# Tophet

**Summary**

In the conclusion of What We Carry Inside, Sam and Dean struggle to repair their relationship even as Sam goes behind his sister's back to rescue a child from the King of Hell.

**Notes**

As usual, I haven't specified trigger warnings on the work but I'll warn for sensitive topics on individual chapters. Please note, Crowley is the main antagonist as well as a demon, and it is in line with his character to, aside from make sexually suggestive comments to other characters, make references, threats, and jokes about things such as violence against children. There will be no pedophilia, "on-screen" overt child abuse, or non-consensual parent-child incest featured in this story, but there will be dialogue and content that may not be suitable for people sensitive to those subjects. Such content may be in any chapter, with or without warning.
"What the hell happened to you?" Sam asks the woman in Bobby's study.

"Heavy-duty witchcraft," Dean replies. "I've always been a girl. I just never knew how to tell anybody."

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"Never been this turned on by my little brother before. It's sorta... weird."

Sam presses his mouth to Dean's ever so softly, cradles her face with both his hands as their eyes close.

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"Have you told Sam the truth?" asks Castiel.

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"It wasn't you, Sam," Dean insists. "I know you. You're not even capable of what he did. I'm choosing to have this baby."

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"She was unwanted once, but I realize now," Sam tells his sister, "She's the greatest and most precious gift you can give. And I can't wait to meet her and hold her."

"You like the name Mia?"
Sam Winchester buries the small tin box in the center of a crossroads and waits.

A good fifteen minutes passes before a red-eyed demon appears in the body of a young woman. She seems unusually cautious and the stature of her meatsuit at under five feet does her no favors.

"Drew the short straw?" Sam asks her in greeting.

She glances down and sighs in resignation when she sees the Devil's trap around her.

"They told me that when a Winchester summons, whoever answers the call isn't coming back."

"I just need to talk to your boss. Get him here, and you live."

"You think I'm going to tell Crowley to walk into a trap? What you can do with salt and holy water or that magic knife is nothing compared to what'd be in store for me."

"Tell him it's a trap, then. Just get him here."

"Even if I was willing, I come when my King summons me, not the other way around," she informs him.

"I don't care. Make the call." He shoves a mason jar of blood into her hands and then shows her the demon-killing knife. "Tell him that a Winchester wants to renegotiate a deal."

After some hesitation, she chants in Latin, stirring with her finger. After a moment, she stops, then speaks to the swirling blood:

"Guthrie, it's me. Tell His Majesty that a Winchester wants to renegotiate a deal."

"... Yes."

She scowls at the next thing she hears.

"I don't know, they didn't tell me before I went."

"... No, I don't."

"... What? When- Never mind. It's the brother and he demands to speak to the King."

"... I don't think, I know it is."

She waits for the reply, then her demeanor changes.

"Yes, Your Majesty?"

"... But sir, it's-"
"That will be all, Alisha, thank you." There's that god-damned accent—from outside the Devil's trap. Nodding to the crossroads demon, Sam breaks the circle with his boot and Alisha promptly vanishes.

"I take it Dean told you of our arrangement." Crowley says, hands in his pockets as always.

"I'm here to trade myself for Dean's daughter. Not just my soul, all of me. Today. Give her to Dean and I'll go with you."

"Not going to happen, Moose."

"Why not?"

"Because I know where deals with Winchesters lead. I take your offer, and by the end of it I'll be stiffed out of a soul, a dozen of my subjects will be dead, and you two will somehow still get whatever it is you wanted. Besides, what would I do with you, dress you up?"

"What are you going to do to that baby, Crowley?"

"Raise her as my own child. I'm the King; she'll be treated accordingly."

"Dean and I have met your son. He hated you," Sam points out.

"That was centuries ago. Parenting techniques were limited. I have an obligation to be a 'good' father now. ...Rather, I did."

"Wh- what do you mean, 'did'?"

"Didn't Dean tell you? I'm no longer bound to the deal if there are any attempts made to take back the child."

"...She didn't say anything about that," Sam lies. Feigned ignorance might be his only hope.

"That's a shame, because this is an attempt, which means the contract has been broken. I'm not here to negotiate anything."

"No, no, I didn't make this deal!" he protests. "I'm not bound to it. This can't-'" Sam tries to stay calm but he's not sure how to when he may have just ruined everything.

"Dean is bound to making all reasonable efforts to stop you. It seems she let you go out alone after you learned the truth, which seems to me rather neglectful. The contract is broken."

"We're talking about a newborn baby here. You can't hurt her because Dean didn't lock me in a room. That's not fair."

"Fair?" Crowley scoffs. "What's your basis for comparison? I never said I was going to hurt her. As of right now I intend to hold up my end of the bargain—to do everything in my power to maintain her physical and psychological health at peak levels. But from now on, if you do something I find inconvenient, I'll start sending you her fingers."

"Don't you dare."

"You and Dean are responsible for not forcing my hand. Or hers."

"Then I'd like to see her. I want proof that Mia is all right. That's all I want, to see her."

"What can you offer me for that privilege?"
"It's my right. She's my blood."

"She's my daughter now. You're just her uncle."

Sam grinds his teeth. How dare a demon call Mia his daughter?

"What do I have to do to see her?" he demands.

The demon's lips curve into a smirk.

"Would you engage in depraved and/or freakish sexual acts?"

His face is going red but he'd do almost anything just to see that Mia is okay, and there are worse things than being someone's bitch for an hour. Just not very many.

"...If the other person is of age and consents," he answers.

"Thank you. I'll remember that if I'm ever inclined to let you visit her."

"What?"

"I simply asked if you would. I wasn't offering."

"Look, whatever you want me to do, I'll do it. I just want to see her."

"What is your fascination with the child? You're not her father," the demon scoffs.

In a moment of weakness, Sam breaks eye contact.

"...You can't be." Crowley sounds both aghast and thrilled. "The clean-cut, morally upstanding Winchesters?"

"It's none of your damn business. All you need to know is that you should be scared right now. You have our daughter, and I'm giving you one chance to bring her back."

"And if I don't take this generously-provided opportunity?" the demon asks, sounding more amused than anything else.

"Then you're going to die, Crowley."

"Don't make promises you can't keep, Moose. Besides... you wouldn't have taken any longer to accept my offer. If it had been Dean dying and you with child, you would have let me take the baby just as soon, and it would be her standing here."

Sam only glares.

"Don't pretend to know."

"I don't pretend. I just assume you'd save your sister's life."

Crowley is just trying to goad him now. Sam takes a mental step back and gets back on topic:

"I swear to god, Crowley, if I don't have my daughter back safe and sound tomorrow, I'm going to kill you."

"If making empty threats makes you feel better, go right ahead, but even if you do succeed, the demons I have watching over her are under quite specific instructions."
"What does that mean?"

"It means that there is one baby and two of us claiming to be her father. I'm willing to split the baby and give you half, but the real father would never let such a thing happen. If word of my assassination reaches them before you do, such a thing will happen."

Sam can't speak or move at first. Nauseated and enraged, his body shakes and his fists clench so tightly the nails dig into his palm. He's ruined everything. He's thrown Mia out of the frying pan and into the fire, and the King of Hell is just standing there smugly.

After taking a few deep breaths, he tries again:

"There has to be something you want more than my daughter."

"On the contrary, she's the most valuable thing I've ever owned. Meanwhile, you and Dean each have the one thing that you want more than that child."

Sam says nothing.

"I'll let you know about that visit," Crowley adds before vanishing.

Legs shaking and weak, Sam stumbles back to the car.

It's a long time before he can force himself to turn the key in the ignition, and longer still before he thinks he can drive without unintentionally crashing into a tree.

Intentionally, he's not so sure about.

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Now what?

Sam closes the motel door behind him, leans against it for a few seconds. He's a little surprised that he made it back safe and sound.

He can't just leave Mia with Crowley. It's impossible.

But his hands are tied. If he does anything and Crowley finds out, it will only hurt Mia.

Dean did tell him that they couldn't go looking for their daughter, but she didn't say anything to imply that simply summoning Crowley to make a proposal would break the contract. So whose fault is it, Sam wonders. Dean agreed to be responsible for his actions, but she isn't. Sam made this mistake. He should have realized how Crowley would take advantage of the request.

And then he's gone and confessed that he'll turn tricks just to see Mia. Sam cringes. That's going to come back to fuck him in the ass.

He's made nothing but mistakes. He's not even sure leaving Dean was the right thing to do. He's hurt and angry, and time apart will do them good, but he wants to be with his sister. When he has nothing else, he always has Dean.

With a sigh, he shrugs off his jacket and takes off his shoes. He sits on the bed, lost.

Maybe Mia will be okay, he thinks, as long as he and Dean lay low like they were supposed to. Crowley wants leverage, and he'll only have it as long as he treats Mia well.
No. Crowley can't be trusted. Sam can't live with himself, and certainly not with Dean, if he's just sitting there while a demon raises and indoctrinates their baby.

He notices his hands and fingernails are lined with dirt and heads to the bathroom sink to wash up. A reasonable human being would have used a shovel at the crossroads, but Sam lost all reason once Dean told him the truth.

As the suds rinse away, he's seized by an unusual urge. Reaching to turn the knob, he feels cursed or possessed, but doesn't fight it.

Soon the water is running steaming hot over his hand, and it's so much better than thinking about Mia. Tears from physical pain are infinitely preferable to tears of agony, of anger toward Dean, of pure fear for their daughter.

He needs more.

Sam turns off the faucet, his left hand red with heat, and finds his lighter. Feverishly, mindlessly, he flicks it open and holds it under his palm, searing the scar that once held him tethered to reality.

Shutting his eyes, he gasps and hisses. Ironically, it's this hellfire on Earth he now uses to distract from reality, to escape from what Dean has done and what he has done.

The metal lighter starts to heat up and burn his fingers; his response is to clench it in his left fist, even as the scent of meat cooking reaches his nose.

All sensation in his palm fades, but he waits a few more seconds for the lighter to burn out. He drops it into the sink and looks at the charred, blackened mess his hand has become.

What an idiot he is, roasting his own body to hide from emotional pain for barely a minute. It may be nothing compared to what happened in Hell, but this is the worst burn he's had in his life. Damage like this, so severe it's numb because he's fried his nerve endings, could take months to heal. Of all times to be sidelined, and he did it to himself.

Crowley picks up his ward, makes his meatsuit smile and coo at her. Can't have the child grow up thinking she doesn't have a loving father. Turns out she does, in fact, but Moose is far, far away.

The King had been curious who the father was, but hadn't gotten around to finding out yet. It's been just over a week since he made his investment.

He should have guessed it. The fact that Dean kept it but then took so little convincing to give it up, the rare genetic disorder, the heart defect only noticed after the child was born... Really, he should have known Sam was the father from the moment he saw the pre-term baby's full head of hair.

It doesn't change anything, of course. His plans are still the same: fight fire with fire. The Winchesters are most susceptible to family. Crowley has a Winchester he can mold to his liking, or try to. Sooner or later she will meet her parents, and she's just as likely to turn on him as she is to help eliminate the siblings. He must be prepared to use her as either an agent, a hostage, or both.

First, though, she really needs a name. Crowley is uninterested in what Sam and Dean call her, "Mia." He wants to pick a name they'll hate, one that will make them flinch. One that brings to mind everything they don't want to think about.

Within seconds, Crowley has the perfect name for the baby, one both accurate and ironic, and he
smiles not as a facade of paternal love but out of glee.

"I shall call you Tophet," he says to her. "Tophet, Princess of Hades."
Inflammation

Chapter Notes

Warnings for (passing) references to self-harm, severe depressive symptoms, and references to past non-con.

And thank you, Damien, for remembering the jugs.

Dean has never before spent so much time lying in bed. And it's been a while since she's been continuously drunk for so long.

What's keeping her there is the strongest sense of hopelessness and despair she's ever experienced in her life. In the past, even when what she thought was the worst had happened, she had some hope, something to work for. Now...

Sam is gone but not dead. He left because of what she did, though he claimed to understand why she committed evil. There's nothing Dean can do to convince him that giving up Mia couldn't have been a sin or even a mistake when it was the only way to save him. It's what they both wanted—for Mia to be protected and well-cared for as she grows up. They were never going to watch her grow up anyway. As long as the deal stays in place, Mia will be fine.

This time, the one thing Dean has always been able to define herself with is gone. Any time she was lost or broken, she still had hunting. There were people to save. There still are, but Dean can't save them herself. For six whole weeks, she's not supposed to drive or lift much more than a milk jug (not counting the ones on her chest). She was even told to "hold her abdomen to protect the incision site" when she so much as sneezes. Ganking monsters is way out of the picture—it's the damn photographer.

Without Sam, without hunting, without Mia, without her car, there's nothing. Dean doesn't know what the hell to do other than lie there, drink, and think about death.

No matter what's happening, there are two things that Dean never has trouble hearing. One is her little brother's voice, and the other is her car's engine.

Sam took it when he left, with an unspoken agreement that he'd return, or at least return the car, by the time Dean was good to drive. There was also an unspoken implication that he wasn't going to return any sooner than that, so hearing Baby now, just three days after he learned the truth, makes Dean worry—not enough to get up, though. She can't think of much that would get her to her feet right now.

Two car doors open and close. Then the front door, along with an unintelligible exchange between Sam and someone else, maybe Bobby. After that ends, familiar footsteps approach, coming up the stairs, then to the door.

Dean watches her little brother come in with a duffel on his shoulder and a white bandage on his left hand. He doesn't even glance in her direction until after he's set down the bag and taken a deep
"What happened?" Dean asks once Sam notices that her eyes are open.

His expression tells Dean that he's considering giving her the silent treatment, but eventually he speaks, refusing to look directly at her:

"Burned my hand."

"How?"

"I made a stupid mistake." Sam leaves the room before Dean thinks of a reply. Without meaning to, she wonders if she'll make it another five weeks. Her brother is here, but he's not back.

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There is one reason Sam chose to convalesce at Bobby's, and that is the sheer number of lore books and tomes of rituals and spells. There has to be something that can tell him where Mia is. And that's the first step in finding his ten-day-old daughter.

It kills him to admit that what he did, burning his hand, sets him weeks back. He can't drive until he can use his scalded fingers again, and that's if whatever they do to his palm doesn't get in the way. Being optimistic, he's looking at two weeks minimum before he can actually do anything.

Mia has nothing to protect her from Crowley's whims, or any other demon's, and now it's more important than ever that Sam doesn't leave her there. He's the reason she was trafficked and it was his mistake that put her in more danger than ever. He can leave no stone unturned, no avenues unexplored, no methods untried.

His biggest obstacle, after being unable to get around independently, is having to work alone. No one can know what he's doing.

All he can do for now is read, read, research, and read more. He prays, too, but not to God for help or strength. Sam prays to Mia for forgiveness. She's more likely to listen.

Sometimes, he prays for strength to face Dean without either his blood boiling in rage and pain because she traded his daughter, or falling apart because he put her daughter in definite danger.

Someday, Mia will belong to them as a pair, to Sam'n'Dean. Whether or not they keep her or do the right thing, they'll be able to look at her and think "ours." That is the day Sam can begin to heal, and not a minute sooner.

According to Bobby, Dean hasn't been sober since her brother left, and almost never leaves her bed, which surprises Sam. Even if Dean did just spend eight months "incubating a five-pound parasite," as she once put it, it doesn't make sense for her to be bedridden when a few days earlier she was up for sex.

As long as someone is keeping an eye on Dean, Sam is inclined to leave her alone. Whatever's prostrating her can keep her there. It's convenient for Sam to be able to pore over the extensive library now available to him.

He does need help with a specific task once a day, and he agrees with Bobby that Dean should have something to do just to get her walking around a little more.
She actually perks up at the chance to spend a few moments with him once a day, every day, when his burn has to be cleaned with iodine. She doesn't even complain about having to be sober.

Red-eyed and dressed in old sweatpants and a t-shirt, she joins Sam in the kitchen. Like any halfway decent doctor, she washes her hands before putting on the latex gloves Sam offers her. Somehow there's just nothing to say or ask. That's for the best.

Unwrapping his hand to look at the wound for the first time, Dean cringes as if it hurts just to look at the damage.

From his wrist to his fingertips, it's red and covered with blisters, except for his palm which is missing layers of skin. Just gone. What's left is yellowy pale and, the doctor had explained, dead.

After a moment of staring, Dean clears her throat and gets to work.

"What the hell'd you do, Sammy? Give a phoenix a handjob?"

So that's how it is. Dean wants to pretend things will be normal, that they can just be the same brother and sister as before. As long as it's just for these few minutes each day, Sam decides, he'll go along with it.

"Something dumber, if you can believe it."

The iodine stings and Sam wants to yank his hand away. The easiest way to hold his ground is reminding himself that this is part of his hand healing, part of getting Mia back sooner rather than later.

"Come on, share it with the class."

"No." If he tells Dean, he'll have to tell her why. Or twist the truth and hurt her in a way that somehow he isn't willing to. "Fuck!" Sam flinches as his sister accidentally rubs in the iodine harder than necessary.

"Don't be such a pansy," she says to apologize.

"So, what, do we just keep doing this iodine thing forever?" Dean asks after a few days. She kind of hopes the answer is yes.

