grabs his keys, all but runs out the door.

“Dean!” Sam begs, hot tears springing to his eyes. “Please!” Sam’s not sure what he’s begging for, exactly, just for this pain in his chest to finally stop. But it won’t. Dean leaves, slamming the motel door behind him. The Impala revs up, headlights flooding the windows. An ugly cry is pulled out of Sam as the car peals away. He’s sure he must love Dean, otherwise Sam would hate his fucking guts.

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The stars have been out for hours by the time Dean finally returns. Sam lies on the bed, heavy and exhausted but unable to sleep. He pretends, though, as Dean stumbles through the front door, unsteady on his feet.

Drunkenness has become a nightly routine for the last week. Dean will leave him alone, for hours at a time, coming back to their motel room just to pass out on the bed, or even on the floor, waking up to repeat the process the next day. When Sam said there were ways to fix Dean’s problem, this is not what he meant.

“Sam...Sammy, you awake?”

Sam stiffens. This a departure from routine. Usually Dean ignores him, like he regrets ever meeting Sam, drinking him away into some dark oblivion. Tonight is different. Tonight he’s remembered.

Dean trips, curses. He’s still drunk. Sam fakes sleep.

“Sammy.” Dean’s voice searches for him in the dark. Suddenly Dean’s body is on top of his, Dean’s weight pressing down on him and wet, greedy lips pressed against his own. Sam gasps as Dean crawls into the bed beside him, kissing his mouth, his neck, his chest. “Wake up, little boy,” Dean growls, a hot, wet threat against his skin. “I just came back from the doctor ‘n I’ve got a new prescription,” he laughs. Dean digs into his pocket and pulls out a small plastic baggie, waving it under Sam’s nose. “I used to bust people for this shit, hmm? Fucking chased druggies out of abandoned houses but, you know,” Dean laughs, “they never told me how good it felt!”

Heroin. Sam doesn’t even need to see the powder, he’s already noticed the effects: flushed skin, constricted pupils, and a drastic change in mood. Dean’s as high as a kite.

“And I feel so good,” Dean confirms, kissing Sam’s skin, twining their legs together. “Fucked in the head for so long but now daddy’s found something that makes him all better. Hmm. Do you feel it too?”

Dean shifts his hips and Sam gasps again. Dean’s arousal is hot and insistent against his leg. It’s not the whisper of lust like in their last car ride together, it’s full, and urgent, begging Sam for attention.

“Oh ,” Sam sighs. His love is a perennial in his chest, blooming violently at the first signs of spring. “Daddy …”

“Yes!” Dean growls, grinding himself proudly into Sam. “I’m gonna fuck you little boy. And then every part of you will belong to me, won’t it?”

“Yes!” Sam readily agrees. Tears spring to his eyes. Happiness looms over him like a threat.

Dean offers the packet to Sam who sets up a line on the bedside table and inhales.

“There you go, have some medicine,” Dean laughs, patting Sam’s cheek with approval.

Sam’s missed this: the rush, the way it makes him feel light and airy, like he’s in love. Because he is in love. Dean can give him everything he’s ever wanted. “Daddy,” he sighs, ready to lose himself.

Dean presses a lazy kiss to his mouth, enjoying his own high. “I was a good man before you came by and cut my belly open,” he accuses with a smile. “Now I’m holding my guts in my hands thinking how did I get here?”
“You were never a good man,” Sam reminds. “You deserve me.”

The bed groans as Dean smothers Sam with his body. Biting, clawing, growling; Sam welcomes the monster in his bed.

Dean rips off his leather jacket and throws it to the floor, then fumbles with the button on his jeans, eagerly jerking down the zipper. Sam sits up. He watches in awe as Dean reveals himself, pulling his cock out of the cotton trap of his boxers and jeans. Sam’s mouth waters. Dean is fully aroused, hard and impressively fat. Not one flaw, not one disappointment.

Dean’s chest heaves with anticipation. He looks down at Sam, a proud smile on his lips. Sam feels a rush of adoration. Dean is beautiful, and strong, and a man. The perfect man. The kind of man they advertise young cadets will grow up to be in St. John’s Military Academy brochures. Dean is the kind of man his father wanted him to be. Could never be himself, so Sam leans in to swallow Dean’s cock.

“Hnnngghh, fuck!”

Sam is good at this. He puckers his lips and hollows his cheeks, bobbing up and down like a seasoned whore. He slathers his spit across Dean’s cock, sucking the tip, sliding his tongue into the slit and relishing the taste of Dean’s twisted groan. Sam knows how to make men buckle at the knees, but he’s not the one in control now. Dean makes sure he remembers, grabbing a fistful of his hair and pressing Sam down, down. Sam slackens his jaw and opens his throat. Dean holds Sam’s head and fucks Sam’s mouth. Sam takes it, easily. He was made to be used.

“Christ!” Dean swears. “Jesus, fuck Sammy. That’s right. Let me fuck your face. Such a good boy, christ, such a good boy.”

Dean pushes himself all the way inside, precum leaking down the back of Sam’s throat. He presses Sam’s face against his hips and keeps him there. Thick pubes tickle Sam’s nose. The cock in his mouth makes Sam want to gag, almost does until Dean finally releases him, gasping for air, light-headed and confused.

“Good. Again,” Dean commands.

He pushes past Sam’s lips again until his cockhead breaches the line of Sam’s tonsils. Sam suffers against the desire to vomit, but still Dean holds him, watching with delight as he squirms.

“Good. Again!”

Sam barely gets a chance to catch his breath before Dean pushes fresh tears to the corner of Sam’s eyes. This time he can’t fight his reflex. Acidic bile shoots up from his stomach. Sam wrenches his body away. There’s a warm rush of regurgitated liquid over his chest. The rest stains the sheets. Sam has only had water today but it still leaves his throat feeling raw, his head feeling light. The strange feeling of deja-vu washes over his dulled senses. He looks up at Dean to see his lover laughing.

“Good boy,” Dean praises, wiping away the bile-water from Sam’s lips. “Your pain gives me pleasure,” Dean admits, reverently touching Sam’s cheeks. “It always has.” Dean drags a thumb across Sam’s mouth, thoughtful. “Tell me you love me,” he demands.

It’s been over a week but the utterance comes easier than his vomit, and from somewhere deeper. “I love you,” Sam sighs, holy and awful somehow, like Dean’s curses. “IloveyouIloveyouIloveyou!”

Dean hushes him, nods. “Now I’m going to fuck you,” he says.
Then Dean picks Sam up and tosses him onto the other side of the bed. Sam bounces with a childish laugh. Dean crawls after him, presses their bodies together, crowding them against the bed’s headboard. Sam’s head fits between two metal poles, his legs folded up and against his chest while Dean kisses him hungrily. Sam can feel Dean’s cock pressing insistently against him.

“Daddy,” Sam whines, desperate. “Please!”

Dean hushes him again, gets off the bed. Sam thinks he's done something wrong until Dean removes two pairs of handcuffs and a bottle of lube from the side drawer. Dean throws the lube on to the bed. Obediently, Sam raises his wrists, allowing himself to be handcuffed to the headboard.

Dean smiles at him, gently brushes some hair out of his face. Then he pushes Sam's legs up, guiding his ankles to Sam’s shackled hands. “Hold these,” Dean instructs, and Sam does so, his legs spread wide, his cock pushed up against his belly, his ass out in the air.

Dean strips off his jeans and his t-shirt. Sits in front of Sam on the bed, naked, like him. “Are you ready?” he asks.

Sam adjusts the sweating fingers around his ankles and nods. “Please sir,” he says.

Dean gives a pleased grunt and slides two well-lubed fingers inside. Sam moans. His body is well-trained, Dean’s fingers face little resistance, sliding in and out of with him practiced ease. Sam whimpers as Dean fucks into him harder, twisting his fingers, the familiar squelching sound of sex humming in his ears.

“Beg for it,” Dean commands. He slows the push and pull of his fingers, teasing at Sam’s taint with his thumb. “Tell me what you want.”

"Please, sir,” Sam gasps, moans. "I want you to fuck me."

Dean waits, eyebrows raised. He wants more so pushes another finger inside of Sam to milk it out. “Want to be my property, Sammy?” Dean prompts. “You want to be my plaything?”

“Yes! I want to be yours.”

“All of me and none of you?”

“Yes,” Sam says, reverently. That’s his favorite part.

Dean gives a slow, satisfied nod. “Good,” he says, sliding his fingers out of Sam. “I'm glad you didn’t make me take it from you. It would have been less gratifying.”

Dean offers his fingers and Sam wraps his lips around them tenderly. He tastes himself on Dean’s hands, lapping at each finger with careful attention until he’s cleansed himself from his lover’s skin. The mattress shifts as Dean sits up and squeezes a handful of lube into the palm of his hand, stimulates and lubes his cock at once. When he finally tosses the bottle away and crawls on top of him, every nerve pulsing. Dean leans in to kiss him, the soft press of his lips and the rough scrape of his beard like the opiates in his blood, deliriously, beautifully perfect.