"No, uh, they're going to do a skin graft. After that, I'll have to do some physiotherapy, wear a pressure glove, the whole nine," her little brother explains.

"Whose skin?"

"Mine."

"...From where?"

"They're going to take it from my foot because that's the closest match to what I lost on my hand," Sam explains.

"Right, you wouldn't want hairy palms."

He gives her a bitchface.
"Maybe you'll be able to walk on your hands now," Dean suggests.

There's no change in his glare.

"Handstands will be easier."

"Dean."

"You'll be able to kick people by bitch-slapping them."

"You'll have to let me know what that feels like," he deadpans.

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Another day, another ten minutes with Sam where they do their best to pretend things are okay.

It hurts Dean to see her little brother injured like this. He still won't tell her what happened and she's mad at whatever or whoever is responsible. When she can't make herself get out of bed, which is most of the time, she can stew in anger at that thing if she's tired of being sorry for herself.

"Times like this, I really miss being friends with an angel. Y'know, just-" She pokes her brother's forehead with two gloved fingers. "All better."

"We're just going to have to muddle through like everyone else," Sam replies, wiping the iodine from his forehead with a slight scowl.

It takes each of them several seconds to figure out why the words seem so unpleasant. Though Dean doesn't let go of her brother's hand, she goes still, remembering That Day that she doesn't think about.

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"We muddle through this like I hadn't been infected at all," Dean told her soulless brother.

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"We'll just have to muddle through like you hadn't been turned into a girl," Sam fired back a minute later.

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And then the other thing Dean doesn't think about, what Sam told her last week that she can't believe. Won't believe.

He couldn't have really meant it when he said it might as well have been him. When he insisted that he is that person and that's why he felt guilty until he learned what Dean did. She's not bothered by the comparison. Even if what Sam said was true, it wouldn't have happened like that. Dean would have consented, end of story.

But what if? What if she's here, with the entire person who did that to her? She's never thought about that, having the chance to say or ask the things that she wasn't willing to ask her innocent little brother. Sam will tell her the truth no matter what.

He's just waiting, sitting there, knowing what's going through her head, eyes downcast but not out of shame. He sure as hell isn't proud of his admission but he's not exactly guilty either.
Dean is close to asking one of the big questions, mouth open to say it, then stops.

She still hates thinking about it and she hates that she hates thinking about it. She spent the better part of a year crying at the drop of a hat (almost literally), letting things out, talking to Sam and Bobby, thinking maybe it would put less stress on her and the kid. Mia's gone and there's no reason Dean can't just go back to the way she used to be. She kept everything locked up inside until it withered and died, and that was fine.

"Dean?"

She blinks at Sam.

"What?"

"You okay?"

Nothing is okay. That's the one thing they can agree on. All Dean knows for sure is that she has to get her emotions under control, stat. If she can't shake the sadness and hopelessness haunting her, she'll have to hide it. She can't keep making her little brother be the strong one. It's not his job. It's her job: watch out for Sammy. Be strong for Sammy.

Right then, it all falls into place in Dean's head.

Taking "maternity leave" was her mistake. It must be her fault that Sam couldn't identify her as his big sister. It wasn't him being accidentally transexist or whatever they call people who discriminate against transexuals; it was her not being herself. If she had kept up the whole stiff upper lip thing, Sam would have leaned on her like always and known it was her all along.

No more crying, no more staying in bed, that's what Dean tells herself. She's gotta pull herself together and be Dean Winchester. Be the awesome big sister. If she shapes up, maybe it will help Sam. Maybe he'll stay and forgive her.

So, she clears her throat and answers:

"Yeah. I'm fine."
Seven weeks.

That's how much time Sam lost by burning his hand so badly. That's how much more time Mia has to spend with Crowley because of Sam's stupid, impulsive choice.

Although the doctors insist on more physiotherapy, Sam is unwilling to spend any more time on himself. He has a pressure glove to reduce the scarring—something about flattening collagen fibers in his skin. He can drive again and his fingers still work, mostly. He'll live, even if making a tight fist isn't going to happen any time soon and his thumb isn't as opposable as before.

Dean's doing alright, though she still has a ways to go before she can go around chopping heads off vamps. Sam's a little more concerned about how quiet and disinterested she is. She wasn't as hyped about driving again as he expected. But as long as she's pretending everything's fine, Sam figures she will be.

"Going somewhere?" Dean asks when she walks in on Sam packing a bag.

"Yeah."

"This about Mia?"

"What else would it be about?"

"Sammy..."

He fiddles with the zipper as he explains:

"Look... best case scenario, Mia grows up happy and she loves Crowley like a father. ...Like she might have loved me. You took something I wanted almost more than anything, something I was only willing to give up for her sake, and gave it to a demon."

He puts a couple more items into the bag and closes it before continuing.

"Worst case, Crowley finds some loophole. Mia is hurt and abused every day of her life. Her suffering is on us. I'm only alive today because you made that deal."

"So what's leaving gonna accomplish? You're not going after her, are you?"

"I'm not going after her," he says, shouldering his bag. He leaves the room and walks down the hall. Dean follows, and it's not until they're at the top of the stairs that he finishes, feeling his sister's flinch as he says it:
"I'm going away from you."

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Day 50

Sam starts his count with the day after Dean told him the truth. Had he not burned his hand that night, what he does today would have been done on Day 2.

The first thing Sam needs is a home base of sorts, somewhere he can practice whatever magic he needs to to find Mia. It won't be a simple matter; Crowley is guaranteed to have put wards of some kind around her. If tracking spells don't turn up anything, Sam might have to resort to torturing demons for information. Once enhanced interrogation comes into play, being in a secluded area without a soul for miles is even more important.

He takes shelter in an unsettling place. The cabin itself, he was unwilling to enter. The wall that used to have the front door is gone, as if it had been shaved off, and the ceiling is bowed; it's impossible to know the structural integrity of the place. There are piles of books, broken furniture, shattered glass, and just plain junk on both the floor and in what Sam can see of the attic. There are a few books very neatly stacked on the steps to the upper level; ironically the only one he can make out is *Flowers In The Attic*.

The basement seems far more secure, and Sam is willing to venture in. His flashlight shows him a creepy array of both old and new-looking children's toys from a plastic spaceship to a naked and moldy Raggedy Ann doll, a small plastic Santa Claus for a non-existent front yard, a broken tricycle, and an empty box of Nesquik with a use-by date in the 1980s. Sam pokes one rusty cabinet door open to find a bunch of books with unsettling titles. *Suffer the Children, The Disappearance of Penny, Psycho I, The Altar Boy, The Remnants of Glory, The Hotel New Hampshire, Baby, The Ebony Tower, and Dead and Buried* are juxtaposed with, of all things, an antique copy of *The Wind in the Willows*.

When Sam sees the word "HIDE" carved into the edge of the shelf, he feels a chill and reaches for the EMF meter in his pocket. To his surprise, there's nothing.

Well then, he decides, if it's not haunted, good enough. Time to lay down some salt lines.

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Day 97

"Three and a half months ago, Crowley took a baby," Sam informs his captive as preamble. He removes the gag and continues: "I want to know where she is."

Heart pounding, he stares into hateful black eyes. Dangerous as it is going one-on-one with a demon, he can't trust anyone who might help him. His last spell was a blood-soaked dead end—literally—so it's on to fresh meat.

"You're shit outta luck, buddy," the demon replies. "Never heard anything about a baby."

Sam's left hand may be a long way from being fully healed, but it can pick up a canister of salt easy enough.

"That was the wrong answer."

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Astragalomancy—divination using dice.

With the right kind of dice, and a circle with a diameter of 19 centimeters, a person's location can be derived. Sam tests it first with Dean's name. He tosses five dice down; the numbers add up to 12. He tosses again; four of the dice fall outside the circle and the remaining die is a 1. He repeats the process until all five die fall outside the circle, leaving him with the numbers 12, 1, 9, 24, 6, 19, 21, 12, 15, and 19. L A I X F S U L O S, which Sam recognizes as an anagram of Sioux Falls. Exactly where Dean should be.

Now for Mia, though Sam is not optimistic. Crowley would anticipate tracking spells or other kinds of divination. But the dice land inside the circle.

18, 3, 14, 15, 19, 1, 21, 4, 2

R C N O S A U D B

Sam spends the next half-hour trying various anagrams of the letters, making a list of possible place-names (Corn's Daub sounds enough like a sad Midwestern town) until he puts together "abscond" with only two letters left out—R and U.

Abscondur, a Latin word.

Mia is hidden.

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Day 103

Again splash of holy water, another scream.

"I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING!"

Frustrated, Sam sets the flask down on the table with so much force that the demon flinches.

"I think you're lying."

"I don't know what the King gets up to if he's not holding court, and he hasn't been holding court. He could be anywhere!"

Sam picks up the knife and wets the blade with holy water. As time has been passing and the demons he's spoken to have no useful information, his fear is growing. The only thing he knows to do with it is hurt and intimidate.

"Who does know where he is?"

To Sam's surprise, the demon breaks down after one long cut.

"Stop!" the demon cries out. "I'll- I'll give you names! There's Lucas, Camio, uh, Otis, Dana, Imogen, and, uh... and Erick!"

Though grim, weary, blood-spattered, and sick with worry, Sam feels a little thrill.

Progress.
Day 78

Sam is starting to hate the routine. He picks out a spell or ritual that claims to be able to track anyone or anything even if they're warded, gets the ingredients or items he needs, and the results are nonsense because the bullshit magic is being blocked by a ward.

And yet he persists, because one of those spells might be able to get past whatever protection Crowley has around Mia.

Today, he puts four candles in a large circle, one to the north, one to the east, one to the south, and one to the west. He's supposed to use a chalice and pure springwater, but a large punch bowl and a couple of one-liter Fiji bottles will suffice. Incense isn't so easy to substitute; fortunately Sam has plenty of that.

After sitting in the circle, facing West, and lighting the candles and incense, Sam tries to calm his mind. It's a little difficult when he's on such an urgent mission, and every time he tries a new type of magic he worries that he's crossing the line between a hunter and someone that a hunter would try to stop. How far is too far? He doesn't know. He has to find where Mia is. Once he does, he can put all this behind him and forget the witchcraft.

Once he has reached some level of inner peace, he takes his knife and pricks his right forefinger and middle finger. He holds his hand over the water until a drop of blood from each has fallen, then he carefully reads off the chant:

"Cette eau, mon sang va guider. Mon sang, cette eau va trouver. Montrez-moi Mia de mon sang."

The strength of the spell lies in that it uses the blood of a family member. The bonds of blood are strong, stronger than many types of magic. If Crowley's wards are not to be circumvented, they may be broken through.

Sam watches the two drops of blood swirl in the water. At first it looks random, then they seem to move faster, until they spread and the surface of the water turns opaque. He holds his breath and waits, hoping that finally he'll see his daughter. He'd be happy at this point just to know what she looks like. What color are her eyes? Does she look more like her grandmother or her grandfather? Is her hair a weird color that will change later?

The water turns pitch black. Sam's shoulders slump as it remains dark and then, finally, fades away and leaves him with a bowl of water sullied by two drops of blood.

Another day, another failure.

---

Day 127

The demon who goes by the name Imogen is slightly more informative than her predecessors, though only after a lot of holy water.

"Almost nobody has seen the King in months. There's always a dozen different rumors about what he's up to."

"Have you heard anything about a baby?"
"Nothing." Imogen screams a moment later when Sam splashes her face again. Panting, she insists through clenched teeth: "I swear, no one is talking about any babies or kids!"

"Crowley took a baby in early August. She was warded until one month ago. Then she couldn't be found. If she wasn't dead, she must have been in Hell."

"Well, she's probably dead."

With a growl of frustration, Sam delivers a right hook.

"I'm telling you, there hasn't been a baby in Hell since Lilith's last feast."

"Are you sure?"

"The only ones who would know for sure about the King dragging some baby along with him would be his entourage, the circle of his most trusted servants."

"Names."

Over the next three hours, Sam extracts eight names from Imogen.

She insists, until the moment Sam stabs her in the heart:

"If there was a baby, she's dead."

***

Day 96

"Shut up!" Sam whispers to the small animal bleating in his arms. He's never had to interact with goats much before, and now that he's kidnapped one and driven two hours back to his 'home base,' he's decided he doesn't like them. The fluffy black and white creature has peed on him, in the car, and on him again, and only gotten louder over time.

"Okay, you know what?" he says to her as he ties her in one corner of the basement. "Your name is Licorice, because I hate licorice, and I hate you."

Licorice looks at him with her freaky rectangular pupils and bleats again. Sam caves in and finds a granola bar to feed her. She settles down to munch on it and he has to admit that baby goats are cute when they're not being a pain.

With a sigh, Sam goes to the table in the center of the room and looks over the instructions for the spell he's about to try. There are no stupid guarantees to bypass magical defenses, but it should tell him something helpful about the warding at the very least. He sets the paper to the side and rolls out yet another map—his sixteenth or seventeenth—then sets candles at the corners of the table.

He checks the blessing one more time, murmuring it under his breath to practice before going back to the goat. He places his hand on her head, two of his fingers resting between her little horns, and chants in Latin.

When that is complete, he unties her and brings her over to an empty bucket waiting next to the table, then takes out his knife.

"I'm sorry, Licorice," he tells the kid. She seems blissfully unaware of what knives are for, and Sam almost can't bring himself to do it. He repeats in his head, Finding my daughter is more important than this baby goat, until he's able to pull the knife across the animal's throat, severing the jugular.
She cries at first, but soon goes quiet as her blood pours into the bucket. Grim, Sam waits until the body has bled out, then sets it on the floor. He has to take a couple seconds to breathe before he can go to the next step, which is cutting the kid open and retrieving its liver.

Once that gruesome task is complete, Sam cuts the small organ into quarters, and puts one piece at each end of the map.

"Mia quaerit."

He must wait half a minute before the spell completes. If he were looking for someone who was not warded, the entire map would be bloodstained except for their location. As it is, the pattern of the bloodstains on the map will give him some sort of information, but what it will be or how easy it will be to interpret it is another matter. Haruspices were individuals actually trained in hepatomancy, not random desperate fathers grasping at straws.

The blood spreads, darkening the paper, turning the crisp labels of cities and states into blurry letters. Sam watches as the entire map turns red, confused. How is he supposed to get anything from that?

He counts the seconds. Twenty-six... twenty-seven... twenty-eight... twenty-nine...

As he says "thirty" in his head, the entire map turns to blood and it runs off the table, creating a red puddle on the floor.

Sam gags, watching blood drip from the edges of the table. He doesn't need to consult the grimoire to interpret that. He remembers what it had to say.

Mia is not with them. Mia's soul is not on this plane of existence.

Which means either his daughter is dead, or she has been physically brought to Hell for some reason.

Sam isn't sure which would be worse, and he busies himself with cleaning up the mess he's made to avoid thinking about it. After wiping up as much blood as he can stand—he has to stop when he recognizes the scent as human blood—he takes Licorice's body outside and gives her a proper burial. For all he knows, it's better than Mia ever got.

§§§

On November 28th, Dean wakes up alone in her motel room aware that it's been exactly one year since she and Sam (not quite Sam) took That Case.

She was positive that if she did get pregnant, she would abort. Whether it was at a doctor's or in a back alley or after drinking a half-gallon of whiskey in a week, she was not going to carry an inbred freak for nine months.

But after a week of stealth binge-drinking, suddenly she wasn't so sure anymore.

§§§

Day 167

It takes forty days from getting the name "Leatherdale" out of Imogen to getting said demon into a Devil's trap, and then back to Sam's creepy basement-home for questioning.

"So, Sam Winchester," the demon says once the gag is removed, "Nice talking to you again."

"Have we met?"
"I'll leave that for you to figure out."

"You're one of Crowley's favorites, aren't you?"

"Not that kind of favorite, but he does have me run important errands."

"Like what?"

"All kinds of things. Supplies, the occasional murder, and so on and so forth."

"You're being remarkably cooperative," Sam comments.

"That's because there's a lot I can tell you, but it won't help you find your baby girl—assuming that's why I'm here."

Sam straightens up.

"You know about her?"

"I've babysat her."

"What else can you tell me?"

"She's the King's greatest secret. He doesn't want the common crowd swarming around begging for a piece of the action."

"What do you mean, 'a piece of the action'?"

Leatherdale chuckles.

"What do you think Crowley is doing with her?"

"I don't know."

"Well, let's just say, he ends most of his days balls-deep in your little girl."

Attempting to retain composure, Sam counts to ten before replying.

"And why should I believe what you're saying?"

"You don't have to. Tell yourself whatever gets you through the night, Winchester."

"What else happens to her?"

"She's well-fed, healthy, mentally stimulated, all that. Crowley takes good care of that kind of favorite."

Probably the demon is lying, Sam thinks. But Crowley is exactly the type of demon who would do that sort of thing.

"Does he bring her to Hell?"

"Sometimes."

"But she's usually topside," Sam tries to verify.

"I'll leave you to logic that one out."
"Does he have plans for her?"

"Secret ones, for sure."

"Who's in contact with her?"