“Nowhere left to go but into you,” Dean pants. “‘An’ once I do there’s no going back. Understand? This ties us together, like a knot, until the end.”

“I understand,” Sam whispers. Sex is love. And all of the men who have loved Sam have fucked him. Now, finally, Dean will love him too.
Dean shifts, leans forward as something bursts from his chest. Like a sob. Like regret. But Sam can’t see his face, and by then Dean is already pushing inside. Now there is only pleasure, love, and the violent bloom of happiness in his chest as Dean sinks all the way inside of him, finishing something that started in Chicago months ago.

Dean fucks like a famished man, hungry, starving. The mattress groans wildly under them. It’s creak-creak-creak joining the chorus of thump-thump-thumps from the headboard and the slap-slap-slap of Dean’s balls as he fucks. The ankles Sam was commanded to hold slip out of his grip, wrapping around Dean’s heaving figure instead. Dean seals their mouths together in a rough, abrasive kiss, and Sam loses himself in Dean, clinging to his lover, merging into one thing instead of two. Sam’s tongue is in Dean’s mouth and Dean’s in his. Sam’s hands are cuffed to the bed, but also pulling his hair, tightening around this throat. Sam’s back is driven into the metal bars of the headboard, but is also between his legs. United, finally, they become their own kind of monster on that motel bed, biting, growling, moaning.

Sam is in love again, filled with love, floating on it. It’s beautiful, airy, makes Sam feel like he’s floating far above himself. This is everything he’d wanted since he rode in the car with Dean that first time and told him about his dream of finding a man that loved him. This. Very moment. With Dean. Love. Blossoming. Happiness. Overwhelming. He wants it to last forever, to wash out the rest of his life from memory. Only love. Only pleasure. And Dean fucking him. Driving somewhere deepdeepdeep inside of him, filling up some kind of emptiness Sam needs him to occupy.

What’s left of Sam is being driven out. He can feel it rising to the surface, buoyed up on crashing waves. Dean fills him up, and Sam is pushed out. Over and over again until Dean cries out, shakes, and suddenly floods his insides. Sam gasps as he feels his lover spill into every part of him. It pushes what’s left of himself all the way out. A hard cry of pleasure, mixed with pain and a hot string of cum on his own belly leaves Sam breathless, panting.

Dean shudders and shakes over him. In the after throes of his pent-up orgasm, Sam clings to Dean still, shaking with the blissful knowledge that everything is different. Dean and him are linked together, forever. Inseparable until the end, no matter what.

And there’s only two hundred miles left to Gibsland, Louisiana
Chapter Notes

This chapter contains implied rape/non-consensual sex with a minor near the end.
Reader beware.

Sam and Dean float inside their own world, untethered. Reality is the heated space between their bodies, and the sweat pasting their skin to the Impala’s vinyl seats. They drive in their car-shaped bubble, living and breathing only each other, subsisting on whispers of love and adoration, choked breaths, and the salty excretions that Sam accepts inside of himself like holy communion, night after night.

Everything is beautiful inside this world. There is no pain or regret, only Dean’s heavy arms wrapped around him, supporting him, crushing him. There is no fear, only Dean’s love, Dean’s demanding, severe, asphyxiating love. Sam opens himself up and lets Dean carve everything out of him: his lungs, his guts, his bones, his muscles, his heart, until there’s nothing but an empty carcass for Dean to fill. Dean fills Sam with his grunts and his growls, his spit and his cock, his strangled declarations of love and adoration that come out at the same time as his cum. Sam receives Dean into him and is grateful to be of some use. Grateful to be part of Dean, and no longer part of himself.

Sam has transformed into Dean’s perfect fucktoy, and for the first time in his life, Sam believes he is happy. His body is empty, his mind is free. He spends most of his time on his back, writhing on top of cotton sheets, underneath his heaving lover in a state of pure bliss. Then Dean leaves to get them more drugs, and Sam waits greedily for the next hit of joy to flood his veins.

Happiness. Sam wants to be happy forever.

And maybe they would have been, if the Impala hadn’t died.

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The car breaks down on a gravel road just outside of Lafayette, Louisiana. The engine rattles like a bottle of pills so Dean pulls over to check it out. When he lifts the hood, he lets out a string of curses as black as the smoke pouring out.

The sun is bright, beating down on them both from a blue, cloudless sky. A chorus of cicadas protests the heat. Sam squints at Dean as he goes from the hood to the trunk, rummaging for something in the back. When he doesn’t find it, he leans through the open driver-side window, glaring pointedly at Sam.

“What happened to the toolbox?” Dean’s dirty fingernails press into the rolled down glass. The sweat on his forehead shimmers over a week-old film of grime and dirt.

Sam turns his head. He prefers the darkness of hotel rooms to the bright, stinging sun.
“Sold it,” Sam reminds. They’d pawned it for three needles and some loose powder about two towns back when they were desperate for money. It had lasted them a day. They were desperate for money again the next night, and the next, always a few bills short of total poverty.

“Fuck,” Dean announces, hanging his head. “Fuck!” He kicks the tire out of spite, and then leans back over the hood. “We’ll have to get her towed,” Dean finally admits. He climbs back into the driver’s side, shoulders slumped forward in defeat. The pronouncement is heavy and thick, like the heat in the air. “I...don’t know how much she’ll cost to repair.”

Sam wipes the sweat from his brow. It takes a long minute for him to chew and swallow Dean’s words. A broken car costs money. A lot of money. Money that will take away from other, more pleasurable activities.

“Then let’s ditch it!” Sam huffs, irritably clawing at his skin. It’s been six hours since his last hit. They were supposed to be checking into a hotel in Broussard by now, scoring, fucking all night. This is an unwelcome break in Sam’s euphoria.

“We’re not ditching her,” his lover growls. There’s a flash of heat in his voice, a spark behind his eyes.

Sam grows quiet. They both watch the black smoke rising into the sky like a signal for help, or a warning of danger.

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Two hours later a woman in stained coveralls and a flipback hat tows the Impala to the nearest garage back in Lafayette. Dean’s Baby Girl is dumped in front of an aluminum-sided building in the industrial part of town. Three rusted trucks sit outside the front entrance, next to someone’s grandpa on a rocking chair, hat over his face, asleep. Dean heads inside to assess the damage. When he comes back his face is white.

“Three thousand dollars,” Dean says, like a death sentence.

Sam observes Dean’s distress with indifference. He’s irritated at the break of happy thoughts and feelings that have kept him disconnected from the sun in the sky and the bruises on his own body. Sam doesn’t want to care about the busted up car, or even where they’re going to sleep tonight. He’s had a taste of pure bliss and he doesn’t want to go back to the hell of everything before it - the hell of worrying, of caring, of those long stretches of nothing where you wonder what the point of anything is. But Dean catches Sam’s glassy-eyed stupor, sees him trying to slip out of his own body without permission and puts a stop to it by backhanding him, hard, across the face.

Sam raises a hand to his cheek, stumbles until his back hits one of the rusted-out trucks. He looks up to find Dean burning with frenetic energy; the spark behind his eyes stoked into a blazing fire.

“This is all your fault,” Dean accuses. His shoulders are tense; the slap wasn’t enough of a punishment. “I feed you, clothe you, fuck you, and what do I get in return?”

Sam shrinks against the truck, knows better than to run so he waits. The old man on the front porch just sits there. Sam imagines his father under that large-brimmed hat, watching with silent approval.

“You’re a useless cock-sucking little whore, Sam.” Dean balls the corners of Sam’s t-shirt into his
fists and slowly lifts him off the ground. “Worse than a whore. Cause at least then I’d get some cash out of you. At least then you’d be *worth* something.”

Sam feels Dean’s arms tremble against him. They stare at each other, face to face. Dean’s eyes are alight with a devilish fire. It’s become a common sight for Sam.

His lover has lost weight since their drug-fueled binge across two states began. Dean’s favorite leather jacket hangs off of his skeleton frame like an old skin he refuses to shed. His face has become sallow, and pale. His arms and legs are wiry and gaunt. The strong, indestructible man Sam fell in love with is withering away under the heat of the howling demon that lives inside of him. Sam always knew the demon was there, loves Dean because of it: the only thing Sam finds that can tame his own wild impulses. The human side of Dean, however, is slowly being burned away. Sam is sleeping with the ashes of what’s left over, and one day he knows he’ll wake up to find Dean is no longer there, that only his demon remains.

“You belong to me now, Sam. And if I chose to sell you, it would be my *right*.”

Sam’s eyes widen at the threat. Dean drinks in Sam’s fear like his favorite whiskey. When he’s satisfied, Dean uncurls his fingers and lets Sam go.

Dean steps back and Sam watches the fire behind Dean’s eyes slowly die. But the threat remains in the air like heavy, black smoke.

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They take their things from the Impala and walk to a Studio Six motel, three miles further into town, where Dean has just enough money to pay for one night. The manager hands him a key and a contemptuous glance. He suspects something between Dean and the dirty young boy at his side, but he takes their money anyway, silently complicit as Sam and Dean retreat to room nine at the far end of the complex.