"Crowley, a couple nursem;maids. Me. The King can't spend all day looking after her."

"Do you know where she is right now?"

Leatherdale gives a lazy smile.

"Yeah, I know where she is."

"Is Crowley there?"

"Sometimes he is, sometimes he isn't."

Sam's incredulity must be showing on his face, because the demon continues:

"You've hit the jackpot, buddy. I have every bit of information you need to take back that kid. Thing is, you're not gonna get at it. I'm in Crowley's circle because I'm unbreakable. No one can get anything out of me if I don't want them to."

"No one's unbreakable."

"It took Alistair and his best-of-the-best pupils almost a hundred years to break me. And remind me what happened to him?"

Sam doesn't answer except to pick up the demon-killing knife.

"You will talk," he tells the demon.

*

Day 174

Seven days later, Sam has barely slept or eaten. His only mission is to make Leatherdale talk, but he's gotten nothing of use since he started in with the torture.

The one good thing is the feedback on Sam's experimentation using brass knuckles (technically iron knuckles) on his left hand to compensate for his weak fist. Leatherdale's laughter or lack thereof is an excellent gauge for Sam's improving skill.

"You can't do this forever, Winchester. Another week or two, Crowley will notice I'm gone. Things will get ugly for your little girl after that."

"Her name is Mia."

"Crowley has his own name for her."

"Which is?"

"I don't feel like telling you."

Sam leans down into the demon's face.
"Tell me what he calls her."

The demon hems and haws, and suddenly spits blood at Sam's mouth. Sam jerks away as it hits his tongue and does his best to expel it before rinsing his mouth with holy water just to be sure. It burns like peroxide in his mouth.

"I know how you killed Alistair," Leatherdale says. "I'm willing to bet you made him talk, too. Maybe you could make me talk if you drank from my veins."

"Sounds like you want me to break you."

"Getting you hooked on blood again will be worth it."

Turning away, Sam tells himself yet again not to even consider it. For months now he's ignored the wasted streams of demon blood that pool on the floor, soak into clothes, and stain his skin. Nothing will make him go back to that. Nothing is worth the evil of it.

Except Mia's six-month birthday is coming up in a mere four days, and Sam is afraid, very afraid, that Crowley will do something to her just as Azazel did to Sam. There's no time to do things the right way.

But there's another option, a horrible option that makes Sam half-wonder if he's lost his soul again. It might not be better than drinking demon blood, but surely Dean would rather do it than force Sam to extreme measures.

Leatherdale had said Alistair's best-of-the-best. Sam has one on speed dial.

He backs away, keeping an eye on the demon as the phone rings.

"Sammy?"

Sam only realizes then how much he's missed his sister's voice.

"Dean," he greets.

"What's going on?"

"I need your help."

Chapter End Notes

Licorice the goat will forever remain in my heart.

There is a real trashed/looted cabin in the woods near my house, as described here, complete with unsettling word carved into a shelf. It scares me because there are toy spaceships from the 2000s, Nesquik from the 80s, and a book about abducting children next to a book for children. The only title that isn't in the real cabin is Flowers In The Attic.
Chapter Notes

Content warning for somewhat detailed torture.

Dean parks her car next to a rotting cabin and gets out. She's not completely sure she's in the right place until Sam emerges from the basement.

Seeing her brother for the first time in months, she's overwhelmed with relief. Forget that he looks exhausted and desperate; it's Sammy.

"What the hell is this place?" she asks him once he gets close. There's blood on his clothes which concerns her, but she recognizes that it's not his.

"Secluded and off the grid. I needed to work alone," Sam explains, as if that doesn't bring up fifty more questions.

All Dean can think about is how much she's missed him in every way imaginable. If he tried to hug her, she'd hug him right back. She couldn't even pretend not to want to touch him, smell him, feel his heart beating.

"You look like shit," she observes.

"Haven't slept much more than an hour at a time for the past week," he admits.

"What have you been doing?"

"I found this place a day or two after I left. For over a month, I tried every tracking spell I could find, scrying, I even... Nothing worked. So I started questioning demons. I talked to over a dozen and none of them knew anything."

"Sam, what the hell are you talking about?" Deep down, she already knows, but for the love of God, please let it be something else.

"Let me finish. I finally got ahold of a demon who knows everything, but I can't make him talk. I need you."

Dean stiffens.

"To torture a demon for you?"

"It's been a week, Dean. He's my only chance."

"Your only chance for what?"

"Finding Mia."

She shuts her eyes. She had deluded herself into thinking Sam told the truth when he left. But no.

"...You lied to me."
"You would have tried to stop me."

"Because I did the right thing, Sam. I gave Mia the best chance to grow up safe. She'll always have everything she needs. She has immunity from every demon on and off the planet, unless you go poking around looking for her. If Crowley catches wind of this, everything we've-" Dean stops before her voice breaks. Why can't Sam get that she had to do it? He knows it was one of the hardest things she's ever done, doesn't he?

"The right thing is for her to grow up as far away from demons as possible. I won't let her stay with Crowley. I can't. And I won't rest until I know she's safe."

"I have to stop you."

Without so much as a blink, her brother takes a step closer and reaches behind Dean's back. She doesn't know what the hell he's about to do until he takes the gun from her waistband. He puts it in her hands.

"Then stop me."

He turns around and heads back into the basement, leaving Dean to stand alone in the dusk.

Now that she knows what he's doing, she has to stop him to keep Mia safe. If she's not against him, she's with him—at least that's how Crowley would see it.

Dean has to admit, if she knew for a fact that they would succeed, she would help Sam. She'd do almost anything to get Mia back. And they might do it if they work together.

But if Sam had seen Mia, had experienced that change from expecting parent to parent, he would understand why Dean can't risk going after her daughter, can't risk putting her in danger.

Well, she thinks, whether or not she helps Sam, it won't be using her gun. She tucks it away and heads back to her car.

*

Two hours later, Dean drives up to the cabin a second time. Again, Sam appears.

"What?" he asks.

"I've got six gallons of water in the trunk, a bag of salt, and some... tools," Dean greets, holding up a brown paper bag for the last item.

"You changed your mind?"

"I can't stop you. Whatever you want to know, I'll get it for you."

*

"Looks like the fun's about to start," Leatherdale comments as Sam carries the supplies into the basement. When he notices Dean, he perks up even more. Dried streams of blood on his face crack as he smiles. "Oh my. You've become quite the femme fatale, Dean. Or is it Deanna? Of course, a hot piece of ass by any other name..."

"Shut up," Sam growls.

"Don't like me talking to your sister that way, huh? Jealous?"
"He said shut up," Dean says.

"And I said it took Alistair's best-of-the-best to break me, and here you are," the demon says. "Good thing, too. Sammy here was on the verge of sucking me, and not on his knees."

Dean glances at her brother, who's averted his eyes in shame as he does at any mention of demon blood. It's not just help he wanted. He needs her to be the monster she was becoming in Hell.

"I wonder if you'll do better this time," Leatherdale muses.

"What are you talking about?"

"Well, Dean, you see, a few years ago, I was topside minding my own business, when Sam and that bitch Ruby caught me. With the help of a little magic juice, Sam sent me back to Hell, and do you know where I ended up? On the rack, under your knife."

She remains impassive, remembering. Alistair had set her on a full-fledged demon one day, instead of other damned souls. It was a different experience, to put it lightly.

"Yeah, well, pretty soon, you're gonna be beggin' me to kill you, and you'll tell me everything I want to know."

"Won't hurt you to try," the captive shrugs.

Dean sets out the implements on the workbench running along the wall and turns to Sam. She hands him a key.

"There's a motel twenty minutes down the road. I got you a room. Take a shower, get some sleep, and eat something."

"But-"

"No buts. If you want to save Mia, you gotta take care of yourself."

"You have to call me the second you know where she is," Sam says after some hesitation. "No matter what."

"I promise."

"There's a list of questions in that notebook," he tells her, then reluctantly leaves the basement.

Listening for the sounds of Sam driving away, Dean pokes around the basement. She's not sure what to think when she finds a skinned Furby, its black plastic casing warped and sun-bleached.

"Gonna look for my ticklish bits again today?" Leatherdale asks when the rumble of the car engine is gone.

"I don't need to."

"How's that?"

"Well, looks like there are a few questions here that you don't wanna answer."

"Because I'm not going to tell you anything that will help you and Sam kidnap the Princess of Hades."
"Most of these questions won't do us any good without knowing where she is."

"I'd rather not take chances."

"What if I offer you a deal?"

Leatherdale scoffs.

"What kind of deal can you offer me?"

"Answer two of these. Then I kill you."

"Why would you do that? I'm your only shot at finding that baby."

"You're Sam's only shot," Dean corrects him. "Far as I'm concerned, you're just an opportunity to show Crowley that I'm holding up my end of the bargain."

The demon smiles and nods in appreciation.

"...So you are trying to stop Sam."

"I'm not putting Mia in danger. I tell him you got loose and attacked me, and I killed you in self-defense."

"You'd have to let me go so I can tell my King what you did."

"If I do that, will the deal still be in place, a hundred percent?"

"Well..." Leatherdale sniggers to himself. "It would be."

"Would be?"

"If it hadn't been broken almost six months ago."

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

"As my King tells it, you were negligent and allowed Sam to go off on his own. He tried to trade himself for the Princess. And, well, that was trying to get her back."

"You're lying."

"Ask Sam. Ask him how I know that he's the father of that baby."

"Look, I don't know what you're talking about, so how does that count? I didn't know what he was doing."

"You didn't warn him and you allowed him to go off on his own. You did not take all reasonable measures to stop him."

"I warned him."

"Not what the King told me, but you still let Sammy go out without a chaperone. N E G L I G E N C E," Leatherdale chants, "What does that spell? Child abuse!"

"Shut the fuck up."

"Calm those perky tits, lady. Crowley has been taking good care of your baby. He's only going to
hurt her if you or Sam start being annoying. Or, you know. Try to kidnap his daughter." He nods his head at his bindings and the knife.

Dean wills herself into a less agitated state. She's not sure anymore if stopping Sam is the right thing to do.

"If I send you back, stop Sam, will Mia still be safe?"

"As safe as before, yeah," Leatherdale smiles.

"Alright. I still want those answers, then I need to make it a little bloody in here. Authenticity, y'know? I'll exorcise you afterwards. Then you tell Crowley that I stopped Sam."

"Deal. Remind me what those questions are?"

Dean reads off the list:

"Sam wants to know, where is Mia? He wants details about the location and the building. He wants names of every demon in contact with her. How often is Crowley there? Can Crowley track her? Is there any way to get past the wards around her? Does she have special needs? And... 'what does he call her'?"

The demon ponders.

"Let's see... No, the princess doesn't have any special needs, other than a special diet for her PKU. 'Course, only time will tell just how messed up she'll be, what with mommy drinking so much and her uncle being her daddy."

Dean takes a deep breath. What's done is done and Mia is what she is.

***

Alcohol numbing her feelings, Dean sits on her bed at two in the morning, thinking about the abomination growing inside her. It's the product of something she wants to forget.

But, technically, it is Sam's. There is a part of her brother inside her, and that feels right. How can something of Sam's be wrong? Why would she reject it, try to poison it? Is destroying it really what she wants?

***

Dean writes PKU next to Sam's question and clears her throat before turning back to Leatherdale.

"What else?"

"Crowley visits in the morning and at night, most days. The King is busy, but he always ensures the child is well-cared for."

"Well, that saved me a couple hours."

Leatherdale is confused for a few seconds before sighing.

"You got me. I'm in for it now, huh?"

Dean offers a grim smile.
"About those ticklish bits..."

* 

After hours upon hours of injecting holy water into Leatherdale's veins, forcing salt down his throat, and more, Dean is getting frustrated. She's putting this demon through incredible agony; he's screaming like nobody's business. But he won't break.

"We're going below the belt," Dean warns. She holds up the syringe full of holy water, yet again. "You tell me where my daughter is, we won't have to find out what happens when this goes into your balls. Or your dick."

"Shoot me up, cowgirl."

Less than thirty seconds later, the demon's pants are around his ankles and he is screaming even louder than before. Dean shakes her head, realizing she's just lost a little of her hearing. It'll come back.

"Got anything for me?" she asks once the demon's raw throat goes silent.

"As a matter of fact, I do," he answers with a hoarse laugh. He promptly urinates, which causes Dean to take a step back in disgust.

"You're gonna die sitting in piss," she points out, turning back to the table to refill the syringe.

"Ah, but don't we all?"

* 

Standing behind Leatherdale, Dean bends down to speak softly in his ear.

"We both know shoving needles into your balls isn't gonna get me what I want. So you got one chance before I pump so much holy water up your ass, an angel would give you a rimjob."

Leatherdale sighs in satisfaction.

"Now we're getting somewhere!"

"You seem awfully eager for this," she observes.

"I'm excited, Dean. If you can make me beg for mercy, you deserve the chance to go after Mia."

With some difficulty, Dean removes Leatherdale from the chair and trusses him up, trapping his arms between his knees and his chest. She keeps an eye on him as she sets up an enema bag and fills it. This is a nasty technique, in more than one way.

Dean jams the nozzle into the demon's ass and unclamps the tube. She grimaces as Leatherdale begins to scream yet again, and doesn't stop.

It takes several minutes to empty the bag. Dean removes the nozzle and shoves in a retention plug.

"Where's Mia?!" she demands, raising her voice to be heard through the agonized wailing.

"It doesn't matter! The King... will figure it out. He'll... be ready," Leatherdale gasps through clenched teeth.
Dean kicks him in the side, as close to his distended stomach as her boot reaches. The cry of pain is even louder than she expected.

"You've got about five minutes before I use this on the other end, too," she warns him, holding up the nozzle. She drops it and refills the bag, making it ready for whatever orifice she decides to "cleanse" next.

"Stop! Please!"
"Where is she?!"
"Tophet... is... in... Jericho... Vermont!"

Grim, but triumphant, Dean shoves the demon-killing knife into Leatherdale's chest.

Now that she knows, the question is whether to use the information. If she and Sam fail when they try to rescue Mia, and their daughter gets hurt, she'll never be able to live with herself. It's been a nightmare living with herself for the past four months, even believing Mia was safe.

It's not too late to protect Mia. She can tell Sam everything, exactly what happened, but tell him it was somewhere else, on the other side of the country. When they can't find anything, they'll decide the demon lied and have to give up. Mia will be safe; soon enough Sam and Dean will get back to normal.

§§§

Sam wakes up to his phone ringing. He stumbles across the room to pick up.

"Dean?"

At that point he realizes he's naked and he's confused until he remembers that he showered before collapsing on the bed. He couldn't remember the last time he had showered and he still can't. Before Leatherdale.

"Sammy."

"Did you get him to talk?"

"Yeah, he got chatty after a while."

"Where's Mia?"

"Get back here and I'll tell you all about it."

* *

When Sam gets to the cabin, he sees Dean gathering branches. If Leatherdale is dead, they need to burn the body. And if Leatherdale is dead, Dean must have gotten the answers they need.

"Dean!"

She tosses the branches onto the pile and approaches him.

"What did you get out of him?" he asks.
"First things first, Sam. Did you talk to Crowley after I told you about Mia?"

"What I did doesn't matter. What matters is Mia and getting her back."

"What fucking matters is you not telling me that Mia wasn't safe!"

"You're mad at me for hiding something?"

"I lied because I knew she was safe. You lied because you knew she was in danger."

"It wouldn't have helped anything for you to carry that burden too. It was on me."

Dean shakes her head.

"The past six months, I've gone days where the only thing that stopped me from drinking myself to
death was knowing that Mia was safe. I know I'm poison, I know I fuck up and hurt you when I'm
trying to save you, but I thought that I'd given Mia a future that no one could take away. Now it turns
out that you did."

"Dean, I'm sorry I made that mistake. I really am," he answers. "But let's be clear: whatever future
Mia had was taken away when you let Crowley have her."

"She had a chance. She still does."

"Not enough of a chance. I can't let my- I can't let our daughter grow up with Crowley as a father. I'd
rather risk her becoming a hunter than becoming whatever happens to someone who's raised by the
King of Hell. Now, are you going to tell me what you got out of Leatherdale or not?"

"Everything."

"Everything?"

"Every question you had."

It strikes Sam that he's going to see his daughter soon. One way or another, this hellish chapter of his
life will be over. His eyes fill with tears and he wants to hug his sister.

Instead he clears his throat and answers the awkward, unasked question hanging between them.

"You can come with me as long as you promise me something."

"What?"

"You have to promise me that if push comes to shove, you'll let me give my life for her. If you have
to leave me behind, if we get some kind of hostage situation, anything, you put our daughter first."

"Can you promise me that?"

"...If that's what it takes."

"Deal. Mia first."

The Winchesters offer each other weak smiles, as weak as their promises to each other.

"Let's get going."
"Are you sure this is it?" Sam asks, peering at the two-story home through the Impala's windshield.

"You've asked me like two hundred times now. Sam, we are in the right place," Dean insists, her eyes also on the pale yellow vinyl-sided building.