Inside the room, they dump their clothes onto the sunken bed. Sam rearranges the contents of his duffle bag, trying to make his last set of jean shorts and a dirty pair of underwear look less impoverished than it is. He looks to Dean who scans their stuff and frowns. They have nothing left to pawn for drugs, and the thought of spending a night without them makes Sam start to sweat.

“Bonnie and Clyde would rob a bank right now,” he says, scratching at his arm again.

“And drive off in their *getaway car*,” Dean reminds. “Ours is in the shop. And we’re not leaving without her.”

“I think you love that hunk of metal more than you love me.”

Dean ignores him. “We need to come up with cash, quick. I’ve got ten dollars, and that’s hobbled together from singles and loose change….might be just enough to hustle with, double or nothing.” Dean slides his wallet back into his pocket and looks down at Sam. “We’ve got to be bold, and the chumps have to be just right. You know what to do, of course.”

Sam nods. They’ve hustled together dozens of times, always what they’ve done to survive. But this time, they’re going to need more than survival cash if they want to fix up the Impala. Dean’s threat from the garage claws at the back of Sam’s mind, but he shoves it aside and gets ready.
McMillan’s Pub is on the other side of town, in a residential neighborhood where the driveways are partially paved but the cars are all parked on the grass anyways. This is the fourth bar they’ve cased that night and Sam has a good feeling about it when they enter around ten o’clock. It’s small but there are two sets of pool tables, both occupied, one by a young couple playing each other, the second by two pairs of older men. Sam watches the older men with furtive interest, notes what they’re drinking (whiskey, the good stuff), how well they’re playing (average, except for the fat guy), and how easily they could be ripped off (very). There could be a lot of cash in it for Sam and Dean, if they play their cards right.

At the bar, Dean orders a bourbon and offers a credit card he knows doesn’t work. Says to keep the tab open, optimistic that he’ll have cash at the end of the night. The bartender gives the kid next to Dean a suspicious once over, but Sam smiles and bats his eyes and the bartender leaves him alone, distracted by another patron flagging him down.

“Go for the young couple first,” Sam suggests, once they’re alone. “Be a dick, get the older guys to step in and wager a bunch of cash.”

“I know how to do this,” Dean mutters into his glass.

If you want the big fish, you gotta throw them some bait and then reel them in. So Dean sits and drinks, focuses his attention on the younger couple for now. He waits for one of them to fuck up a shot. Eventually the guy, trying to impress his girl, jumps the cue ball over his shot and off the table. Spotting an opportunity, Dean sets his glass down on the bar and moves towards the couple with a loose, mollifying smile. Then he challenges the boyfriend to a “real” game, loud and arrogant enough so the older men playing across from them start to pay attention.

Now it’s Sam’s turn.

Sam heads towards an old arcade game in the back, conveniently positioned next to the pool table with the four older men. Sam digs into his pockets and finds the change Dean gave him earlier. Fifty cents, enough for one game, so Sam bends over to deposit the coins, brazenly short cut-offs digging into his thighs. He listens carefully to the men behind him, a short, breathless moment of silence saying he’s been noticed. Clink,clink go the coins; so the game begins.

Sam is the distraction, picking off the best pool player to give Dean a better shot. So it’s attention Sam is looking for, in any form he can get it. He switches his hips as he plays, feels the fabric of his shorts shifting lecherously from one side to the next. The men behind him continue their round of pool, but Sam knows he’s being watched, can’t tell yet if that’s a good or a bad thing until the game ends. That’s when Sam makes a show of being disappointed, patting his empty pockets with a quivering lower lip and the fat guy from the group takes the bait. He approaches Sam at the arcade game, his eyes shining bright with interest.

“Run out of money?”

Sam smiles, bats his dark lashes. The fat guy is the best pool player in the group, and Sam knows exactly how to play him. “Uh huh,” he answers: big eyes, wet lips.

“Maybe I could help?”
“I’d like that.”

“I um.. how much ?” The fat guy whispers that last part. Sam wants to howl with laughter.

“Depends on how much time you want me to spend working the joystick ,” he counters.

The fat guy leans in, opens his mouth like he’s about to say something but then Dean’s voice rises above theirs, belligerent and obnoxious: right on time. The fat guy and his friends turn to see Dean in a heated exchange with the couple he’s been playing against. There are accusations of cheating, and everyone in the bar can hear it.

“No way, I’m not paying you, you’re a fucking cheat ! Rigged this whole game from the start!”

Dean sneers. Sam sees that fire burning bright in his eyes. “That’s fine I’ll just take your girl out back here. I’m sure she won’t mind settling your debt.”

“You motherfu -”

“-Is there a problem here?”

One of the four men playing pool beside Dean and the couple steps forward. The boyfriend repeats his accusations, Dean repeats his defense.

“Let’s settle this with another game,” one of the men insists. “We’ll double the pot.”

“Quadruple,” adds another.

This is Sam’s cue to pull away the best player. He touches the fat guy on the arm, bats his eyes, and slinks away towards the men’s bathroom. The fat guy lingers, unsure, but then he starts to follow Sam with a starved, hungry look in his eyes. Like they always do.

Sam ducks into the bathroom. It’s a single unit with a lock on the door, which is good. All Sam has to do is keep this guy away from the game, but he has absolutely no intention of touching the ugly fuck. Those days are over. He belongs to Dean now, and only Dean gets to decide what happens to his body. So once he’s inside the bathroom, Sam presses himself against the wall and waits.

When the door swings open, and the fat pool player steps inside, Sam attacks. He throws himself at the fat guy, pushing his balding head into the tiled wall. The pool player shouts and then collapses, but he collapses in front of the door, blocking it.

“Shit!” Sam tries to open the bathroom door, but it only swings an inch before it hits the pool player’s fat gut. Anxiously, he pulls harder, but then a hand shoots out and wraps around his ankle.

“You little… bitch !”

Sam yelps. He stumbles back, but the hand on his ankle holds firm, causing him to fall.

Suddenly, the fat pool player’s hands are all over him. Sam yells, kicks, lands a hit to the face that gets him released, but only for a second. As Sam turns, trying to push back onto his feet, the pool player pulls him back down, and starts to crawl on top of him. Sam is pinned to the dirty bathroom floor. He struggles, but the man holding him down is three times his size. Sam kicks, and flails but he can’t buck the fat son of a bitch.

“I’m going to get what you owe me,” the pool player threatens. Grubby fingers start to pull at Sam’s shorts, and that’s when he panics.
“No! Fuck! Get off!” he shouts.

Sam thrashes, and kicks, but the fat bastard is still there, pressing him down onto the bathroom tile, pulling off his clothes. Sam’s shorts slip further down his thighs and he’s helpless to stop it.

“Dean!” Sam starts to shriek, at the top of his lungs. Fuck all of their plans. This wasn’t supposed to happen. “Dean! DEAN!”

Something gets shoved into his mouth, a wad of toilet paper, or a paper towel, Sam doesn’t know. It mutes him briefly, lets him hear the sound of pants being unzipped. Then the pool player presses against him, and Sam feels a cock against his exposed skin. Sam shakes his head violently, tears streaming down his face.

And that’s when the door gets kicked in.

There’s an angry growl and then the pool player is thrown off of him. Sam spits out the wad of paper in his mouth, and scrambles to pull up his shorts. He sees a dark angry figure in the corner lashing out at the pool player. There is blood on the walls. Blood on it’s jacket. It turns to look at him, and that’s when Sam recognizes Dean, eyes burning bright, the demon in him resurrected.

The pool player’s friends are right behind Dean, though. When they find him huddling in a corner, everything explodes into chaos. The pool players charge at Dean, punching, pushing, kicking. For a moment, whatever hellfire is in his soul, it makes Dean unstoppable. He throws each one of them aside, easily, laughing as he rolls his shoulders, taunting them for more. But eventually the three pool players overpower him, dragging Dean and their friend back out of the bathroom and into the bar.

Sam sits there stunned, in shock. Outside, the fighting continues and Sam’s not sure what he’s scared of most, seeing the fat pool player again or seeing Dean. He turns his head and sees a small window above the toilet. An escape! Sam jumps to his feet and clammers onto the rimless, porcelain toilet. He presses both hands against the glass and wills it to open.

Behind him there’s another shout. It travels through Sam’s bones like a shock. The window lurches forward an inch but refuses to move any further. His foot slips on the toilet, gets plunged into dirty water. Sam cries out something broken and strangled.

He shoves at the window with increasing panic until, finally, it jerks open far enough to slide through. Sam gasps with relief, and dives through the window, out of the bar. He lands head first in a pile of trash, sending empty beer bottles skittering out into the alley.

An old weather-stained fence barely separates the alley of the bar from a nearby apartment complex. The light from a second story balcony shines down on him like the eye of God. Sam extricates himself from the pile of trash, cursing. He notices then, a sudden, eerie silence. There’s no more noise coming from within the bar, no more sounds of fighting. Sam holds his breath. Crickets chirp. The television from the apartment complex plays loudly.