Throat dry and tight, Sam doesn't respond. Ever since he woke up this morning—gave up trying to sleep might be more accurate—he's been painfully aware of the date. February 1st. It is Mia's six-month birthday, and if Crowley is going to do something to her like feed her demon blood, Sam and Dean have until tonight to stop him. Assuming he's actually waiting. For all they know, it's too late. (Or, Sam admits, Crowley might not have any plans to poison Mia.)

Doesn't matter. Mia is here and they're going to get her out. It might be as little as five, ten minutes before Sam meets her. Ten minutes, and this will start to be over.

The ordinary-looking building isn't what Sam expected. The trees and privacy fence, sure, but it looks like it belongs to a middle-class family with four kids, not the King of Hell. There are no demons outside that he can see, no cars in the driveway, or even footprints in the light snow covering the front lawn.

If he didn't know better, Sam would say the house was empty and had been for a while. He refuses to even consider that they've made a mistake. Mia is in there, and once he finds her he will never let go.

He hopes she won't be too scared of him, a complete stranger aside from maybe his voice. Would she remember it from the womb?

"It's not too late," Dean says.

Sam looks at his sister, confused.

"If anything goes sideways in there, and I mean anything, Sam, how are we supposed to forgive ourselves?" she asks him.

It's unlike Dean to express that kind of doubt. Even after the forced role reversal during Dean's pregnancy, Sam finds himself uncomfortable having to reassure her.

"We can do this, Dean," he tries.

"We don't have to. We can walk away and let her grow up safe."

"With Crowley?"

"Yes."
"With someone who named her after a place where they burned children alive as sacrifices?"

That silences Dean for a moment, at least. Sam had looked up the name "Tophet" after Dean extracted it from Leatherdale and he feels a pang every time it goes through his mind. That name can't be a coincidence; Crowley wants to remind them what Dean essentially did, maybe to drive a wedge between them.

"He just did that to mess with us," she answers eventually. "I'm just saying... it's not too late to leave well enough alone."

Eyes locked with his sister, Sam informs her with all the determination in his heart:

"With or without you, Dean, I'm going in there, and I'm not leaving without my daughter."

She reaches for her door handle. Sam hides a sigh of relief. She's going with him.

The front porch is empty—it deserves a couple of rocking chairs, Sam thinks—and remains so as the Winchesters creep around to use the back door. It's perpendicular to a window into the kitchen, which is spotless, too spotless. But Sam doesn't let himself doubt. Mia is here.

After picking the lock, they enter the house, finding themselves in a small laundry room-mudroom hybrid. That is to say, a room with a washer, dryer, and ominously empty shoe racks. They proceed into the kitchen and rec room. Perfectly neat, no dust, no clutter, no sign of a baby or even an adult living here. It's like walking through a furniture catalogue, Sam thinks. It gives him only a little reassurance to realize that the thermostat is set to a comfortable living temperature.

There is no one on the first floor, so Sam takes the basement while Dean heads upstairs. As he expected, nothing besides a furnace and some empty cardboard boxes.

Maybe Dean had better luck, he thinks. She must have. Mia has to be here, upstairs. Her crib must be ten feet above his head. Dean probably found her by now, but why isn't she calling for Sam yet? Mia must be heavily guarded, no matter how absent the house looks.

The thought drives Sam back up the stairs, then onward to the second floor. With as much stealth as he can muster when his heart is pounding loud enough to wake the dead, he proceeds along the corridor and pokes his head through each door. He finds nothing but immaculate bedrooms.

There's only one room left and Sam has to stop and force himself to take a few deep breaths. He hasn't seen or heard Dean since they split up, which means she's in this room, yet for some reason isn't calling out to him. Mia has to be in here, too.

The first thing Sam sees when he swings open the door is a pink crib. His heart leaps at a mere sign of Mia, only to be strangled with fear when he sees his sister with a knife to her throat. A demon in dirty jeans and flannel has Dean's life in its hands and it's smiling at Sam as if greeting an old friend. And worse, the crib is empty.

"Where's the baby?" Sam asks.

The demon digs out a large, crumpled envelope and tosses it to the hunter. There are some small lumps inside it, and Sam can't help but notice tiny smears of blood on the inside of the flap as he opens it.

He discards the envelope before it fully registers what is inside the small plastic bag he is now
holding. For the first time in his life, he almost screams in pure horror.

Mia.

"Oh, you goddamned son of a bitch," Dean growls when she sees the gory contents, though she can't hide how her face pales. The demon presses the knife into her skin enough to draw blood, and she goes quiet again.

Crowley warned him. He told Sam he would do it. Those tiny severed fingers before him are Sam's doing.

"I have a message from the King," the demon says in the sickened silence. "He's way ahead of you. Imogen, Leatherdale, all part of the plan. The Princess was never in Vermont; Crowley just planted the information he wanted you to have and made sure Leatherdale believed what he was telling you, if you got him to tell you anything. The fact that you're here proves that Crowley is in control. You're just rats in a maze, chasing a wild goose who's only going to lose more feathers unless you make the smart choice and back off."

"Why would we leave Crowley alone after this?" Sam demands, holding up his daughter's fingers.

"You may notice that those are fresh," it answers, nodding to the bag. "If you give them back soon, the King will have them reattached and Princess Tophet won't even remember losing them."

"What about Dean?"

"Give your word that you'll stop endangering the Princess and you're both free to go."

"Why-"

"We give our word," Dean interrupts, surprising her brother.

"What?"

"Sam..."

He nods and echoes her:

"We give our word."

The demon shoves Dean away. She takes Mia's fingers from Sam—he couldn't let them go for anyone else—and examines them briefly. Nothing more than a fold-over sandwich bag protecting them. That's what Crowley thinks of his hostage.

Clearing her throat to hide her emotions, Dean gives them back to their foe.

"Tell Crowley he has our word we will back off, as long as Tophet keeps her fingers and is never, ever hurt again."

Triumphant, the demon vanishes, leaving them with nothing but the smell of sulfur.

Stumbling over to the crib, Sam can't see through the tears blurring his vision. He grips the bars, knowing Mia was never here but that this object is here for her. It's proof to him that he has a daughter out there.

But what kind of father can he claim to be when everything he's ever tried to do for her has made things worse? Fathers don't hurt their children.
He hears Dean behind him; it sounds like she's picking up the envelope from the floor. He tries to look at her when she stands at the end of the crib but it's too much. Mia's blood is almost literally on their hands, especially Sam's.

"You didn't listen to me, Sam," his sister says. "Will you listen to this? Is seeing her blood enough?"

"...You meant it."

"Yeah, I meant it." Dean sounds incredulous. "Are you telling me that you don't care that she got her fingers fucking chopped off?"

"Of course I fucking care! It's all the more reason for us to get her away from the monster who did it! We just need to find another way, Dean. Whatever it takes, we have to save her."

"What the hell is wrong with you? Crowley might be holding our baby over the edge of a cliff, but he's not gonna drop her unless we keep pushing. You don't have a snowball's chance of saving her, and if you fail, she's going to die or be hurt even worse. I won't let you take that chance."

"If you help me, we can do it. We can do anything as long as we work together."

"I won't help you get our baby killed."

It strikes Sam that for the first time, Mia does feel like his and Dean's child. It finally feels natural to think of her as the child of two parents, however dysfunctional her conception and gestation were, however disjointed the decisions that led to her birth were.

And what does that mean? That they have to make a decision together? Or is it Sam's subconscious reassuring him of his oath to get Mia back? He can only want the child more if he thinks of it as Dean's as well. The more of a Winchester she is, the less she belongs with demons, right?

"It's over," Dean says, voice low and severe. The authority strikes a fear into Sam he hasn't felt for a long time but then she continues, "Crowley won."

"No, he didn't, Dean," he snaps. "You're just his bitch because you made a stupid, selfish decision."

It's a shock when Dean punches him in the face; Sam stumbles back, feeling a violent urge towards her he hasn't felt since before her transformation. Hitting a woman feels wrong, but if he would strike back at his brother without apology, he should be ready to do the same to his sister.

So he delivers a right hook, which Dean withstands, and he readies himself for a full-out brawl with her. It's not as if he hasn't been angry at her for six months.

Dean holds her own better than Sam expected, considering she's not quite as strong as before her transformation. She makes up for it by being more agile, and while neither of them want to really hurt each other, the bruises start to add up. They were ready to fight demons; now they have to take it out on each other.

Thing is, although Dean has no idea, she's already won. Sam knows how this is going to end and he's throwing punches because the moment this is over he'll have to admit it. Fighting Dean is all he has left. Once he surrenders... he's not sure what will happen to him. He's afraid to find out.

One moment, Dean has him pinned, the next, she's leaving an obvious opening for him. Sam doesn't take it and she notices.

"You afraid to keep fighting a girl, Sam?" she challenges. "Think you're gonna hurt me?"
He takes her off guard and wraps his limbs around her to restrain her. He's forgetting about fighting, and thinking only of how warm and alive Dean is. He's missed everything about her from her scent to her horrible, annoying singing. He can't walk away from her again.

"You want to know the truth? What I'm afraid of?" he asks, looking into her eyes.

"What?"

"I'm afraid to stop fighting."

Dean's eyes are guarded. She waits for Sam to continue.

"If you asked me to kill myself so I would stop going after Mia and putting her in danger, I'd do it. If you asked me to let you kill me, I'd do it. But you're asking me to live and let her grow up in Hell. I'm scared to try. I'm scared I'll go insane, or- or just not be strong enough."

"I know you can do it."

"I don't, Dean. I don't think I can do what you're asking of me."

"Begging, Sam. I'm begging. As your sister, as Mia's mom, let go of our baby."

There. There is the inevitable end to fourteen traumatic months, from Dean's rape to their consensual illicit unions to Mia's birth to this moment.

When Dean asks something of him, something with so much gravity, Sam can't say no. He can't refuse. And yet...

He shakes his head, unable to say it.

§§§

It's getting thrown into that horrible TV show universe and suddenly not being pregnant that settles it: Dean wants to have this baby.

"Are you going to test for genetic problems?" she asks when she drags herself to a doctor.

"Usually it's only done if there's reason to suspect there may be an issue," he answers dismissively. "You don't appear to have any risk factors."

"...Look, uh, I'd appreciate it if you could keep this off the record, but the father is kind of... related to me."

Now the doctor's interest is piqued.

"How closely related?"

"Can we just go with unhealthily close?"

"I see." The doctor puts her down for what turns out to be a CVS.

As they poke the needle into her, Dean swears to herself to do the right thing by this kid, whatever the right thing ends up being.

§§§
They take turns driving until they can't agree what state they're in. Rather than find a motel, they decide to park the car somewhere quiet and sleep in the backseat, curled up together under a blanket.

Well, pretend to sleep. There's no way Sam can sleep when he's trying to come to terms with the day's events. There is nothing he won't do for Dean, and if she wants him to accept that she put his life ahead of Mia's future, then... he will, won't he?

Just thinking about it makes his whole body tense and the adrenaline flow. Anything could be happening to Mia. They can't even be sure if her fingers are going to be reattached, if those were hers in the first place. Sam only half-wishes they weren't. If they weren't hers, then some other baby suffered in Mia's place. His brain is too tired and angry to know whether that would be worse.

The glow of the crescent moon behind the clouds rises higher and higher. Sam is still awake. All he can think about is Mia and how utterly wrong everything is. What happened to Dean was wrong. Sam's reaction to the pregnancy was wrong. No matter what happened to Mia after birth was going to be wrong. It would be selfish to raise her themselves and they would have been devastated to give her up. But Dean had to somehow take a third, even worse option. And now... it's all just wrong!

The pattern of Dean's breathing changes. She's awake. He probably woke her up just by how upset he is. The thought doesn't help him be any more calm.

"Sam? You up?" she whispers after a solid minute.

"What?"

"Have you slept at all?"

He doesn't answer. Dean sits up and he has no choice but to also sit up.

"It's going to be okay, Sammy," she promises.

"It's really not. Not for her."

"It'll be worse if we try to get her out."

"I know, Dean. Just give me some time."

If Dean had a response, it's cut off when Sam tugs her into his lap. He presses his cheek against hers and shut his eyes. His sister. Close, warm, alive. And he will never walk away from her again, never let go of her again.

She slides her arms around him, keeping it friendly as she wraps them in their shared blanket. They haven't talked about the other side of their relationship since Dean confessed what she did. Even she has the tact not to bring it up right now. Not that they need to talk about it. It's not something they want to have to talk about.

He kisses her cheek once, then her lips. Dean's mouth curves into a smile before she reciprocates, pressing closer to Sam.

Too gentle, Sam thinks. She isn't feeling what he wants her to feel. A hand on the back of her neck, he deepens the kiss, pouring his agony and love into her. Anyone else could mistake it for passion, but Dean won't. She holds back from groping or grinding that she might have done and instead returns the love and accepts the agony.

Slowly, as if poison is being drawn from a womb, Sam begins to feel different. He begins to
remember being with Dean when Mia was not eclipsing the world. He remembers feeling like a human instead of the angry thing that's been on a hunt for six months, alone even when he wasn't.

*Dean, Dean, Dean,* he thinks. He doesn't want to hurt her. He doesn't want to be angry at her. He just wants to be with her.

He softens his kisses, and loosens the bruising grip he's held her with.

"Is it safe to get turned on now?" Dean asks in a whisper.

"Maybe." Sam waits for the inevitable reach downwards. Dean feels for his cock and finds it soft.

"You don't seem too excited."

"It's not because I don't miss you," he promises. He doesn't need to talk about how much of a mood-killer it is to be abandoning something—someone—he cares about.

"Well let's get you excited," Dean whispers, shrugging off the blanket. Sam watches her strip naked to the waist. It's too dark to see details, but when his fingers make contact with her skin he remembers the thrill of touching her. Her body is almost the way it was the first time, before pregnancy reshaped her body. There are stretch marks where Mia grew, scars like any other. Dean accepted those scars for their child, for Sam, for their family, but in vain.

It angers him, but he can ignore it. He can ignore a lot when he can taste, smell, touch, hear, and see his sister. He takes off his jacket and shirts to feel more of her skin against his, she sighs softly as he latches onto her neck and sucks a mark into her skin for the first time. He doesn't care if anyone knows what they do now. What matters is that they're together.

Grasping her hips, Sam grinds against her, letting sexual desire come to the forefront. The closest two humans like them can come is for one to allow the other into their body, and allow each's pleasure to be dictated by the other.

He watches Dean's silhouette remove the last of her garments while he shoves his pants and briefs to his ankles. It's cold inside the car but not even that can tame his need for her now that they've come this far. He holds back and lets Dean take his cock in her hand. She positions it at her entrance and sinks down with a soft moan, enveloping him in wet heat.

It's been such a long time. Sam had made himself forget how good it feels to be inside Dean, how much he knows he belongs here with her.

But the truth is, he's never been so conscious that he's with his own sister. It doesn't matter to him; he still feels this experience is good, that this union is pure even if their love and need for each other never will be.

They move in rhythm, at a gentle pace that's less about getting off and more about being one. Kissing steals their breath faster than the movement of their bodies.

It hits Sam then that they are only sharing this because of what Dean did. He would have died without ever truly feeling in his soul that Dean is the same sibling he grew up with. It took a selfish act on her part for Sam to understand.

And now he's feeling a satisfaction that he couldn't have felt without that understanding. He is reaping good from the evil Dean committed. He is enjoying the thing Dean paid too high a price for.

Guilt is heavy, but it doesn't overcome him. Not when it comes to Dean. Once it's about Dean, guilt
is secondary, cursory, and never for what it should be for. And regret, of course, is non-existent.

No matter how much Sam hates himself for that, he'll never reject his sister. The life Mia had ahead of her was too high a price for Sam's life, but not for the end result of being with Dean. They're no better than they were when Sam said they needed to change, and deep down he knows they may never change. Maybe they can. He hopes they can. But if they are only ever selfish, needy, and codependent, he'll take it and he'll love every second of it.

"Shit, Dean..." he finds himself murmuring. He's been numb to his own needs and wants for months and now he's alive. Dean makes him alive. He's alive and too close, too soon. He makes her pause her hips, placating her with his thumb on her clit and his lips against hers. She whimpers into his mouth as he stimulates her until she's quivering in his lap, so close she can hardly hold still.

He doesn't finish her yet. Instead he lowers his head to latch on to her nipple, flicking the nub with his tongue to tease her as his hands rest lightly on her thighs. She tangles her hand in his hair, encouraging him as she starts to rock her hips.

As she becomes more frantic, Sam's thoughts too lose coherence. The deep love and subtle, abstract thoughts disappear, replaced by more concrete and immediate concepts of need and pleasure.

They climax in the same moment, Dean's voice breaking into a soft shriek and Sam's groan muffled in her flesh. For a few seconds, everything in the world is precisely as it should be and nothing is bad. Euphoria sets in, with a sense of belonging that Sam can only feel when he's with Dean.

Yes, he thinks. This is what is right. The rest of the world, the rest of the universe, it doesn't matter right now.

Dean pulls off and they rest their foreheads together as their breathing returns to normal. The shared heat of sex begins to dissipate and Sam finds the discarded blanket to wrap around his sister's shoulders. She in turn embraces him, pressing a kiss to his lips.