Sam peeks back through the window. He sees no one, hears nothing, not even the blare of the bar’s radio. Should he go back? No, he decides against it. Instead he leaves the alley and makes his way to the front of the bar. He plans to hide amongst the cars, and wait for Dean to leave, or wait until the bar is empty enough to go back in for him. But to Sam’s surprise, Dean is already out front, surrounded by the men he was beating up minutes before. No one is fighting now; in fact, they might even be shaking hands!

Sam squints but can’t be sure. He decides to get closer. He ducks from behind the bar’s southern wall to the nearest parked car. Carefully, he weaves his way between the cars, towards the front of
the bar. From here he can see Dean, and even the fat pool player that had tried to touch him! The pool player hands him something, money, Sam thinks, and Dean takes it. Then Dean pats the guy on the shoulder and leaves.

Impossible! Sam stares slack-jawed as Dean turns his back on the bar and casually makes his way towards the parked cars, towards Sam himself. Sam watches carefully, keeps hidden behind a silver Corolla until Dean is close enough. Then Sam reveals himself. He isn’t sure if Dean might be angry at him for leaving him behind at the bar, but Sam is too furious at what he just saw to care.

“What was that?” Sam asks hotly, pointing back at McMillian’s Pub. Nervously he glances at the men still gathered around the entrance, afraid they will spot him, afraid they will come after him again.

But Dean ignores his question. “Ah there you are,” he says. “I figured you weren’t stupid enough to stick around. C’mon, let’s get out of here.”

Dean brushes past him and back onto the road. Sam trots after Dean loyally, but he still wants to know what happened.

“That guy gave you money!” Sam insists. “The guy that almost raped me!”

Dean stops, suddenly. It catches Sam off guard. “But you should be used to that, shouldn’t you Sam?” Dean asks, quietly, coldly. “You used to let them rape you all the time. Would invite it, even. So what’s the difference now?”

Anger is violently replaced with shame. Sam stares down at the ground, feels small and tiny like a piece of gravel stuck in the tread of Dean’s shoes.

“The difference is me,” Dean provides after a long moment. “I make that decision now, not you. But don’t worry my little boy, look.”

At Dean’s prompting, Sam looks up to see Dean holding a small baggie filled with Sam’s favorite powder. Instinctively Sam reaches for it, but Dean pulls it out of reach.

“No. Not now. First we go back. We clean you up. Then we indulge.”

Sam nods, licks his lips greedily. He forgets all about the horror inside the bar, about the fire burning bright behind Dean’s eyes. He thinks only about that next hit, about bliss and that moment of sweet release.

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Back at the motel room, Dean runs the shower. He strips himself, and then Sam, tests the water temperature, and holds Sam’s hand as they both step inside. Firm arms hold him, lathering up a layer of soap across his skin. Sam sighs and relaxes as Dean begins to wash him. Sam remembers when Dean had forced their first shower together, after Sam had overdosed and thought himself dead. Dean had washed his old life away and offered him a new one under the guise of witness protection. Honestly, Sam would have said yes to anything. He was disgusted with his life on the street, bored of the Johns, and tired of being used. He wanted to be with a man that he loved, and whether either of them knew it at the time, that’s exactly what Dean had offered him.
When their shower is finished, Dean dries them both off. Then Sam trots out of the bathroom and sits dutifully on the edge of the bed, waiting. His patience is rewarded. Dean removes the money and the drugs from his discarded jeans. He sets up the paraphernalia from their duffle bags, and readies the drug for injection.

Sam uses one of Dean’s belts as a tourniquet and then, finally, pure bliss. Rainbows and blue skies and happily-ever-afters. Sam returns to the empty space in his head where he can stop caring and just be, without all of the ugly thoughts that poison his mind. Sam lays back on the bed with a grin. Relief.

Dean injects himself, and then he turns back to Sam. He lifts Sam’s wrists and handcuffs them to the frame on either side of the bed. This has become part of their nightly routine, and so Sam lies there passively and waits for the drug to stir the arousal in his lover. Sam welcomes Dean’s body, as Dean climbs on top of him, wrapping his legs around Dean like a warm embrace.

When he can feel Dean strong and hard against him, they fuck. Dean goes at it like a starving animal. When he’s done, Dean pours himself inside of Sam, gives Sam one long, lingering kiss.

“Thank you,” Sam mutters against his lover’s lips. And then, “I love you.” This, too, is part of their nightly ritual.

Then Dean pulls out of him, and stands from the bed. He looks at down at Sam, handcuffed and passive. His own face is stony, and grim. “I’ll be right outside,” he says. “Remember that this is my decision, and that you’re doing it for me.”

Sam smiles warmly as Dean’s words float above him, mysterious and unreachable. “Okay,” he agrees easily, slipping into numbness like the embrace of an old friend. His eyes are open but he feels swept away in a happy dream. He doesn’t care when Dean gets dressed and leaves the room. He doesn’t care when he hears Dean’s voice outside, muffled, alongside someone else. He doesn’t care when the door opens again and it’s not Dean that enters. Hardly bats an eye when the mattress sinks with the weight of another man. He even smiles a little when a hand touches his thighs.

And then, his legs are slowly plied open. That’s when something scratches at the back of Sam’s brain, a survival instinct trying to cut through his drug-induced euphoria. He looks up blearily, registers the dark silhouette holding his legs open, pushing them back, back, back towards his face. Sam blinks, knows something isn’t right though he doesn’t know what.

“Dee?” he whispers, into the dark.

But the dark laughs back at him. “It’s Greg, actually. Nice to meet’cha Sammy.”

Hot whiskey-soaked breathe makes the hairs on the back of Sam’s neck stand up. A car passes, dimly lights the interior of the motel room. For a second Sam can finally see the man who is slowly unzipping his pants. In mute horror Sam recognizes the fat pool player from the bar, here, in the room. Panic cuts through his euphoria like a hot knife. Sam jerks at his restraints and turns to the window to scream for Dean. But Dean is already at the window, watching, two eyes burning bright hot, lit by hellfire.
Chapter 17

Sam waits all night for the sun to rise. When it does, it takes forever to reach him. The sun reluctantly drags itself across the suburbs of Lafayette, taking its sweet time before light finally pours through the dirty windows of the Studio Six motel and onto the bed where Sam has been lying awake all night. He turns to greet the morning with red-rimmed eyes, letting the sun’s warmth crawl across his cheeks, salty with dried tears, and across his lips, sore from biting back his sobs. The morning signals the end of last night’s nightmare. Finally, he can relax. Sam exhales his relief and collapses back onto the bed. The metals cuffs around his wrists whine; the heavy chain looped around those cuffs, imprisoning him to the frame of the motel bed, groans. The key to Sam’s imprisonment is threaded through a chain around Dean’s neck. It glimmers in the morning sunlight. Sam watches the key rise and fall with Dean’s breathing, muttering something to himself in his sleep. Sam’s fingers itch, the traitorous urge to reach out and touch it.

Everything hurts. Arms, legs, eyeballs, even the cum drying between Sam’s thighs digs into his paper skin like razor blades. Sam is surprised to find he’s not carved open, his intestines hanging out, marinating in his own blood, because that’s how much it hurts. The pool player had only been inside of him for a few minutes but it had felt like years of being stretched on the rack, or flayed with a whip. The fresh memory of it pushes hot tears from the corners of Sam’s tired eyes. But his heart was mutilated the most. That tender thing caged in his chest is used to being bruised by Dean’s anger, tortured by his cruelty. But last night Dean did more than wound Sam’s heart—he’d gutted it, crushed it, thrown it to the floor and ground it under his heel, sliding the leftover pulp back into place, sealing the crime with a kiss. Sam’s limbs may be unscathed, his skin intact, but his heart is a bloodied mass in his chest. Sam can feel it oozing out of his rib cage, poisoning him with grief.

Sam believes he deserves all of the pain Dean gives him. But last night was different. Last night Dean had broken his heart, but it gave Sam no pleasure the way Dean’s punishments usually did. It wounded him in a way that may never heal, and he hated it. He thought about rebelling, about screeching and screaming, and tearing his chains off. But it’s only a passing thought. His chains are too heavy, and besides, it was too late for any of that. Dean owns him now, body and soul, until the end.

Sam sighs, closes his eyes. And the end will come, soon.

Dean is losing control. Fueled by sex and drugs, they're careening off the highway, just as Dean had in Ponder, Texas. But this time they're charging full steam ahead like a derailed train until they flip over and burst into a fiery inferno. Sam can smell it now: the gasoline leaking from the tank, the char of flesh as they burn, their broken bodies riven by the steel bones of the Impala, pinning them together as everything goes up in flames.