It strikes Sam deep to realize she let him do this without any kind of protection or barrier between them. She might conceive and have to make a difficult choice. And she's willing to put herself through that for the sake of this oath.

Because this is an oath they are swearing, a reaffirmation that they are in this together, that they belong together and always will.

The thing Sam wanted in his heart, more than anything, has gone up in flames. Dean threw it into the fire. But Dean is what's left, what will always be left when everything else is smoke and ash. She is the subject of his Hellish love and sick devotion, and will be forever. She will be worth fighting through the tears, enduring the agony, undergoing any trial or tribulation, forgoing any desire or supposed necessity.

"Dean?"

She's stroking his hair, as if he's been lost all these months and has just now come back to her. She's not wrong.

"What, Sammy?"

There's a weight lifting from his shoulders but grief settling in his heart. Sam takes a deep breath and lets an unseen tear fall before beginning:

"You did see Mia, right? Before Crowley took her?"
"A little."

Mia was never rightfully his, but he claimed her all the same. It's a stolen fatherhood he's letting go of and it still hurts like hell—worse than Hell, in some ways. And far, far worse than being told the lie that she was dead.

"Tell me. Tell me what our daughter looked like when she was born."

And Sam listens to his sister turn a few seconds of her life into minutes of describing their newborn baby, until even with Dean's ineloquent words he can picture every detail.
August 2016

Pouring himself a drink, Crowley watches the petite teen lying in the center of his bed stretch her limbs. She takes ahold of the one of the silk sheets and wraps it around her naked body. She always seems to hide herself in some way afterwards, as if unsettled by what she's just done.

Already in his dressing gown, he leans against the liquor cabinet as he takes a sip of scotch.

"You've barely spoken since yesterday," he remarks. "Didn't you like your birthday presents?"

"I loved them, Daddy," the girl reassures him with a forced smile. "Especially the dress."

"But?" Crowley prompts.

"Nothing. I'm fine."

"Don't lie to me, Tophet."

"There was nothing wrong with my birthday presents. It's just... it's been a year since I became your... consort." She blushes slightly at the final word.

"So it has."

"I don't want to do this anymore, Daddy," she confesses.

Neither does he, Crowley thinks dryly. Most of the fun in having sex with her is in knowing how upset the Winchesters will be if they find out, which they haven't.

But Tophet is unaware that her appeal lies mainly in that rather than in her physical appearance. She's neither voluptuous nor sensual in shape. Her face, with a thin upper lip and a strabismic eye, tells the tale of a mother who drank. In truth, the demon is indifferent to her appearance, but it's good for her self-esteem to think that her father finds her beautiful.

"You're not a child anymore, darling. You must earn your place in my court, or make your own way in the world." He adds, "I can get you any job you want, you know."

"I don't want to leave you. There has to be something else I can do, something I'm good at."

The King smiles a little and sets down his glass. Today is the day, then. His daughter is tired of
prostituting herself, even for her beloved Daddy.

"What if I offered you a chance to do one task that will ensure my everlasting favor?"

"What is it?"

"Remind me first what you know about Dean Winchester and Sam Winchester."

The girl blinks in confusion a few times, then answers:

"Dean is my mother, Sam is my uncle. They're hunters and your worst enemies. Dean was pregnant with me when her brother was sick and dying. She summoned you and agreed to hand me over in exchange for Sam's life."

"The Winchesters are the biggest threat to my existence and the existence of Hell," Crowley explains, "I've spared them in the past because they had use, but it's been years without a hint of another apocalypse looming. It's time to take care of them for good."

"You want me to kill them?"

Exactly what the King wanted to hear.

"I wouldn't expect that of you. Killing a blood relative is not an easy task for most humans. And you've never killed anything larger than a snake."

"I don't care. I don't know them. They're not my family, you are. You raised me and I love you."

Crowley smiles and joins Tophet on the bed, pressing a kiss to her long, soft hair.

"And you know I would love you too if I were capable of it." He waits for her to smile and relax a little before continuing. "For that reason, you are not to harm them. I won't let you put yourself in danger."

"Then how are you going to-"

"The less you know about the overall plan, the better, darling. All you need to know is that it depends on you. They are Winchesters, and as one of them, you are my best hope of ridding the world of the flannel-wearing nuisances. Do as I say, and once they're dead you can stay here as long as you like, doing—or not doing, as the case may be—whatever you like."

"What do you need from me, Daddy?"

§§§

It's not August 1st—the day of Mia's birth—that Sam finds significant. It's not the date, two days later, when he woke up and was told that his daughter had passed.

It's the day that Dean told him the truth, August 8th.

That's the day, every year, that he wakes up at four in the morning and lies there next to Dean, hurting more than ever.

His daughter is five years old. She should be going to kindergarten in a month. God knows what's really going to happen to her. Or if she's even alive. Sam thinks he'd know if she wasn't, but how could he when he never met her?
Five o'clock comes and goes. Sam's mind is still racing and his heart is still hurting.

Six o'clock, and Sam feels no inclination to get up or do anything. It doesn't occur to him to try to think about something else. These hours are Mia's.

It's almost seven o'clock when Dean awakens. She picks up on his mood immediately and any morning raunchiness she might have had is tempered.

Sam turns onto his side and puts an arm around Dean to keep her close. He can feel her body through her old t-shirt, supple shapes through soft fabric, and he rests his hand on the curve of her hip. He was inside her last night, reminding her with each thrust of all the intense love and need he feels when he's next to her. He had kissed her until he was positive she knew nothing except for his passion for her, for living this life with her and her alone.

"I was dreaming about Mia," Sam tells her.

"Me too. Every night this week."

They have this exchange annually, Sam thinks, but they never have the courage to talk about what their dreams are.

His is embarrassingly idyllic—he walks into a house, one that belongs to him and Dean, and it's Mia's birthday. This year the cake had five candles. His little girl smiles as if she's been waiting all day for him to come home, as if her party wasn't complete without him. The first two years, she was sitting in a high chair and he tried to make his way to her. Starting with her third birthday, he stands in the doorway and she scrambles from her seat to greet him.

The dream always ends before they touch. And worse, when he wakes up he can never remember her face. It's just gone as soon as he opens his eyes.

Sam takes Dean's left hand and interlaces their fingers. In the dream, he has a wedding ring. Though the idea of legally marrying his own sister is laughable—vows between them would be silly and redundant—he figures if they ever did get out of the life and settle down, they might pose as a couple.

He wonders what Dean dreams about, but he doesn't ask her. They're not nice dreams like Sam's. He knows because he's been awoken by her distress several times, hearing her voice crying out in fear for both him and Mia.

Still, things are better than they were a few years ago. Nowadays, the Winchesters can smile and laugh. They can interact with children who are Mia's age. They can help other people. They can lust after each other like teenagers.

They aren't "happy" though and the truth is that neither of them want to accept this reality. Sam thinks about dying on a regular basis, but he'll always choose to keep going for Dean. Besides, it hurts a little less each year and someday it will stop making him doubt that life is worth living. Probably.

It helps knowing his sister needs him. Although she's unmistakably Dean, she's not the Dean she was before giving her baby away to a demon, then being told by her brother that essentially he's glad she was raped. Her perception of both herself and Sam has never been so negative.

Mia changed them, and all they can do is keep fighting against the evil they find in the world. Though demons have been few and far between since the whole Purgatory crisis, they've killed every one they've encountered. They're just holding their breaths for the day Crowley has something
Later in the morning, Sam is on his laptop in the bunker's library when Dean appears.

"Anything on the radar?" she asks.

"Thirty kids have gotten sick in Red Cloud, Nebraska... from whooping cough."

"Sure it's not a shtriga?"

"They aren't comatose. Nothing up our alley, unless you want to start going after anti-vaxxers." It never fails to roil Sam to think about people not taking advantage of everything medicine has to offer, but his sister is dismissive.

"Maybe Bobby has something for us," she says. Her phone rings, surprising both Winchesters, and she checks the caller ID.

"Speak of the Devil," she mutters as she picks up. "Heya, Bobby. Just talking about you."

"... Who?"

"... Never heard of her." Dean holds the phone away from her mouth and addresses Sam. "Does the name Taylor MacLeod ring a bell? Girl with a lazy eye?"

Sam shakes his head.

"What does she want?" she asks Bobby.

"... That doesn't sound suspicious at all.

"... Alright. We can meet her."

After exchanging a couple more details, Dean hangs up.

"Either somebody needs us or somebody is trying to get us killed," she explains. "My money's on getting us killed."

"Why?"

"Mysterious girl shows up at Bobby's, asking specifically for us, says she needs help but won't tell him what. Says she'll only talk to us. When does that ever end well?"

Tophet watches the yellow cab drive off before turning to face the park where she expects to meet her mother and uncle. It's a beautiful day and there are a lot of people milling around. Slipping on her sunglasses, she heads for the large fountain a few hundred feet away.

Not many people pay her any mind—just a young girl who likes something about her and a young man about her age who also likes something about her except in a very different way. If she were to remove her sunglasses and look at him, his interest would disappear, but as long as he's not bothering her, she won't.

She doesn't need to search the crowd. She senses all the general moods around her and everyone is
more-or-less happy or at least relaxed, except someone who's very sad about a personal loss. She'll notice when two apprehensive minds come near her.

Sitting by the water, it's never been harder not to fidget. Daddy taught her to "display decorum at all times, like a princess," but she's suddenly anxious about meeting her mother, maybe the only person who can answer her questions. And Sam—the man who's worth more to Dean than she was. What kind of person is Sam, and what kind of person is Dean?

Some might call it manipulation that her father has kept information from her throughout her life, but Daddy calls it a safeguard. He wouldn't be the King of Hell if he didn't know how to be five steps ahead of everyone. He needed her ignorance to be authentic. There can't be anything for Tophet to hide or pretend not to know beyond what's absolutely necessary.

One nervous mind appears. Tophet dismisses it when she recognizes an affectionate tinge, but once the man comes into view and joins his partner on a bench, she watches. The couple converse for a little while before the man makes up his mind. He takes out a tiny box from his coat and asks his girlfriend the age-old question.

Tophet can't help but smile at sensing his joy when the answer is yes. His girlfriend accepts the ring and hugs him, but she feels guilty. Why is she guilty, Tophet wonders. She doesn't especially care when it just shows how fake and shallow love so often is. They're definitely not going to last.

Instead of dwelling on it, she watches a fat squirrel run around. She's not really a fan of animals. Their motives are a mystery to her and she's never found a spell to let her sense whatever thoughts they might have that won't have awkward side effects. Maybe someday she can invent one.

There. Two minds on alert, searching. They'll be within her line of sight in a couple seconds.

And... that's them. A woman with a short, masculine haircut and a very tall man with long hair next to her. They really do look like they should be in the back woods shooting things. Hopefully they don't smell bad. On the other hand, Daddy warned her to, above all, not underestimate them. She can lie to them only for so long before they refuse to believe her.

The plan—her idea, not Daddy's—is to get a feel for what they're like to a stranger who isn't their long-lost relative. Once they've gotten to know each other a little, she'll come clean.

Sam's mood flicks to decisive when he spots her. He nudges Dean and they approach Tophet.

"Taylor MacLeod?" Dean asks.

"Dean and Sam Winchester?" She stands up and extends a hand, ignoring the complete lack of trust she senses.

"That's us. We hear you need some help with something."

"Yes."

Handshakes over, Sam gestures to an empty, secluded picnic table where they can talk. Tophet walks in front of them without much thought, but they're filled with wary curiosity. She seats herself and folds her hands in front of her on the table. Sam, directly across, mirrors the position. Beside him Dean feels more secure with her hands below the table for some reason. The woman is positive that she is with an enemy and Sam is about one wrong move away from agreeing.

Still, their minds are defensive, not violent. Tophet feels as safe with them as with her father's demons.
Now that it's just the three of them, she removes her sunglasses and looks at each of them in turn. Their faces show no reaction to her condition. Their minds show a little discomfort at first, but not shock or disgust at the sight of her right eye turned severely inward. The lenses get tucked away into her purse.

So this is her mother. This is the woman who carried a baby and then traded it for her brother's life. She's beautiful, Tophet thinks to herself without even knowing why. Not glamorous the way her grandmother Rowena is, but just... beautiful the way she would want her mother to be.

And this is Sam, who Daddy described as a moose with a pretty face. It's hard to imagine him sick and dying. The last thing Tophet wants is to have to fight him.

"Thank you for coming," she adds. "I understand it's unusual for a stranger to ask for hunters by name."

"Speaking of names," Sam interjects, "yours is interesting."

"What do you mean?"

"MacLeod," Dean explains flatly.

Both of them are staring at her critically. She's taken aback by how easily they seem to have found fault with her.

"How is that interesting?"

"Does the name Fergus MacLeod mean anything to you?"

Son of a bitch, she curses in her head. It never occurred to her they would know Daddy's human name. Why didn't he tell her not to use it? The game is over before it even started.

"It does," she admits, "Though I think you know my father better as Crowley."

There is overwhelming anger coming from the Winchester side of the table. It's not directed at Tophet but she can't stop herself from flinching. Their hatred for Daddy is almost frightening. He was right—they want him dead. Especially Sam. For him, there is deep pain associated with Daddy's name.

"You've got about ten seconds to tell us what you're really after, Taylor," her mother informs her. "If that is your name."

"It's not." Tophet takes some of her ten seconds to psych herself up before telling the truth: "I'm here to meet you, Dean. Because you are my mother."

It takes a moment for it to sink in. Then their minds become solid walls of... denial.

"You can't be her," Dean protests. "You're what, seventeen?"

"Nineteen," Tophet corrects, indignant. She explains, "I did a lot of growing up in Hell."

A moment later, her uncle becomes confused. Then he's more suspicious of her than ever before. Not that it shows on his face.

Then Tophet gets an unusually specific thought from Sam. Not words—it's never words, just an awareness of feelings and at best some images that don't make much sense until after the fact—but the distinct impression that he's wondering if she's psychic.
This is another complication Daddy didn't warn her about. He never said anything about Sam being even sensitive to psychics, let alone maybe being one himself. Her own abilities are limited enough that no normal person, no matter what they mentally shout at her, should be able to ask her something so specific.

Ignore the question, she decides. Even if she wanted to answer, she wouldn't know how to project a thought any more than project a flavor. Maybe that's a good thing. He'll decide the answer is no, and he'll shrug off whatever made him wonder in the first place.

Still, she doesn't know what else Sam can do. Or Dean. Does her father even know about this?

*Don't underestimate them.*

Question of mental abilities aside, Sam's feelings are almost the same as Dean's. They don't want to believe her. They want her to be a liar, someone they can dismiss and forget. They don't want her, and she's surprised at herself for feeling hurt over it.

"How would you like me to prove it? Blood test?"

Dean studies her face for what feels like an eternity before making up her mind, partly. She believes her in some respect, but has doubts in another.

"Not the kind you're thinking of," she answers eventually. The hunter takes out a knife and gestures for Tophet to take it.

"I went through this with Mr. Singer, you know." She gestures to a scratch on her forearm.

"Shouldn't hurt you to touch it."

The teenager picks up the knife and holds it for solid ten seconds before setting it down and showing the hunters her palm. Unburnt. She is not a shapeshifter.

"Sam?" Dean prompts.

Shaking, he pulls out a flask and gently takes Tophet's hand before pouring some holy water on it. She doesn't react and he looks to Dean for guidance.

She nods, a reluctant nod of defeat. Admitting that Tophet seems to be who she says she is.

It's not simply a lack of doubt or a belief, though. Dean *knows* that Tophet is her daughter.

And because Dean is convinced, Sam believes. His fingers tighten around hers and his eyes fill with tears.

"Mia."

While Dean's heart is turning to stone, Sam's is overflowing. The girl almost wishes she didn't have to let go of the fount of affection, but her uncle needs to understand one very important thing. She pulls away and folds her arms on the table, preparing herself for a twinge of pain as she corrects him:

"My name is Tophet."

Chapter End Notes
I'm sorry I'm doing the "supernaturally aged child" trope.
Tophet.

His daughter's name is Tophet.

Sam wants to shout, to demand if she even knows what that name means, but he holds back.

This is his daughter. He looks at her, now through the lens of a father meeting his daughter rather than a hunter analyzing a threat.

He doesn't try to deny to himself that her crossed eye is... weird. But he accepts it as part of her just as he accepts and loves Dean's so-called flaws.

The irises are hazel, like Sam's, but a bit greener. He likes it; it's as if his and Dean's eyes were mixed together. Cleft chin, just like them. Her hair is blonde and straight, falling past her shoulders.

The girl has a slender, petite frame, but overall looks healthy enough to Sam. If he's honest with himself, he would have expected her to be a couple inches taller, considering the height of her parents.

Her clothes are casual but elegant and expensive-looking. Even in his masculine ignorance of the fashion world he recognizes the designer logo on her purse. Materially, she's in a good place.

Psychologically, who knows? At nineteen, she's had time to develop ideas, loyalties, and orthodoxies of her own (or more likely of Crowley's). She called the demon her father. That alone tells Sam and Dean volumes about her upbringing.