Sam has always known he and Dean were going to die together, like Bonnie and Clyde, holding each other’s hand in a hail of gunfire and blood. Their love had survived death to become a legend passed down for generations: a warning, an aspiration. Sam wants that for him and Dean as well. He thinks about it, often. He thinks about how they will be buried together in an unmarked grave where people will stop and stare, wondering about the bones beneath the earth and what brought Sam and Dean to ruin. Rumors of their love will spread. Couples will blush and turn their heads while kids dare each other to recreate the awful things Sam and Dean tenderly did to each other. And then, one spring, flowers will bloom from the same mound of dirt that covers their bodies. White calla lilies will sprout, tall and shameless, embedded in the rotting hearts of Sam and Dean themselves. The calla lilies will never die, standing tall even through the dead of winter; an eternal sign of their love, more beautiful and less fragile than they had been alive.
Sam sighs dreamily into the metal cuffs that cut his skin. His morbid daydream is a balm to the ache in his chest. Love can transcend pain. And that would be Sam’s final act of love, he thinks, to forgive Dean for breaking his heart.

Sam turns again to watch his lover sleep. Dean’s pitted eyes tremble under their closed lids; anxious, even in his dreams. Sam touches Dean’s arm, tenderly traces the bulging, bruised vein he abuses to shoot up. Dean shivers under him, shaking his head fitfully and Sam hushes him like a loving mother. Pulling at the chain looped around his wrists, Sam soothingly strokes Dean’s forehead. It’s hot to the touch, hellfire still raging beneath the skin. Dean is devolving quickly, more haggard and emaciated by the minute. It’s painful to watch, to remember how strong and virile he used to be.

The end can’t come too soon, Sam thinks. Dean could use the rest, the kind of eternal peace only death can grant. It would be the kindest way to end his suffering, because they’ve both suffered so much. Sam leans in and kisses Dean, insistently, filled with the hopes and prayers of their early deaths. His kiss awakens Dean, who flies upright in their shared bed, panting, sweating, as if he’d narrowly escaped the pit of hell that Sam wishes for them both. His wild eyes tremble. Sam tries to touch him but Dean recoils, as if he doesn’t recognize Sam. What was Dean dreaming of? Sam wants to ask, but the morning sun banishes Dean’s demons back into the dark. Slowly, he becomes himself again, rubbing the nightmares out of his eyes.

“Jesus...it’s only you,” Dean sighs. He reaches for a pack of smokes on the nightstand and lights up with shaking hands. He takes a deep drag. It seems to steady him. “I saw him again, last night. I’ve seen him every night since Chicago but he usually stays in the shadows. Last night, though, last night he wanted me to see him.”

Sam doesn’t know who Dean is talking about. His lover rubs at his eyes again. Sniffs. Looks tired. Like he hasn’t slept in years.

“I’m not crazy,” Dean continues. “I know how it sounds, but it’s true. He was there, laughing, beckoning me to join him in hell. I could see the fire. Jesus, he still had the Captain’s uniform they buried him in, but the medals had all melted.”

“Who was there, Dean?” Sam finally interrupts, searching their room for Dean’s phantom.

Dean stops, stares at Sam again like he doesn’t really see him. “My dad,” he finally answers. “My dead dad. He was here, standing next to that fat fuck while he was raping you.”

Sam winces, covers his heart with his chained wrists.

“He wanted to congratulate me,” Dean continues. “Because I’ve turned into such a fucking junkie.”

Dean sniffs, scratches at his neck again. The evidence is there, but Sam still denies it. “That’s not true.”

Dean laughs at him. “You’re so—I don’t give a fuck, because my daddy was an addict too, you see. The worst kind, where everyone praised him for being a goddamn hero until the door was closed, and then it was just him and me. But I understand now, finally, why he did it. Because he couldn’t help himself. Getting your own son to tremble just at the sight of you? Jesus. He needed it, the sick fuck. An addict. Like those junkies he cleaned off the streets. Couldn’t get enough of it. See?”

Dean exhales smoke, leans in close to Sam holding his lit cigarette aloft. Sam watches the angry burning end of the cigarette, watches as it lingers in the air, watches it comes towards him. Dean jams the lit cigarette into his neck. Sam screams, but Dean clamps a hand over his mouth. Tears spring to Sam’s eyes. He flails helplessly beneath Dean, who closes his eyes and savors Sam’s
“Yeah. That’s the good stuff. Like a drug. Shit, better than that.”

When the ember dies, Dean yanks the cigarette out of Sam’s neck. He admires his work by circling the angry red crater he’d left with his thumb.

“I used to resist, never wanted to be like my daddy,” Dean says. “But then you came along, darling, with your pretty doe eyes and your pale unmarked skin. Tempting me. When I hit you that first time, you deserved it. And I knew every wicked thing I could imagine for you after that, you’d deserve as well.”

Dean flicks the dead cigarette aside. Then he straddles Sam, sitting atop his handcuffed arms, pining him to the bed.

When Dean wraps both hands around his throat, Sam is overcome with fear. “Please,” he begs, afraid of the demon dancing behind his lover’s eyes. “Stop. Dean -”

“Hush,” Dean dismisses. Pressing against the cigarette burn hurts him as well, but the euphoria cancels out any pain. “Daddy’s having his fun right now.”

Dean tightens his grip and begins to choke Sam. They’ve have played this little game of theirs hundreds of times before, but this time it feels different: haggard, desperate, a junkie struggling vainly for his next hit. Not love, but something more gruesome, less beautiful than the fairytale in Sam’s head.

“Yes, like this!” Dean pants, squeezing tighter, and tighter. “Like this! Like this!”

Dean releases him, sits back on his haunches, panting while Sam coughs. They stare at each other warily: fear and need.

“Last night was different, Sammy, that’s why John showed up. When I sold you to that fat fuck, it hurt didn’t it?”

Sam nods. Dean wipes blossoming tears from Sam’s eyes.

“It was so beautiful, like something in you broke. Something I can’t reach with my hands or else I’d have bruised it long before. Am I right? Tell me where it hurts. Is it here?”

Dean places a hand over Sam’s heart and the bloodied mass in Sam’s chest flutters under his touch. It bleeds from fresh wounds as Dean eagerly awaits confirmation of his pain. “Yes,” Sam admits, as Dean presses down on his heart. “Yes, it hurts!”

“Why?”

“B-because….because I love you, Dean.” Sam’s lower lip trembles. It feels different from every other time he’s said it before. It wavers in the air between them: fragile, ephemeral, like dust.

Dean exhales. It blows away.

“That’s right, because you love me,” Dean repeats. “Because it hurts more if you do. Just like me and my daddy. Because you always love your daddy, right Sammy? Even if you shouldn’t. Even if it’s fucking suicide. But you don’t know better. At least I didn’t, not then. I just nodded and said ‘yes sir’ no matter how much he kicked the shit out of me. Hoping, praying, that one day he would finally look down at me and say: I love you too.”
Dean removes his hand, leans forward so the key around his neck taps against Sam’s chin. He whispers low and hot into Sam’s ear. “But that day never comes, Sammy. Never for me. And never for you.”

Then, with both hands back around Sam’s throat, Dean begins another brutal round of choking. Sam lies there and lets him.

He had just confessed, for the hundredth time, his loyalty and his love. But for the first time, Dean had made his own confession: Sam isn’t a lover, but an opiate. Dean hurts him because it pleases him, and Dean’s pleasure is all that matters. It’s a callous revelation that brings tears to Sam’s eyes. He thought Dean loved him—in his own twisted, brutal way—and that they were going to live and die together in that love. But if Dean only wanted to hurt Sam for the sake of hurting him, then dying together wouldn’t be beautiful at all. What was the purpose of Sam’s suffering? Before it had been love, but now?

Unconsciousness approaches. Sam panics. Yanking his cuffed wrists out from underneath Dean, Sam desperately claws at the hands around his throat. His fingernails dig into flesh. Dean hisses, lets go and Sam is rewarded with a fresh breath of air. He sucks it in greedily, chest rising and falling.

Dean examines the long red scratches across his knuckles. He glares back down at Sam. Their eyes lock. This was betrayal. Sam wasn’t supposed to fight back. He was supposed to be good. He was supposed to be passive. And if he wasn’t, well—Dean will have to punish him now, and the punishment will be bad. The way Dean is shaking with rage, it’ll be worse than anything Sam’s had before. And Dean thinks he deserves it, but for once, Sam doesn’t agree. For once he doesn’t want to be beaten for Dean’s pleasure. He doesn’t want to hurt anymore if it’s not for love.

That’s why Sam strikes first. When Dean tightens his fist and draws back his arm, Sam punches his lover in the gut as hard as he can. Dean groans. Sam’s shredded heart beats wildly in his chest. There’s no going back after this, he thinks, there’s no way he’d survive Dean’s revenge. Sam pushes Dean off of him and Dean falls back onto the bed. Sam scrambles past him toward freedom. Both feet touch the floor before the chain around his handcuffs pulls taut across the sheets. Shitfuck! He can’t go any farther. Sam stares down at his wrists, and then back at the bed. Fuck! The goddamn chain!

“Going somewhere, Sammy?”

Behind him, Dean sits upright on the bed. He pulls the key to Sam’s handcuffs from around his neck, places it in his palm, curling his fingers into a fist. The jagged end of the key sticks out like a spiked knucklebuster. Dean grins at his fist, and then at Sam.

Sam swallows. He’s so scared he wants to vomit. “Please Dean. Please!”

But there’s no use in begging, they both know what Sam did. Dean lunges, punching Sam with his keyed fist. It punctures his cheek. Sam falls back onto the bed, swallows the blood spilling into his mouth. Dean jumps on top of him again, furiously smashing both fists into Sam’s face. The key slices him across the nose, neck, and lips. When Sam finally raises his chained wrists to protect himself, Dean begins stabbing the key into his abdomen, into his pelvis, and between his pale legs.

Sam screeches, but Dean doesn’t stop. Sam can’t take much more of this. He’ll black out, soon, is terrified of what will happen after that. But then, just he feels himself start to fade, Dean’s next punch misses his face. It slams into the chains wrapped around Sam’s wrists, raised over Sam’s face to protect himself. The key in Dean’s hand gets caught in the links. When he pulls his hand, the knucklebuster is gone. Sam shifts his wrists and the key falls free, landing on the sheet beside him.
They lunge for it at the same time, but Sam gets to it first. He rolls over onto the bloodied key, clutching it protectively to his chest. He tries to unlock his restraints but Dean wraps his arms around him to wrestle it away. Sam resists. They roll across the bed together and Sam’s chain follows. They wrap around Dean as they fight for the key. Dean manages to overpower him, pries open Sam’s bloodied and bruised fingers and plucks the key from his hands.

“You’re gonna pay for this Sammy,” Dean pants. “I’m gonna cut your legs off so you can’t run. Slice off your tongue so you can’t fucking scream!”

But Sam’s not done fighting. On his back, he kicks down, hard, over and over again between Dean’s legs until he hears a cry of pain. Dean loosens his grip and Sam rolls off. The chain follows, sliding past Dean’s shoulders, looping around his throat. As Sam crawls away, the chain pulls taut. Dean grunts, the chain is looped around his throat. Dean tries to pull it off, but when Sam sees the links tightening around Dean’s throat, a grim determination settles over him.

Sam sits back on the bed, loops the chain around his hands, and pulls.

“Hnrgh!”

Dean reaches for his throat. The key curled in his palm falls, bounces off the bed and onto the floor. Sam pulls harder. He gets behind Dean, grabs the other end of the chain as well and pulls. Tighter. Tighter. Tighter.

Dean can’t breathe, Sam knows the feeling well, knows he just has to hang on for a few seconds longer. But that’s when Dean gets violent. He starts bucking like a wild bull, shaking himself from side-to-side. Dean sits up and fall back down, slamming his back against the bed. He lands on top of Sam, knocking the air out of him, but Sam hangs on. Dean does it again. He throws them both against the wall, the headboard, anything to shake Sam off. But it doesn’t work. Sam holds firm, keeping the chain taut. He doesn’t know how much longer he can hang on, thinks he’s going to lose until Dean finally gasps, trembles, and falls face-first onto the bed.

When Dean goes still, Sam lets go of the chains with an ugly sob. His lover is motionless on the bed. Sam stares, shaking, immediately filled with regret. He tears the chains away from Dean’s throat, revealing an ugly red ligature mark branded into Dean’s skin.

“Dean?” Sam asks, voice wavering. “Dean?!?”

He shakes Dean until Dean groans, until his eyelids flutter. Suddenly Sam’s joy turns to fear. If Dean wakes up again, he’ll keep attacking. There’s no time to lose. Sam slides off the bed and rescues the handcuff key from the floor. He fumbles with it. His hands are sweating. It’s hard to turn the key, but then, finally, it unlocks! The handcuffs fall away, the chain falls heavily to the floor. Sam rubs at his wrists in disbelief, stumbling away from the bed. Freedom.

“....Sammy?”

Dean’s voice, heavy, like gravel. Sam freezes. Dean coughs, sits up. Sam backs away from the bed, shaking his head. They stare at each other for a long minute. Sam wavers, but when Dean moves again, Sam lunges for the door: unlocks it, throws it open, and runs.

Out like a flash, Sam sprints into the street at full force. He’s naked, and bleeding, left eye already swelling shut, but Sam never wavers, never looks back, doesn’t dare. Dean was awake. He could be right behind him. Sam hears it now. But Dean’s not the only one chasing him. There are even more footsteps, thundering loudly in Sam’s aching head. He’s being chased by a whole line of men, by every man that had ever wanted something from Sam: Mr. Lucas, the boys from St. John’s, his pimp.
from Chicago, that trucker he sucked off, even his father—pale as a ghost and sunken into himself, staring out at Sam with pitted black eyes, forever disappointed. Sam runs from all of them.

The morning air singes his lungs but he doesn’t stop, afraid he’ll be caught by any one of those men, memories of them chasing after him like hellhounds biting at his heels. Sam thought leaving Chicago would change things. He thought he was finally free, finally happy. But Dean was using Sam for his own pleasure, just like Sam’s old pimps. Not love, just abuse. Sam felt like an idiot for not realizing it sooner. Like finding that article about Mr. Lucas at St. John’s, his betrayal printed in black and white, what he’d thought of as love reduced to clinical terms by a local psychologist.

Chicago, St. John’s, Louisiana, wherever Sam went it always ended the same. No matter how far he ran. So maybe running was worthless. Maybe he deserved everything he got, including the cruelties that left his heart wounded.

Sam trips. His knees skid across pavement. He falls to the ground, too weak to stand back up. His adrenaline fades. Unconsciousness approaches. He already misses the warm familiarity of Dean’s hands around his throat.
Seven Months Later

The night is hot, the moon shining above the quiet suburban neighborhood of Lafayette like a second sun. Everything slows, mired in molasses. Even the alternating blue and red of police lights drag lazily over the house with broken shutters at the end of the street. Two cop cars are parked out front. On the lawn—nothing but pavement, radiating heat—a woman and two teens stand with their arms crossed. Sam watches them from the backseat of the patrol car, hands cuffed behind his back. Neighborhood cops found a joint and a bag of ketamine tucked into his back pocket. The two college boys who were dropping Sam off got busted too. They’re in the cop car in front of his, but Sam’s not worried about them. He cares about the three people standing in front of the house with broken shutters. This is where he’d woken up after running from Dean.

A wave of nausea wakes Sam up. Body on autopilot, he rolls over and vomits. It spills out of him and onto a pair of slippers. Pink, at least they used to be. A blonde woman walks into the room. Without saying anything she helps Sam up and guides him to the bathroom nearby. Carpet turns to linoleum tile under his bruised feet. Sam is lowered in front of a toilet just in time for another wave of nausea to punch him in the gut. The woman holds his hair back, strokes his shoulder and says comforting things with a southern kiss that reminds Sam of home.

When the vomiting finally stops, she sits down beside him. With effort, Sam lifts his head. The left side of Sam’s face is numb, his eye swollen shut. He doesn’t remember what happened after he ran from Dean, his memory just stops like a tape that runs out of film. He should be dead, though. He remembers that.

Kindness, a balm in his wounds. The blonde woman smiles at him and wipes away the sick around his lips. “If you’re asking yourself why you’re not at the Ritz-Carlton I’m afraid they’re plumb outta room. Lucky for you though I’ve got a spare bedroom, and nothin’ better to do but take in kids that collapse on my lawn.”

Ellen Harvelle had found him, unconscious and bleeding, in front of her house. A retired nurse, she could tell right away that Sam was a junkie, but she took him in anyways, stitched up his wounds and made sure Sam stayed hydrated while he puked his fucking guts out for seven days straight. Detox, that’s what Ellen had called it. His body was purging itself of poisons. Heroin. Dean. Seven months later and Sam still doesn’t feel clean.

“Alright, heading back to the station now,” the cop says, climbing back into the car. A metal grate divides the front and the back but Sam can still see him reflected in the rearview mirror upfront. Fat, middle-aged, and with a stain on his collar that says he lives alone, this guy would have been Sam’s
perfect target. He knows exactly how to twist this fat sonofabitch right around his finger with pretty smiles and lurid promises. But for once, Sam doesn’t want to.

The police turn their emergency lights off. They make their way through the streets, slowly winding through the neighborhood. Sam knows the kids that live in these houses, he’s been going to school with them for about four months. It’s enough to win the attention of a teacher who talks about scholarships for Sam with hearts in her eyes.

A lot of things have changed since he first arrived.

The first few weeks all Sam could think about was getting high. And Dean. Dean with his loose whiskey-soaked smile. Dean. Growling, possessive, owning him with just a look. Dean. Naked, glistening with sweat, merged at the hips and moving together like one beast. Dean. With black eyes and a red face, hands curling around Sam’s throat. A cruel smirk as he inhales Sam’s pain. Dean. Motionless on his back, red angry lines of a heavy chain etched deep into his neck. Dean. Dean. Dean.