What hurts more than anything else as Sam stares at his daughter is realizing that there will never be an opportunity to save the little girl from Crowley. He can never again entertain notions of somehow watching her grow up, teaching her things, being with her for the moments a father should be there for. The idle fantasy of rescuing Mia from a childhood with Crowley is banished, exorcised like a demon. There is no Mia anymore.

This is his daughter. Tophet, who somehow telepathically communicated her age to Sam before she said it aloud. Tophet, who referred to the King of Hell as her father. Tophet, born on August 1st, 2011 and in 2016 is nineteen years of age.

"Tophet," he echoes, corrected. Of course that's her name. They knew that; Leatherdale told them.

"Why are you really here, Tophet?" Dean asks.

"Answers."

"About?"
"Myself. You. When you were pregnant. Who or what my father was."

She doesn't know?

"What your father is?" Dean's eyes are holding steady, and so are Tophet's. Sam is pretty sure the girl can't actually read minds, but she definitely has some sort of power.

"There's a lot about me that needs to be explained. Daddy says you have the answers I'm after."

"Daddy?"

"Crowley?"

Sam loses track of the conversation; everything he can see or hear fades away when he realizes his daughter calls Crowley "Daddy."

Not just "Dad" or "Father." Not even "Papa." Affectionate, infantile, creepy, "Daddy."

Try to stay calm, he tells himself. Don't think about it. Tophet will probably pick up on it no matter how well he tries to hide his feelings; if she senses his disgust she might figure it out before he's ready. He's not sure how he can be more ready; he only knows that he isn't.

He's dragged away from those thoughts when Tophet addresses him:

"You know, Sam, I'll tell you all about my psychic powers if you tell me about yours."

"What?"

"You just blocked me. Only psychics can block me. Well, and demons."

"I'm not psychic." After a pause, he admits, "Not anymore."

"Wait, wait, hold on. What the hell are you guys talking about?" Dean interrupts. "What do you mean Sam blocked you? From what?"

"I can read emotions," the girl explains. "It can get a little... wonky with other psychics." She gestures to Sam. "Sometimes I get more, sometimes less."

"I don't have any powers," he insists.

"Then how did you think to wonder about me?"

"I knew you were nineteen right before you said it."

"I can't project thoughts on my own."

"Look, who did what doesn't matter," Dean says. "You can't just waltz in and interview us like we're your science project. You lied to us."

"Only because I wanted to know how you'd treat me before knowing who I am. I didn't know you knew the name MacLeod." Her tone becomes more serious, authoritative: "But I give my word, I'm only here to ask questions about myself, questions that any person has the right to know. I know you and my father aren't friends, but I'm not here to hurt you. I promise."

Sam briefly considers letting his mental barriers down in the hopes of determining whether she's lying. Instead he glances at Dean for guidance.
"Your word," she says dubiously.

"Yes," Tophet answers, as if surprised that Dean is skeptical. "You can consider my word as binding as a demon's contract."

The Winchesters still hesitate.

"I'm called the Princess of Hades," she presses. "Honestly, it's a meaningless title, but if I have even one responsibility as Princess, it's to keep promises, honor deals, and keep Hell's reputation spotless."

The argument makes some sense. Demons were calling her Princess five years ago.

And when are they ever going to have another chance to get to know her?

"I just want answers," she repeats.

"Then you'll get them, but not here," Sam replies.

"Where, then?"

"Home."

Dean grabs his arm with bruising force.

"Excuse us for a moment."

With an intrigued expression, Tophet nods and the siblings get up and move a few feet away.

"Are you crazy?!" Dean demands in a whisper.

"Dean, if that's Mia-"

"That girl's name is Tophet. I told you somebody either needs help or wants to kill us. She grew up with Crowley, so guess what, it's answer number two."

"What makes you think she doesn't need our help?"

"With what?"

"Anything. We don't know what he's been teaching her, or doing to her."

"And you think we can 'show her the light'?" Dean scoffs. "You think a little TLC will bring her over to our side?"

"This isn't about sides, Dean. This is about finding out if our daughter is happy, and doing something about it if she's not."

"And what if she tries to kill us, huh?"

"A lot of people have tried to kill us."

"Yeah, and there's a success rate."

Sam shakes his head. He's going to play his card, and his sister is going to have to deal with it.

"I'm going to do this, Dean. You knew how much I wanted to raise her with you, you wanted it too. But all I could dare to hope for was getting to hold her for a few minutes. I got nothing because of
what you did. I don't care if it's two hours or two weeks; I am going to spend every minute I can possibly get with her. If you won't talk to her, I'm sure I have most of the answers she wants."

"If she tries to kill us, I'm gonna say I told you so," Dean murmurs as she returns to the picnic table, Sam following. She crosses her arms and addresses Tophet: "Do you want to stay with us?"

"For how long?"

"Until all your questions are answered. And all of ours."

"What do you mean, yours? You just met me."

Dean adjusts her stance, lips parting to speak but then closing as she reconsiders her answer. Sam watches the internal conflict in her face until she makes her statement:

"I'm your mother. You want to know where you come from. I wanna know where you've been."

"I'd like to get to know my niece," Sam puts in. He wishes he could congratulate Dean on getting that first sentence out, but she'd just be pissed.

Tophet looks between them. Sam wonders what happened to her eye. Was there some kind of trauma? Or are he and Dean somehow to blame? They'll get to ask eventually, if she agrees to this.

"Sounds good to me."

*

Tophet is quiet during the car ride, though constantly steals glances at Dean. Sam watches her from the backseat, alert to anything out of the ordinary but also marveling that he's finally met his daughter.

He wonders what made Dean so sure it was Mia. He can believe it, not just because Dean is telling him to but on his own, his gut is telling him that yes, this is the child he fathered.

When they finally arrive at the bunker, Tophet allows herself to be escorted inside. After descending the stairs, she finally speaks up, looking around.

"This isn't what I expected."

"This was the headquarters of the Men of Letters. They collected all the knowledge they could on the occult," Sam explains. "This is the safest place you've ever been."

"You'd be surprised how safe Hell is."

"...You know we've been there, right?" Dean asks.

"What? When?"

"Way before you were born."

"As... guests?"

Dean turns to her brother.

"She thinks we've been to Hell as guests." She addresses Tophet again: "Who the hell goes to Hell as a guest?"
She shrugs.

"Sometimes Daddy likes to conduct business there. So if you weren't guests, you were...?"

"On the rack," Dean answers.

"Oh. ...So you've both been dead?"

"That would be correct," Sam answers. He doesn't understand how this conversation is occurring in reality. Small talk with his daughter about being in Hell. Just another summer night.

"Well, you look great," Tophet replies with genuine politeness.

"Uh, thanks." Dean is similarly confounded but better with compliments.

"Dean." Sam nods his head in the direction of their bedroom. She gets the message.

"I'm gonna go get a room ready for you," she says to Tophet, and disappears into the corridor.

Alone with Sam in the war room, Tophet sets her purse down and continues to look around curiously.

Sam has no idea what to say. He sits on the edge of the table, arms folded as he regards her. This is what became of the baby who was given in exchange for his life. He shouldn't ask if she knows without Dean present.

"I've never met someone who doesn't trust me as much as Dean," Tophet remarks after almost a minute of silence. Then she smiles a little. "Maybe you, but I can't tell."

"We don't trust Crowley. You're practically his daughter."

"I am his daughter. And he's good at getting what he wants for the price he wants," she admits. "But he's never lied to me or broken a promise."

"He may have raised you, but-"

"He's the only father I've ever known. Daddy- well, demons can't love anyone, but they can care about people. He cares about me as if I am his daughter."

So that's what passes for love for her, Sam thinks. Whatever fake affection Crowley has shown her over the years.

"Has he told you anything about your real father?" he asks. Hefigures he should do some prodding around, establish what she knows and doesn't know.

She stares.

"Crowley is my 'real' father."

"...Your biological father." He can't make himself apologize for the mistake, even if she was right to correct him.

Now she shakes her head.

"Nothing. Did you know him?"
Sam takes a deep breath. He vows in that moment never to lie to Tophet. He and Dean did enough damage to each other; he will not make the same mistake with his daughter. If he can't or won't tell the truth, he won't tell her anything.

"I did."

"Well, what was he like? Where is he now? What's his name?"

"It's not my place to tell you, Tophet."

"You have to tell me something. Anything. What does he look like? Is he... I don't know, handsome?"

"Is who handsome?" Dean asks from the entrance of the corridor.

"My birth father," Tophet answers.

Dean chuckles.

"What do you think, Sam? Was her dad handsome?" she teases.

He glares at her. Day one of Tophet being in their lives and Dean's already joking around and setting him up to say something awkward. He takes revenge by answering from his heart.

"I always thought you were out of his league."

Dean rolls her eyes.

"Shut up. Don't listen to him. Your dad," she informs Tophet, "is smokin' hot. Tallest drink of water I've ever seen."

Sam finds an excuse to turn his head and hide his reddening face.

"Almost as tall as Sam," Dean continues. "Seriously, I could stare at him all day and never get tired of it. He is a god among men."

"I think she gets it, Dean," Sam cuts in, though it's nice to see Tophet is amused by their exchange. He notices then that she's wearing a silver necklace with a delicate chain, hidden under her blouse. It's probably important to her.

"Where is he now?" she asks Dean.

"I'll tell you another time."

"Does he know about me?"

"Later. Promise."

The girl frowns, but doesn't press the issue.

§§§

Dean sends her brother off with a grocery list of foods Tophet can eat—the girl is surprised that they already knew about her PKU. Then she shows her daughter to the guest room.

"There's a bathroom down the hall on the left, shower rooms next to them. Sam and me, our room's
around that corner to the right. Rooms plural. You probably want to stick to main rooms for now. The library is a good place. And don't touch anything that looks sharp, because it is."

The girl sits on the bed and tests the mattress. At least she's got some priorities straight, Dean thinks.

This whole thing is scarier than anything Dean's faced in a long time. She doesn't know what she's up against, if she's up against anything in the first place, or how this is going to end. Meeting their daughter is going to change their lives, she knows that much.

She wonders how long until Tophet asks a question that there's no good answer for. Once she has a chance to talk to Sam, they'll know how to field any dad-related stuff, but that's just one thing. There are a hundred things she fucked up and now she has to answer for it.

"Do you always feel this guilty?"

"One, yes, and two, don't dig around in my head," Dean answers, bristling.

"I'm not digging around. I just pick up the emotions you have. It's like any other sense, I can't turn it off."

"Is it like Counselor Troi? Can you tell if somebody's lying?"

"I don't know who that is. Sometimes I can tell. You really don't need to worry about me, I'm one of the weakest psychics you'll ever meet. This place, if you're more than three or four rooms away, I can't make out what you're feeling. Walls make a difference, that's how weak I am."

Dean tucks that knowledge away in case she and Sam want some alone time before Tophet is gone. It's still uncomfortable knowing that her mind is being watched. And that Sam is immune. It's feeling a lot like the time before they killed the yellow-eyed demon.

"There's a way to suppress it," Tophet admits. "I'm fine with giving it up if it bothers you that much."

"Okay, how?"

"Demon blood."

Dean tenses.
Spark, Part One

Chapter Notes

Just to establish context: because the Leviathans never happened, Kevin Tran was never "activated" as a prophet. Therefore the Trials to close the gates of Hell never happened, Abaddon was not reassembled, Metatron is still holed up reading books, and none of the season arcs/events since then happened.

...Cas really dropped the ball with that Purgatory thing.

Sam pauses in front of the door.

"Now? I don't know what the hell," Dean's voice is saying. "I can't trust someone who was raised by Crowley. We don't know what he might've done or told her.

"...Thanks, Bobby. Assuming she doesn't try to kill us, we'll take her to visit."

Dean is putting her phone away as Sam enters their room—Dean's room for the time being. She only moved the bare minimum for giving the impression that they are normal siblings with separate bedrooms. He has to grab the rest while Tophet isn't looking and right now she should be fast asleep.

"Well, lemme hear it." Dean holds her arms out.

"What?" Sam turns his head as he gathers items from the bureau.

"Are we gonna pretend she doesn't look weird?"

"What does that have to do with you?" He starts making a pile on the bed. Tophet might be with them for a while. Sooner or later she'll find out, but not yet.

"It's my fault," Dean says, grabbing a sock from the floor.

"We don't know that," Sam insists. "It's just as likely Crowley did something. Or us together."

"No, Sam. I know what kids, people look like when their mom drank. She has the thin upper lip, the flat, uh..." she taps on the space under her nose.

"Philtrum," Sam supplies.

"And her eye. That can happen, too, sometimes."

"How do you know all this?"

"I can do research too, Sammy."

"Dean, I don't care about how she looks. She's beautiful, anyway. What matters is that she's healthy and happy. So far, it seems like Crowley took good care of her."

"Yeah, real good care," she replies sarcastically.
Sam's weak optimism crumbles. Putting the last few articles of clothing on the bed, he asks:

"What did she tell you?"

"About her psychic empath thing."

His eyes close.

"Tell me he didn't..."

"It's not like yours, Sam."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean... yeah, Crowley did something to her as a baby. Tophet didn't say what. But she doesn't get power from demon blood. It suppresses her ability."

"I don't understand."

"Neither does anybody else. Tophet says she's needed demon blood her whole life. It wasn't until Rowena-"

"The witch? Who can kill demons?"

"Yeah, who, by the way, happens to be Crowley's mother. She invented a spell that lets Tophet live without demon blood. Without the blood, she can use her powers."

"That still doesn't make sense."

"Crowley agrees with you there, according to Tophet. There's something else that's messing with whatever was 'supposed' to happen to her."

"Okay, what is it?"

"She was hoping we knew."

Rubbing his face with his hands, Sam lets out a deep breath.

"You got any ideas?" he asks Dean when he's able to face her again.

"Other than he's lied to her about needing blood her whole life, no."

"Did anything happen when you were pregnant?"

"Sam, we could write a book on the things that happened while I was pregnant."

"Anything to do with demons that I didn't know about? You didn't... have to do anything weird with Crowley to make the deal, did you?" he asks, recalling his penultimate encounter with Lilith.

She shakes her head.

"I just had to kiss him."

The image of his sister kissing the demon makes Sam shudder. At least it was only that.

"Okay, then, what if it was just us in general?"
"We're totally normal humans, Sam."

He stares at her.

"I'm not."

"Don't be an idiot. You can't pass that on."

"Says who? It's not like anyone's done experiments on this."

"Sammy, we know how babies happen. A sperm," Dean says, holding up one finger horizontally, "and an egg." She makes a fist with the other hand and sticks her finger into it.

"So you did pay attention in biology," Sam comments in a patronizing tone.

Dean holds up the one finger.

"You can't pass on demon blood in one little sperm cell!"

"We don't know that, and I didn't say demon blood. Just... something. Something recessive or dormant that no one would've even noticed, but just enough to interfere or interact with what Crowley did."

"You're overthinking this. We don't even know if what she's saying is true. I mean, she can't actually need demon blood to live. We've both seen that episode of Star Trek, with the addicts."

Sam crosses his arms.

"Do you have a problem with it if she does need it?"

"...Yes. You wouldn't?"

"I would. But my problem won't be with her."

After about five seconds pass with no response from Dean, Sam begins gathering up his possessions and changes the subject:

"She wants to know about her dad," he states.

"Do you wanna tell her?"

"Of course. I just... if she knows anything, she should know everything. Some of it's not mine to tell."

"Why can't we say she was conceived a nice way? Backseat of the Impala, just like her parents."

"Neither of us were conceived in the car."

"Yeah, we were."

That gives Sam pause.

"...You're shitting me."

"Dad never told you?"

"When did he tell you?"
"I was seventeen, he figured out I'd fucked a girl in the backseat. Said it was fine but I have to wrap it because there's something about that backseat."

"Dad was just trying to scare you. Anyway, we can't lie to Tophet. If we do, we're no better than Crowley. We have to tell her the truth about everything. If we can't, for any reason, we say nothing."

"We should wait, then. She wants to know who her dad is. As far as she's concerned, the answer is the guy standing in front of me. Not soulless-you. If you want to tell her the whole truth, we do it in the order I say, when I say."

"Got it."

Now holding everything he'd piled onto the bed, Sam nods at his sister to check if the coast is clear. She opens the door and pokes her head out into the hallway.

"Clear."

Sam brings his clothes and other personal belongings into his room. Once he drops them off he slips back into Dean's room. He takes her by surprise and kisses her on the lips. She scowls before returning the gesture with more force.

"Anything else we want classified?" she asks once she's asserted her dominance.

Sam shakes his head, then nudges Dean backwards until she falls onto the bed.

"Is this a goodbye fuck?"

"No." Sam joins her, then tugs at her until she lies on top of him. It's easier to trick her into a hug if it's on a bed. He wraps his arms around her before continuing. "I just want to say, even with what we know already, and all the things we can't be sure of... this is the happiest I've been in five years. I think this is a chance to make things right, Dean, or at least better. For her and for us. By the end of this, whatever the hell this turns out to be, we might even have a daughter."

"Without the hassle of potty training, parent-teacher conferences, or giving her The Talk," she points out.

"I dunno, Dean. You are an authority on sex. I'm sure there's plenty of knowledge you can pass on." He gives Dean's ass a firm pat.

§§§

Around half-past seven, Dean wakes up, reaches for her brother, and finds nothing.

Right, he's in the other room. They have a guest who doesn't know about them.

Tophet.

She finds a robe—Sam still calls it a dead-guy robe—and puts it on, securing the belt tightly around her waist. Time to face the music. Or whatever's in store for them today.

Sam's room is empty. Dean is already on the way to the kitchen when she hears him:

"DEAN!"

He sounds a little annoyed but there's a hint of laughter in his voice.
When she reaches the kitchen, she finds Tophet and Sam sitting across from each other at the table, eating doughnuts. They're both smiling.

"What is it?"

"Tell her," Sam says to Tophet.

"Tell me what?"

"Sam asked what my favorite food is and I said I've only had a couple because I shouldn't be eating them but the best thing I've ever tasted is a bacon cheeseburger."

Filled with pride, Dean holds her hand up.

"Damn straight, kid."

With a shy smile, the teenager gives a weak high-five.

"Didn't anybody teach you how to give five? You can do better." Dean holds her hand up again. Tophet puts a little more energy into the second attempt.

"We'll work on it," Sam puts in before Dean can insist on another one.

Sitting next to her brother, Dean turns her attention to the doughnuts.

"How'd you sleep?" she asks Tophet after swallowing her first bite.

"I slept well, thank you," she answers. She's wearing the big t-shirt and sweatpants Dean gave her last night. Apparently she's showered because her hair is a little damp. It's wavy now.

"Your hair is just like our mom's," she comments. "Your grandmother, I mean. Didn't realize when it was so straight yesterday."

"I hate it being wavy."

"It's really pretty, either way," Sam tells her.

"Thank you," she responds gracefully. "...Is my grandmother alive?"

"No. Our mom died when Sam was a baby. And Dad died... ten years ago?" She looks to Sam for verification. He nods.

"What about other relatives? Do I have any other uncles? Aunts, cousins?"

"None that are alive. We had a half-brother, though."

"Do I have siblings?"

"Nope. You've got a deadbeat mom and a Sasquatch uncle. That's it."

"Have you always been hunters?"

Dean and her brother summarize their life to Tophet, up until they killed the yellow-eyed demon.

"So it took you twenty-four years to get revenge," she says, mesmerized by their narrative.
"Yes."

"What happened next? What about the deal you made?"

"That's a story for another time." It's been like an hour since Dean joined them and even with the comfort of doughnuts, reliving Sam's death was tougher than she'd expected.

Tophet accepts that but quickly finds another subject to pursue.

"What about my father, is he a hunter?"

"Yes," Dean answers. Sam checks the box of doughnuts for a reason to look at something else.

"When did you meet him?"

There's nothing but crumbs, so Sam takes the box and puts it in the trash.

"About... six months before you, uh, happened. We worked a bunch of jobs together."

Now her brother is leaning against the doorframe, arms crossed, hidden from Tophet's eyes as well as her mind.

"Were you, like, 'together' the whole time?" she asks.

"Only at the end."

"I was an accident, wasn't I?"

"An accident is saying something went wrong. You were unplanned," Dean assures her.

Out of the corner of her eye, she sees Sam's expression soften. Good, because Dean has had that line ready to go for years.

"What did he say when you told him?" Tophet asks next.

"Your dad and I, uh, parted ways before I knew, so it was a few months in. He was mad when I did tell him, but he came around."

"Does he know what happened after I was born?"

Sam straightens up and returns to the table. He stands at the end like a mediator between mother and daughter.

"How much exactly do you know?" he asks.

"You were dying," she answers Sam before turning to Dean, "You summoned Daddy. He asked for me and you agreed."

Sam stares at his sister.

"You summoned Crowley?" he repeats. "You didn't tell me that."

Before Dean can respond, Tophet interrupts:

"Daddy never said she did. I just assumed."

Dean figures her suspicious gratitude will be heard loud and clear. Why would Tophet cover for her?
Sam turns back to Tophet.

"So you know about the deal."

"Yeah. ...Are you assuming that I hate you? I don't. I love my daddy, and I've grown up with everything I've ever needed and almost everything I've wanted. I think the deal worked out great. Sam's alive and I'm fine."

"Well, glad to hear it," Dean says. She leaves her brother and Tophet in the kitchen.


Though breakfast ended on not-the-best note, Sam is ready to face Tophet again an hour later. He finds her in the library, looking at a large globe in the back corner. She doesn't notice him approach. He doesn't want to startle her, but then she turns around to look at him.

"Are you worried that you'll scare me?" she asks.

"I didn't want to creep up on you."

"You keep your mind guarded so well I usually can't sense you, but sometimes something will slip through."

"I don't even know how I do it."

"How did you lose your powers?" Tophet asks him.

"They stopped after we killed Azazel."

"...Is that it?"

Instead of answering, Sam turns attention back to her.

"Dean tells me that you need, or needed, demon blood."

"I get sick if I don't have it."

"Does it hurt? What happens?"

"At first I'm tired, then I'm weak, slow, dizzy. The next day, I throw up most of what I eat or drink and I can barely walk. By that night, I don't really know what's going on around me. My body just starts shutting down."

That, Sam thinks, is not detox. At least not his experience of it.

"How often do you need it?"

"At least once a week."

"And you've been like this your whole life?"

"As long as I can remember. Daddy says it started when I was weaned."

"Has he admitted to giving you anything as a baby?"

"All Daddy did was breastfeed me."
"He did?"

"By possessing a woman," Tophet says as if Sam is thick in the head.

"So... demon breastmilk, is that what you're telling me?" he asks with a grimace.

With a shrug, she nods.

Sam is sick to his stomach. He's not sure why but it's somehow even more disgusting than tainted blood. Maybe because a natural, healthy thing for a baby was perverted into a poison. If this is all true.

"But I haven't needed demon blood since Rowena created a spell for me to use," Tophet continues. "I cast it every couple weeks or so and it's just as good, except it doesn't block my power. It gives me migraines, but I'd rather have a migraine than have to drink that blood."

Sam recognizes the sentiment and knows then that deep down, Tophet knows what's happened to her is wrong.

"Do you mean like bad headaches or real migraines?"

"Real migraines."

"Ouch. ...You gonna need to cast the spell while you're with us?"

"If I stay long enough, and if Dean doesn't mind me sensing her emotions, yes."

"We're not giving you demon blood," Sam informs her. "It's poison."

"Yes, it is," Tophet agrees before turning back to the globe.

Sam stands next to her now, seeking to balance the appearance of a creepy uncle with the desire to admire his daughter's existence.

"So, you said you grew up in Hell."

"Mostly. A few months out of every year, from my perspective, I'd spend on Earth. I went to school, had friends, and pretended to be normal."

"Were you able to keep in touch with any of your friends?"

"Only the ones I graduated with. My best friend when I was ten is only thirteen now."

"When did you graduate?"

"2015. I haven't been back to Hell since that June."

"What have you been doing since then?"

"Different things. Traveling, spending time with Daddy or Rowena, meeting people."

"Met anyone famous?"

"A lot of politicians."

Sam considers asking if Crowley is backing a presidential candidate but decides he'd rather not know.
"Did you think about going to college?"

"I hated school too much," she scoffs. "I'm severely dyslexic. If I wasn't in remedial English, I was in special ed."

"I see." Sam feels a little bad for her. He considers reading one of life's pleasures and she probably doesn't get to enjoy it. "There must have been some subject you liked."

"I liked study hall, lunch, and art class."

Sam chuckles.

"What about gym?"

"I just stood around with the other girls who didn't want to get sweaty and gross and we talked about girl stuff."

"What did you do when you weren't in school?"

"When I was younger, I drew a lot. Then Rowena came. She taught me everything she could about witchcraft."

"Really?"

"Yes. I am a witch."

Sam looks at his daughter. Usually when he hears of witches, they're something to hunt.

"A teenage witch?"

"Don't go there."

Sam nods, rebuked.

"How does it work for you?" he asks her. "There are a couple types of witches, aren't there?"

"Technically I'm a borrower. I cast spells using demonic power. But unlike most borrowers, I haven't sold my soul to a demon. It's my own power I'm using. I'm almost as powerful as a natural witch."

"And what do you use your powers for?"

"All kinds of things. There's a spell for everything, it's just a matter of finding the right words and the right ingredients. If someone annoyed me in school I could give them a ton of zits. If I have a picture of a lost pet, I can find it. I can make good luck charms and hex bags."

"Hex bags," Sam repeats.

"Don't worry, I've never killed anyone. I just know how to make and use them."

"If Dean calls you Sabrina, are you going to turn her into a frog or something?"

"No," Tophet laughs. "I don't mess around with big stuff like that. I stick to little things, and to inventing spells."

"You can invent a spell?"

The girl nods proudly.
"If you want a spell for something, I can make one up. It might not be the most efficient, and there might be side effects, but I can figure out what ingredients and what amounts will get the job done."

"If you don't like your hair being wavy, can't you make a spell to straighten it?" Sam asks, half joking.

"I haven't found a permanent spell that works."

Sam wants to ask if the same is true for her eye, but keeps his mouth shut.

"Well, be ready for Dean to grill you on this. She's not a fan of witches."

"You only think they're bad because you've only met bad ones. There are lots of good witches out there who help people. You just never know about them."

"Do you consider yourself a good witch?"

"I got into it just for myself. Sometimes that includes helping people. Sometimes it involves annoying people."

"But you don't hurt anyone with your powers."

"I don't hurt anyone who didn't already inflict the same pain on someone else."

Tophet looks into Sam's eyes, and he wonders how much pain Dean and he have inflicted on her.
Dean watches in wonder as her brother drops everything to be with Tophet, looking for excuses to spend every possible minute with her. It's kind of cute, actually. Or it would be if Dean didn't have a gut feeling that their long-lost daughter is up to something.

Sam finds an innocent excuse soon enough: Tophet is interested in what the Men of Letters might have in their library on spells. He jumps at the chance to show off his freakishly extensive knowledge of what books are in the library and be around her.

Reading, as it turns out, isn't one of Tophet's strong suits, but she pushes through if it interests her enough. That's one thing she has in common with Sam. Sam would, without complaining, walk a mile barefoot in the snow, uphill both ways, to do his research. Tophet will spend however long it takes to read something new about magic.

Between pages, there are questions. Answers turn into more questions, or into conversation. Even though the girl has had a privileged life (and her pop culture knowledge barely overlaps with theirs), she's easy to talk to. She's a Winchester, if a Gen Z Winchester was raised in the 1% for most of her life.

Fortunately, Tophet has a sense of humor close to Dean's. She laughs or smiles at practically every joke Dean makes, which is made even better by the internal conflict Dean can see in her brother even if the psychic can't. Sam is ridiculously happy to see their daughter smile but in actual pain from Dean's puns finally getting the attention they've deserved.

Whether or not Tophet has plans to hurt them, Dean has to admit she's not the worst guest to have around. For now.

* * *

The questions get easier as Tophet moves from the big stuff to little things.

"Did I really have dark hair when I was born? Daddy says I did."

"Yeah. Didn't he take any pictures?"

"The oldest picture of me is from when I was almost three. He wasn't the type to follow me around with a camera."

"The oldest pictures of you are from before you were born," Sam corrects.

"What? Oh, like ultrasound? I'd like to see them. If you have them."

She's asking Dean, which makes sense because Sam is supposedly just her uncle. Problem is, Dean gave them to her brother after she told him Mia didn't make it. She didn't want to know what happened to them and in five years, she never found out.

"Can't remember where I put 'em," Dean answers. "Sam?"

"I know where to look."
So he kept them after all.

At Dean's nod, Sam gets up and heads, she assumes, to his room. Aside from being his office and occasional bedroom, he keeps some sentimental things in there, things he either wants to hide or that Dean would make fun of him for. (Like the stupid flattened penny from York Beach in Maine that he found on the ground in Colorado. Sam thinks it's crazy that someone managed to lose a tiny souvenir from the Northeast in the Southwest.)

Before the silence gets uncomfortable, her brother returns, holding the pictures face-down.

Tophet gets up and they crowd around one side of the table as Sam sets them out one by one. It brings back memories.

"That was thirteen weeks..." It's creased from when Dean folded it to fit in her pocket.

***

Holding her breath, Dean waited for her brother's reaction to the first image of his son or daughter. The gift to him that he could never know about. Like anyone offering a present, she wanted him to like it, or at least say something, give an opinion.

He said nothing. Sure, he was interested, but nothing like the fascinated sparkle in his eyes Dean was hoping for.

***

"Twenty weeks..."

***

Days after Sam admitted he knew the truth about what had happened, Dean went to the doctor's alone, again. She didn't fold the picture she got this time, but she didn't look at it much, either. Sam was too upset about it for her to be happy.

***

"Twenty-nine weeks..."

***

For the first time, Sam went to the OB/GYN with Dean. She introduced him to the doctor:

"This is my brother, Sam." After a pause, she added, "We're very close."

That was the one time Sam heard a sincere "congratulations."

***

"And thirty-five weeks."

Now it's Tophet who glances at Dean. Dean ignores her even though it creeps her out to think that she's listening in on how each image reminds her of a strong memory. The last one, she got at the last appointment before Sam lost his mind. They all know how that story ended.

"These are really cool. I'm glad you kept them," the girl comments to neither parent in particular, poring over each one. "I can't imagine being so small."
"You should see pictures of Sam when he was a baby," Dean says.

Tophet grins.

"Do you know where those are?"

"Yes. Yes, I do."

§§§

"That's a pretty necklace," Sam remarks when he notices the two pendants for the first time.

"It was a birthday present from Daddy when I was four," Tophet says as she removes it and offers it to him.

Sam studies the delicate silver designs in his palm. She's kept them in good shape, after fifteen years.

"Crowley doesn't trust his own subjects?" he asks, gesturing to the anti-possession charm.

"I think it's more supposed to send a message, that even the King of Hell isn't allowed to possess me."

"What's this other one?" The crowned heart must mean something. It reminds Sam a little of a claddagh ring.

"It's a luckenbooth pendant, though usually it'd be a brooch. It's a symbol of protection and love."

"Gaelic?" he asks.

"Scottish, yes."

Sam hands it back.

"What does it protect against?"

"I have no idea," Tophet confesses with a laugh.

*

It doesn't take too long for the subject of Dean's gender to come up. Sam, supposedly not present for the events, stays out of it, mostly.

"That was before I got changed," Dean adds after answering one of Tophet's questions.

"Daddy mentioned something about you being transformed. He wants to know what happened."

"Well, as far as he's concerned, the answer starts with 'go' and ends with 'fuck yourself.'"

The girl blinks a few times.

"But," Dean continues, "short version is that I was always a girl, just born in the wrong body. Some witches I was hunting with your dad thought it would be a good prank to take away my dick. Didn't work out the way they expected."

"Wow. What spell did they use?"

"No idea. We never found a hex bag or anything else."
"Did you try asking them?"
"...We killed them."

The teenager rolls her eyes, then moves on.

"What was my dad's reaction when you changed?"
"When he gave up looking for the hex bag, he just looks at me and goes, 'Well, shit.'"
"How long did it take for him to... notice you?"
"Probably about three seconds."

Forcing himself to keep the mood light, Sam puts in:
"He told me it wasn't for at least a couple days. Give him some credit."
"Yeah, right, like he didn't check out my ass the first time I turned my back."
"What about you, Sam?" the teenager asks before he thinks up a way to keep up the bickering.
"What about me?"
"What did you think when you saw Dean?"
"Are you asking me if I checked out my sister?"
"Uh, I meant more in general..."
"Oh."
"Well, Sammy, did you?" Dean teases.

"Overall I was just freaked out that I suddenly had a sister." He ignores the latter question until he realizes his daughter is also waiting for an answer. He still chooses to address Dean: "Don't act like you wouldn't have if I'd been the one to get changed."

With a thoughtful pout, she acknowledges his point.

*

Sam holds up his hands.

"Hang on. You're telling me there's a corner of Hell that doesn't look like a horror film, and you had a tutor, a music teacher, an art teacher, and a fitness instructor?"

"Possessed by demons, but yes."

*

"Do you like boys? Or girls?" is, predictably, one of Dean's questions.
"Both."
"Were you allowed to date when you were topside?"
"Yeah."

"...And? Nobody asked you out?"

"I had a couple boyfriends. I got asked out like four times by different guys who thought they were doing me a favor by asking me to a dance, because obviously with my face, I'm incapable of getting a date." Tophet's demeanor and language has relaxed with them, evidenced by her sarcasm. She further adds, "Fuck them, and fuck all the star quarterbacks who get applauded for taking girls with Down syndrome to prom like they're doing charity work."

Sam hadn't thought of it that way before, fortunately his sister keeps the subject moving.

"What about now, are you seeing anyone?"

"Uh..." The girl hesitates, which is odd enough, but then she answers for the first time: "Later."

"Later?" Sam and Dean look at each other, concerned.

"Or you can answer one of my questions that you said 'later' to," Tophet says, with a discomfiting smugness that she definitely learned from Crowley.

*

"That first day we met, we accidentally communicated some specific things without meaning to," Tophet reminds Sam. "I'd like to see what we can get across when we're actually trying."