He tried to go back the second he was well enough. Sam hopped on a bus back to the motel where they’d last stayed — Ellen wasn’t that far, a suburb of Lafayette to the south. By then, Dean was long gone. Sam asked about him and the manager of the motel gave him an ugly look; a silent warning to get out before he called the cops. Sam took the hint and didn’t press his luck. He sat on the curb across the street trying to figure out what to do. Dean had sold his cellphone two towns over. There was no way to contact him. The Impala could still be at the shop but Sam didn’t remember the name of it, or where it was at. Even if he did, Dean still owed them three thousand dollars. The trip was a dead end. As quickly as Dean had stumbled into Sam’s life, he’d suddenly stumbled back out, taking a part of Sam with him.

When it got dark, Sam returned to Ellen’s. She didn’t ask where he’d been (or where the money in her purse went) but she was glad he was back. Ellen made him a bowl of soup and a cup of black coffee and said he can stay as long as he likes.

The house with the broken shutters is at the end of Harvest Drive, a low-income subdivision of Lafayette. It’s a small house but it’s comfortable, decorated with odd knick-knacks and lots of dogs. In her retirement, Ellen traps local stray dogs and brings them to the vet to be spayed or neutered. After, she tries to rehome them. So far she’s found twenty dogs a new forever home. The dogs she can’t rehome she keeps. Currently, there are nine former strays in her tiny two-bedroom ranch. Sam always jokes that, with him, it’s ten.

The other humans in her house include Ash and Ellen’s daughter, Jo. At least that’s what Ellen calls her. Jo hinted, once, that Ellen wasn’t her blood-related mom. Maybe a stepmom or a distant aunt? It was never clarified, and Sam never asked. They both seem happy with the arrangement so it never mattered. Jo is nice. Sam likes her. A bright-eyed, blonde-haired sixteen-year-old, she’s a hopeless romantic, just like him, though her daydreams are filled with less blood. She understood, without ever asking, that Sam likes boys, with a preference for older men. Together they pick out the hottest daddies in the neighborhood, rate them, make lists, share dirty thoughts and a good laugh.

Then there’s Ash who is a mystery to everyone, including himself. He’s not related to Ellen or Jo but he spends most of his time at their house. With a Rod Stewart mullet and a collection of sleeveless tees he looks like your average white trash hick but Ash is an honest-to-god genius. He’s a computer wiz and a hobby hacker. His idea of a wild weekend is hacking into the local police department and changing personnel records. He’s never been caught but it’s made Ash a little paranoid. He sits at the dinner table with a tinfoil hat on his head, just in case the government is listening to his thoughts.

Ash, Jo, Ellen, and then Sam. Hobbled together, they make a family. Not by blood but by choice; a
collection of semi-broken humans, each with their own secrets, taking refuge together from their stormy lives. It’s peaceful, which makes it difficult to accept. Nothing good ever comes for free, and if it does it never lasts. Sam is grateful, but someday he’ll leave.

In the meantime Sam tried to earn an honest living. There’s a dive bar a neighborhood away called The Roadhouse. Sam lied about his age and got a job as a busboy scrubbing dishes for pooled tips at the end of every night. It was exhausting, tedious; hard work with little reward. Sam fell back onto bad habits. He offered himself to the old guys in the bar, the ones that stand outside and smoke. At first for a fee, and then for free. But no one bit. The men here don’t dress Sam down with their eyes. They don’t leer with sick grins from across the room. They don’t stand too close or whisper twisted fantasies into his flush-red ears. They don’t see him as prey, as an object to be used. It surprised Sam, added to his uneasiness.

Then Sam met Chad and Chaz. They attended the community college in Lafayette where they majored in wasting their parents’ money. After classes they went to The Roadhouse to drink and get stoned. Sam followed them out into the alley, once. Instead making money Sam handed over his own and asked for a hit. He was greedy for it; four months without poison in his veins had been absolute hell. They accepted, and Sam inhaled, savoring the way it dulled his mind, quieted the itch.

It became a new bad habit: Chad, Chaz, and Sam behind The Roadhouse. Sometimes they smoked in the alley but most of the time they did it in Chad’s old-school Ford Escort. They sat together and got high: weed mixed with ketamine. It wasn’t as powerful as the bliss he was used to injecting, but it still summoned the ghost of Sam’s old life: heroin, passed out in the back of the Impala. Sam could feel Dean beside him, a phantom limb. He couldn't cut off a part of himself and pretend like it was never there.

Poor Ellen. That’s what Sam thought when he got off his shift late at night and slid into the backseat with a joint in his hands. She’d be pissed. Not that he was getting high — well, maybe a little bit about that — but also that he’d daydream about going back to the devil. Ellen was always expecting Sam to be better than he was.

“Jo tells me you’re not gonna try starting up school again.”

Sam shrugs, pushing food across his plate while Ellen scrubs dishes at the sink. He always waits till everyone leaves and then cleans his no matter how many times Ellen tells him not to. It’s his way of saying he can take care of himself, keeping distance.

“A waste of time,” Sam dismisses with a heavy shrug.

“Ain’t no one gonna hire you without your GED,” she says. “You wanna be scrubbing dishes at that bar your whole life?”

Sam is stubbornly silent. Ellen shakes her head, tries a different angle. “You helped Jo on her paper. First time she’s gotten a grade like that in a long while.”

“So?” he huffs, angrier than he means to. Ellen deserves credit for trying, but Sam runs out of patience with this topic. His life is not a long winding highway, it’s a dead end in a dirt road. He drops his fork onto the empty plate and shoves his chair back, threatening to leave.

Ellen sighs, turns off the tap water and throws her dish towel over one shoulder. “I get so afraid of pushing you Sam. Cause Lord knows what sorta monster raised his hand against you before. I couldn’t bear to see you run off over something dumb I said but I need you to listen to me right now
sweetheart, alright? I need you to know that you’re not what other people done to you. All the shit that they dished out. That’s on them. It don’t reflect on you at all. So think about that some, would you Sam? Cause you got something good here. Don’t throw it away on account of someone else.”

No one believed in him the way Ellen did. It made him angry. Everyone else in Sam’s life hadn’t given half a shit. Or they pretended they did, until they got something from him. But Sam can’t go back in time and seek revenge. Instead, he lashed out at Ellen. For one week he caused Ellen absolute hell. He egged her house, slashed one of her tires, destroyed her fine china (the special blue plates her grandmother had left her). He even let the rescue dogs out from the backyard. All of this in retaliation for bothering to care. He expected her to break, to cry and throw him out. Or, like Dean, to hurt him. Ellen doesn’t do neither. Instead, she kissed him on the forehead and offered him a bowl of soup and a cup of coffee. She’d done the same when Sam had come back from Lafayette after looking for Dean. As lost now as he was then, Sam had to hold back tears.

The dogs came back. Sam cleaned the egg off the house, and with what little money he’d squirreled away from working at The Roadhouse, he paid for a new tire. The china, though, he couldn’t replace. It weighed heavily on him every time they ate from the old set. It’s hard work, Sam discovered, to have someone that cared about you.

After that, Sam enrolled in Lafayette High School. With Ash’s help they faked enough credentials (past grades, a birth certificate, all with Ellen’s blessing) to get Sam in as a freshman. He showed up the first day with a blue polo and a pair of khaki pants; a complete imposter. His peers were children, fresh-face and wide-eyed. They had two parents and a bedroom with painted walls. It was hard for Sam not to hate them, to burn with resentment for everything they had that had been taken away from him.

Jo helped him through those first few weeks. She hadn’t sucked a hundred dicks on the streets of Chicago like he had but Jo was just crooked enough around the edges for him to trust. Jo and her friends absorbed him quickly. Sam was an object of awe to them. They liked to hear about his wild life outside the confines of their suburban homes, especially his life with Dean. Sam wove a beautiful story about the curve of Dean’s back, the flick of his tongue, the rumble of his voice as Dean seared kisses into Sam’s skin like a brand. They ate it up. Wanted to hear every sordid detail. It’s so romantic! they cooed to each other. So Sam told them about Dean’s hand around his neck, about their love leaving him bloodied and bruised.

“He almost killed me once,” Sam says, the tight wall of girls around him a teenage confessional. “If I hadn’t gotten away…” Sam shrugs, the threat of death rolling carelessly off his shoulders.

The glittering romance in the girls’ eyes flickers with doubt. “Are you okay?” Jo finally asks.

He went too far. Quickly, Sam retracts. “Yeah. Of course. He would never—I mean, not really.”

“Where is he now?” one of Jo’s friends asks. “Aren’t you still together?”

“You have to be together,” another insists. “You’re soulmates, you said so!”

“But if he hurts you like that…”

“—he’s dead.” Sam blurts out to a row of stunned faces. “He died. In his car. When it swerved off a cliff. Bad accident. Something to do with the steering, but he was on his way to give me flowers as
It wasn’t the truth but it was what they wanted to hear. Something tolerable, not tragic. Tragedy was only beautiful after the blood had cleared away.

Over the next four months Sam does well in school, especially English. He writes a paper about Desdemona in Othello (beautiful, young, dying tragically) that captures his teacher’s attention. They move him to the gifted class and his counselor starts talking about scholarships. She’s not like Mr. Lucas from St. John’s Military Academy. She doesn’t want to use him, only to help him. For the first time Sam starts to imagine a future for himself that doesn’t end in blood and gore.

Everything is good, for a time—except that Sam still dopes up on the weekend. And sometimes after school. His locker gets raided, a random search with dogs. They find his weed and expel him for the rest of the semester. Ellen says it could be worse, that he could be arrested and given a criminal record (Sam tries not to laugh). He goes out the same night to drown his misery. Chad and Chaz are at the Roadhouse, like always. They tell him school is a waste of time anyways. They get high. After, Chad and Chaz drop Sam off. Before he can cross the street the cops pull up and nab all three of them for possession and intent to distribute.

Now Sam sits in the back of a cop car wondering how he could have fucked things up so bad. Ellen’s shock is burned into the back of Sam’s eyes. There’s no point in going back after this, he thinks. He’ll never be able to forget that face.

As the police cars head toward the station, a call comes through the CB radio asking for an officer to respond to a drunk and disorderly nearby. To his surprise, Sam’s cop picks up the radio and responds. “10-4, I’m on my way.”

Sam sits up, peers outside as they leave his neighborhood. They take 167, cutting through Lafayette. Sam recognizes the shops, and some of the motels. Old memories twist his gut. His heart starts to beat faster. A dot looms on the horizon, on the edge of town. It’s a car pulled over onto the side of the road, its driver-side door swung wide open. The cop car illuminates it dully, from a distance. Black, with chrome finishes, it rises like a monster from the inky black depths of his nightmares. It’s Dean’s ‘67 Chevy Impala. The police officer pulls up behind the vehicle, off the curb and onto the grass. Sure enough, ‘Impala’ is spelled on the side in chrome that glistens under the yellow headlights. The license plate glares back angrily, Kansas, KAZ-2Y5. There was no mistaking it, this was Dean’s car.

Sam takes a deep breath.

The officer grabs a flashlight and gets out of the car. Two feet stick out behind the Impala’s open driver-side door. The officer shines his light inside of it, says something Sam can’t hear. Then he disappears inside the car, reemerging with a thin skeleton of a man hanging around his neck. His eyes are deep and pitted, lips thin, and hair matted to one side. His clothes are too big. He leans heavily on the officer as he’s escorted from the vehicle, stumbling, dragging his leg in a pronounced limp.

Who was this? Sam doesn’t recognize the junkie brought towards the police car. He doesn’t recognize the junkie who’s bent over, hands on the roof, legs spread as he’s being searched. Sam studies the man’s face as it’s pressed against the glass. There’s the ghost of something there, someone he knows, but it’s hidden from his view. The junkie catches him looking. They stare at each other solemnly. And then, recognition sparks! But not in Sam, in the junkie. The man knows him. It
triggers a transformation. Life flows back into him. Gray eyes turn green. Sallow skin turns pink, and freckled. Thin lips become full, curling into a smirk with black knots at both ends. Suddenly, the man blazes with new life. The human shell of him unrecognizable until Sam wakens the demon from it’s sleep.

“Dean!” Sam gasps; a prayer, a curse.

His lover greets him with a wild laugh, a shake of his head. That’s when Sam sees it: red, angry chain marks imprinted like a tattoo around Dean’s neck. Sam had left him with that sign of rebellion seven months ago. They’d never faded, never healed. They glare at him, accusatory. With his own two hands Sam had almost killed his lover and now Dean was back from the grave with hellfire burning in his eyes, seeking revenge.

The cop searching Dean pulls one hand off the top of the car, behind his back. He closes one handcuff around Dean’s wrist, but that’s as far as he gets. The junkie he’d pulled from the car is a new man. Rejuvenated, Dean fights back. Catching the cop off guard, he rips his arm away. Turns. Slams the cop’s head into the hood of the car. Thunk! The inside of the vehicle shakes. Sam watches helplessly as Dean picks up the dazed officer, wraps the chain the of handcuffs over his neck, and pulls tight. The officer gasps. He reaches towards his neck to pry off the chain but Dean pulls harder and harder, staring at Sam with a wicked grin.

“Stop!” Sam cries. “Stop, Dean!”

Dean holds the man there, chain stretched across his neck. It should be Sam in his place, lips turning blue.


Dean closes his eyes, savoring the pleas. Finally, he drops the cop. The man falls to the earth but before Sam can sigh with relief Dean drops to his knees, out of sight. There’s a sickening crack! Dean stands again, this time with a pair of handcuff keys in his bloody knuckles. Sam scoots back as the door is thrown open. Dean crawls inside leaving bloody handprints on the seat.

“Heya Sammy.”

Eyes wide with terror, heart full of lust. This the end, Sam knows it. Dean will never let him live after what he’s done. “Please, please,” he still begs.

“Did you think you were going to get away? Did you think I wouldn’t find you!”

Dean’s arm shoots out. His fingers find their rightful place around Sam’s throat, tightening, a vise. It hurts. And yet, the sick part of him screams with joy. Yes! Yes! It cries. A hit of the sweetest, darkest drug, flooding his veins. Yes! This is what he’s missed. What he is helpless to refuse.

“I should kill you now,” Dean threatens, blood and bullets in his voice. “I should wring the life out of you and leave you here, on the side of the road like carrion.” Dean’s hand tightens. Sam’s head gets fuzzy. He waits for unconsciousness to swallow him whole, maybe for the last time. But then the pressure stops and Dean suddenly lets go.

Sam gasps, lungs filling with air. He inhales greedily. Beside him, Dean pants, as if he’d been choked as well. Sam feels hot breath against his neck, stubble ghosting across his lips. Dean hovers over him, inhaling his scent. A possessive growl rumbles in his chest. Feral. Animal. Sam whimpered,
shuts his eyes. His legs fall open, involuntary and Dean slides between them, pressing their bodies together in the back of the patrol car. Their lips touch. Sam shivers. An old wound in his chest rips wide open. Dean smells the blood and goes in for the kill.

They kiss. Gentle, at first, unsure, trying to remember how their mouths fit together. Then rough, desperate, teeth bared, biting, possessive. Once again, as soon as it starts, Dean stops. Pulling back, lips hovering about Sam’s. They make him tremble with want.

“You understand, now, why we can never be apart?” Dean’s voice is distorted, calling out from the bottom of a deep pit. Sam strains to hear it, hungry, desperate. “Love is for other people, Sammy. A thin string tying you to a child and a mortgage. But...us. We’re more. We’re connected. Like a parasite to its host.”

Dean holds his face in both hands. The cop’s keys are pressed into his left check, the cop’s blood into his right.

“I am your perfect host, aren’t I, Sammy? You sensed it. My weakness, my need. You crawled inside and attached yourself, growing fat on my blood! And now...now you’re a part of me. Like I’m a part of you.”

Blood-stained fingers ghost over his lips. Sam opens them wide, accepts them into his mouth. He sucks. Moans. The earth opens under him and he feels himself falling back into the pit again, right alongside Dean.

“There’s no escape to any of this now,” Dean confirms. “Not for either of us.”

Sam’s mutilated heart beats raggedly in his chest. It was a confession of love, a sealing of their fate. Finally, Dean saw what Sam had all along. They were meant to be together, forever, no matter what. Sam forgives. Wipes the slate clean. Closing his eyes, he swallows the blood on his tongue. A new promise, a binding pact. Yes, I accept.

Dean nods his approval. He pulls Sam forward into his lap and unlocks the cuffs. Then Dean backs out of the car and returns to the Impala, stepping over the cop’s prostrate body.

Sam sits up, confused. He waits for Dean to get him, for another form of restraint, but when he hears the Impala’s engines come back to life he quickly scrambles out of the car.

“I don’t understand,” Sam says. His chafed wrists feel naked in the dark.

Dean reaches into his pocket and removes a cigarette. Lights it. Inhales. “Sure you do,” he says. The burning end dances nimbly in the dark between them. Dean hands the cigarette to him, swings his legs inside the car and shuts the door.

Sam stares at the cigarette. Without thinking, he’s in front of the passenger door, fingers on the handle. Oh, he thinks. Yes. Of course. Dean doesn’t need the restraints. Sam will always follow. Briefly, Sam looks back over his shoulder. Back to Lafayette, Ellen, Ash, and Jo. He exhales. His guilt washes away. Thank god, he thinks. I don’t need a future anymore.

Sam opens the door, gets inside. The vinyl seats squeak their greeting. Sam wraps his lips around the cigarette, lets the smoke fill his lungs. He hands it back to Dean who smirks.

“C’mon Sammy,” he says. “Let’s go have some fun.”

The Impala pulls off the shoulder, back onto the road. Together, they drive back into the dark.
Chapter End Notes

We'll find out more about what Dean has been up to while Sam was gone in the next chapter. Working on it now!

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