"No." He shakes his head. That's one request he doesn't even have to think about. "I'm sorry, no."

"I don't want to steal secrets or anything, I'm just curious."

"I get that."

"Well... if you change your mind..."

"That's a big if, but yes, I'll let you know. ...How about some lunch?"

*

"Okay, can we get a break from the getting-to-know-each-other montage?" Dean asks.

Sam looks up from his sock drawer. He'd just stuffed everything in there the first night, but Tophet is going to be here a little longer than they thought so it's time to organize.

"What are you talking about?" he responds absently. Disappearing socks should be added to his private list of ubiquitous problems that have to have a supernatural explanation. He hasn't even done laundry recently.

"You haven't left the bunker since she got here," his sister points out. "Four days ago."

"We have a lot of catching up to do. Nineteen years, Dean."

"We can catch up with her in other places, too. I told Bobby we'd visit. He met her already but he should meet her as his... sort of granddaughter."

"Alright, sounds good."
"Also, you remember what we used to do with our lives before she showed up?"

"You mean hunting?"

"Yes. If she's gonna be here a while, sooner or later there's gonna be a job for us and we're gonna have to decide what to do."

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

"One more thing, Sammy."

"What?"

"Back off a little."

"What?"

"You're spending a hell of a lot of time with her."

That gets through to him.

"Does she look uncomfortable with me? Did she say something to you?" The precious seconds with Tophet mean nothing if she's annoyed or bothered by the attention.

"I'm creeped out by it. I get you're just trying to spend time with her, but she has a crush on you, like on a Don't Stand So Close To Me level."

"No, she doesn't."

"She totally does," Dean insists.

Sam studies his sister for a few seconds. There's a piece to this puzzle that she doesn't want to give him.

He sighs in frustration once it dawns on him. Sometimes his sister needs to get over herself, stop trying to be tough 24/7, and just tell him when she wants attention. She refuses to request aloud any non-sexual romantic gesture. Foreplay, sure. But not the soft, gentle reassurances that Sam is happy to give whenever she wants, whether it's a couple hours pretending they're not cuddling on his bed while watching an action movie or something much simpler.

Although it's past eleven and the door isn't going to protect them anyway, he closes and locks it before turning back to Dean. He embraces her and gives her a soft but long kiss on the lips.

"I miss you, too," he whispers as she closes her eyes and rests her head against his shoulder.

It's peaceful and Dean smells nice. Sam goes in for another kiss and lets his arms fall to her waist. Then he guides her towards the bed.

"What are you doing, Sammy?"

"Don't you ever feel like just making out, hanging around second base for a while?"

It's telling that she doesn't even try to make fun of him for such a juvenile act.
Although the Winchesters clarified early on that their daughter has no recollection of being hurt, abused, nor possessed, it's not until the next morning that Sam asks to see Tophet's hands.

No scars. Not the slightest hint of them ever being damaged.

"Those weren't my fingers," Tophet asserts once Sam explains what happened. "It must have been some other baby."

Her nonchalance about it unsettles Sam.

"Doesn't it bother you that Crowley did that to a six month old child?"

There's a brief look of irritation, but she answers without hesitation.

"Daddy is a demon. He can't be held to the same standards as a human."

"What does that mean?" Dean asks.

"Demons have their own nature. Different from humans. I was taught what is right and wrong among humans, and what is right for demons. Why should it bother me that he acts like the thing he is?"

"So... you understand that demons are evil?" Dean asks.

"Evil is relative," she states. "There's a natural order and it wouldn't work unless demons and other supernatural beings didn't have different ideas about what's right or wrong. Kind of like a... a food chain."

Sam decides not to pursue philosophy with her just yet. This is the logic she has to use to justify loving a monster.

"That's one way to look at it," he responds diplomatically.

"Besides, you're the one who was going after me," she adds. "Daddy wouldn't have done that if you had left me alone like the deal said to."

Swallowing the lump in his throat, Sam defends himself:

"I wasn't going to leave you with demons."

"That was my mother's decision, not yours," Tophet says, not argumentative but very matter-of-fact. "You're not even my father."

He bites his tongue before he can say something he'll regret, and leaves his daughter and his sister alone in the library.

§§§

Tophet is keeping her eye on her uncle now. She's confused about the conversation they had that ended so badly. Dean insisted that Sam was just really upset about the deal. It's true, so there wasn't much point in interrogating her mother, but there has to be more. She hurt Sam so much his emotional pain came through as loud and clear as if he wasn't blocking her at all.

But right now they're at Bobby Singer's junk yard—she's been officially instructed to call him Bobby. He has a lot of good and less-good-but-not-bad things to say about Dean, Sam, and their father John, which makes Tophet like him. As before, he's grumpy and not so trusting of her, but
welcoming. Tophet senses that, deep down, he's as happy to meet Dean's wayward child as any grandpa would be. The Winchesters mean a lot to him.

"What's this?" Sam asks, gesturing to something on the desk in the study.

"Kitsune. Killed three people, fifty miles south of here."

"Have anybody on it?"

Bobby arches an eyebrow at Sam.

"Sam and me could take care of it," Dean points out, as if it wasn't what the other two hunters in the room were thinking. "If you and Tophet are okay together for a couple days."

"Why can't I come?" the girl asks.

"It's hunting. It's dangerous."

"I'm a witch. I could be dangerous. I can at least defend myself. What's a kitsune, anyway?"

"Monster, looks human, eats pituitary glands. Sam made out with one once. You have to stab it in the heart," her mother answers.

"Part of hunting is finding the monster, right? And it's hard because they look human?"

"...Yes."

"Monsters and humans have different minds. I can tell you who's a human and who's not. I'd make the job a lot easier."

"We can manage," Dean says.

"Easier means faster, Dean. The sooner we stop this thing, the fewer people die," Sam points out.

"I'm not taking Tophet hunting," she tells him.

"Why not?"

Dean tries to come up with an answer without admitting she's just plain scared of losing Tophet to the Life. At least that's what the teenager gathers. She knows she's right when her mother meets her eyes briefly before answering Sam.

"We hunt." She holds her hand up to cover her lips from Tophet's view for whatever she says next.

Sam doesn't have a response right away. Whatever this is about is obviously something she isn't supposed to know about yet. Tophet doesn't care. She watches them anyway.

"You can't force someone out of a thing any more than you can force them into a thing. If she wants to learn about hunting, that's her choice."

"It's a bad choice."

"Then she'll fit right in," Sam retorts with a smirk.

They stare at each other until Dean comes to a decision, although Tophet can't tell what it is.

"Will you let me help or not?"
Lovely, awesome, super patient readers of this fic, am I the only one who's been watching season 13 and thought, "...this reminds me a little of something"?
I swear everything that happens in this story is exactly what I've had planned for months. Any similarities to canon events with Jack are coincidence unless I admit otherwise.
After reluctantly making the decision to let Tophet come along, Dean is also forced to admit that if Tophet is going to work with them, she should look the part. Fed threads and flannels it is.

Clothes shopping with Tophet is like a bizarre dream that isn't bad enough to be called a nightmare, but Dean never wants to experience again. The first store they go into just plain smells expensive and if she went in there alone the employees would probably kick her out—sorry, *ask her to leave*—for violating the customer dress code.

The issue of motel rooms makes things even more confusing. In most cases, a third person doesn't mean an extra room for them. Tophet is, her parents agree over texting, probably not used to living in close quarters with other people in a shitty motel.

Dean figures this is a good time to show Tophet how crappy the Life is, but Sam insists on coddling her. Fine, be a suck-up. Go get two rooms. One for them, one for the princess.

But that could raise the awkward question of why Sam and Dean would share a room, even if it does have two beds, when it would make more sense for the girls to stay together and Sam take the second room. They should have just gotten one room and made Tophet take the cot.

In the end, they just let Tophet make her assumptions after hearing "two rooms, a single and a double", and like the royalty she is, she graciously accepts having a room to herself.

Since Tophet isn't actually a bitch about it, it makes Dean feel better to think her daughter is spoiled. She never had to wonder where she was going to sleep, whether she was going to go to bed hungry, or if her father was going to disappear one day and never come back.

Sam will admit it sooner or later: for once, a demon deal was the right choice.

*After getting herself dressed the next morning, Dean pays a visit to Tophet's room to check on her. She finds the girl in front of the mirror, dressed and just finishing up putting her hair in a professional-looking updo Dean doesn't know how to describe.

"Hey," Dean greets. "You almost ready?"

"Yup, almost," the teenager says as she begins to apply her makeup with incredible speed and precision.

"How are you so friggin' good at that? I suck at it," Dean remarks.

"What, putting on makeup?"
"Yeah."

"I've just had more practice." She pauses to actually look at Dean's face. "You look really good, though."

"Uh, thanks," the adult replies. After a moment, she adds, "Truth is, it's been six years and I still haven't gotten the hang of any of it. Makeup, clothes, periods..." Something occurs to Dean and she chuckles to herself. "Wonder how many moms out there can say they've gotten less periods than their daughters?"

"...Actually, I don't get a period." The teen gracefully puts her mascara on without opening her mouth like a fish.

Dean doesn't ask why since Tophet will know anyway that she's curious. If she's comfortable telling her, she will.

She does:

"It's the way I am. Never had one, never will."

So, no having babies, either, Dean thinks. Well, of course Tophet can't have kids. Her parents are siblings; infertility is a thing that happens, right?

"What?" the girl asks.

"I didn't say anything."

"You're not surprised. You think it makes sense, what I just told you. You know something."

Dean crosses her arms.

"No, I don't."

"Then why aren't you surprised?"

"I am."

Tophet fully turns to her mother.

"You think I can't sense it's something big? Something important?"

"How do you know you're not... mishearing me?"

"Because you're standing right here, and the only other people I can sense are at least two rooms away. You're trying to hide something big from me, something... something you're afraid to tell me."

"You have to stop doing that. What happened to 'later'?"

"Exactly. You could have just said 'later' but instead you tried to lie to me. Whatever big, bad thing you're hiding from me, it's time you stopped saying later and start saying sooner."

"Okay, first off, why didn't you say anything about this earlier?"

"What, not having a period? Because it didn't come up and there's no way you could be responsible for me not having a uterus! Except you think you are."
"I think everything is my fault. Just ask Sam."

"This is different. This is specific. And honestly I'm getting pretty tired of you and your brother hiding whatever it is you don't want me to know. You have to tell me sometime. What are you waiting for?"

Good question. What is she waiting for?

Dean considers it. What if she just lets loose and says, "Sam isn't just your uncle"? Or tries to blame it on the drinking, admit she basically tried to kill Tophet?

"Look, right now we're working a case. When Sam and me work a case, we stow our crap until the job's done. We'll talk once we get back to the bunker. Promise."

"You'll tell me everything?"

Dean has no choice. Tophet won't accept anything less.

"Everything."

With that, Dean leaves her daughter and returns to her and Sam's room.

Her brother gives her a once-over—he likes to pretend he doesn't have a thing for when she puts on heels and a skirt, no matter how boring and conservative it is. Then he sees her face.

"Dean? What's wrong?"

"I'll explain later. ...Go on, enjoy the view while you have it."

"What happened? Did Tophet say something?"

"I said later, Sam. Like we've been saying to her all week."

Then Tophet makes her appearance in her classy new pantsuit and exactly the right amount of confidence. No hint of the frustration she was expressing a minute ago. She's ready to play whatever part they give her.

Not bad, Dean thinks.

Meanwhile, Sam is looking at his daughter as if she's just shown up all ready for prom. His attention is completely on her. It's like she took his breath away.

"How do I look?" she asks, as if his opinion isn't obvious from the way he's fawning over her.

"Perfect." Sam hands her a fake badge. "Welcome to the FBI, probationary agent Sandy Denny."

She examines it.

"Am I supposed to know who that is?"

"Yes," Dean answers before her brother can try to say otherwise.

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After a few hours of expressing condolences and gently questioning bereaved family members and friends, they have just about nothing to show for it.
"Jolyne Paine, last seen leaving her house to do errands, found six hours later; Eric Callahan, disappeared while he was on a run, body shows up the next day; Dana Fredericks, stepped outside for a cigarette break at work, four hours later she's dead; and now Kendra Smith, took her dog on a walk, only the dog came back. All in different parts of town," Sam summarizes with a sigh. "This thing moves around."

"Eric and Kendra were kind of close together. And roughly the same time of day. Maybe it has a route," Tophet suggests. She studies the map spread out on the bed. "They were both late morning. Jolyne was earlier, here, and Dana was afternoon, over here. It starts near the center of town, and works its way to the edge."

"You might be onto something. ...What time is it right now?" Sam asks.

Dean checks her watch.

"Quarter past one."

"If she's right, and it's on its route today, too, we could head for that restaurant and see if Tophet notices anyone non-human around," he says.

"That's the plan?" Dean says. "Sit and wait for her to feel something foxy going by?"

Her daughter snickers but Sam retorts:

"Do you got any other leads?"

Grumbling, Dean reaches for the keys.

* *

Since Sam agrees to stay at the motel and keep working at it, Dean and Tophet drive over to the local Biggerson's and set up camp in the small park across the street.

"How far does it go, your mind-thing?" Dean asks. "When there aren't any walls."

"See those women over there?" Tophet nods at a couple mothers sitting together on a bench maybe two hundred feet away. They're having an intense conversation. "The one with braids, I can't sense, but I can sense the other one because she's having strong emotions. I can pick up just about anyone closer than them. ...Excuse me for a moment, I'll be right back."

The teen gets up and goes over to a disappointed-looking child. She crouches to eye-level and talks to the boy a little. He's not much older than Tophet should be, Dean notes.

After a few more seconds, Tophet says something else, and then picks something from the ground. The kid grins and takes it from her, then dashes off.

She returns to Dean with a cheerful expression.

"What was that?"

"He was desperately looking for a four-leaf clover for his mom. I found one for him."

"How'd you find one so fast?"

"They're lucky; all I have to say is taispeáin dom and I can find them. ...I just love how kids don't question it if I start speaking Irish."
That is a pretty cool trick, Dean admits in her head.

"You do that a lot, just go help random strangers who need something?"

"I'm not some Disney princess who volunteers at an animal shelter or wants to adopt orphans. I don't usually get involved in anything big. I just say nice things to people who are feeling shitty or cast a quick good luck charm on somebody going on an interview or a first date."

Dean smiles a little.

"Y'know, you turned out to be a pretty good kid, Tophet."

"I'd give credit to my father for that."

She has no idea, Dean thinks. Sam is too capital-G Good to have a mean kid. The King of Hell could have tried to raise a sociopath instead and Tophet would still be a good person.

"There," the psychic says suddenly. "Whoever's driving that truck isn't human." She nods at the US Postal Service truck.

"The kitsune is the mailman?" Dean asks, incredulous.

"I don't know for sure, but I can tell you that that postal worker isn't a human, vampire, djinn, siren, or any type of shapeshifter. Plus it fits my idea of having a route."

As much as she likes to shoot first and let Sam ask questions later, Dean is reluctant to go on just Tophet's word. The route thing isn't the strongest theory and there's no proof that she knows what she's talking about.

"Why don't we see where he goes?" the girl suggests. "Maybe we can find out where he lives."

"Alright. It's your job to tell me if he thinks he's being followed."

*

An hour later, Dean and Tophet are parked down the street from the mailman's house. Having trailed him back to the post office, watched him get into a beat-up Honda, and followed him almost all the way back across town, Dean is no more convinced that he's the monster than she was before.

"Did you sense anything that suggests he's planning on eating somebody's brain?" she asks again.

"No, but that doesn't mean anything. Lycanthropes don't think anything more of eating a raw beef heart than you think of eating leftover pasta. This kitsune might be planning on murdering somebody later tonight, or they might be planning on having a drink at a bar."

"Which one're you betting on?"

"I don't know. I'd have to talk to him."

"You're not going anywhere near that house," Dean informs her daughter. "Me and Sam will come back tonight. We'll figure out if this is the kitsune and we'll deal with it if it is."

"I can take care of myself," Tophet insists.

"So can Sam, I've still seen him die. More than once."
Although Sam and Dean search the house, the resident is gone, and there's no hint that a kitsune or any other monster lives there.

"It doesn't prove anything," Sam insists. "I still think she's right."

"Well I don't." Grouchy, Dean opens the door to their motel room. She turns on the light and looks at the clock. "Oh good, it's only three in the morning."

Sam ignores the sarcasm.

"...She's probably asleep," he responds.

"Who, Tophet? Yeah, she probably is." Once the sentence leaves her mouth, Dean gets where her brother is going with this.

"Having you in the next bed drove me crazy last night," he confesses, approaching her. They stand toe-to-toe, looking into each other's eyes. Sam gently pushes Dean's jacket from her shoulders and starts to unbutton her shirt. She kisses him slow and deep until she rethinks things with her rapidly draining brainpower.

"What if she's not asleep?"

Resigned, his hands fall to her waist.

"She'll only sense you."

"And think I'm into some real kinky shit, fantasizing about my little brother when he's like four feet away."

That gets a laugh out of Sam. Dean almost hopes he'll press a little more, convince her to say yes, but he never nags her about sex. She gives him a chance to anyway.

"I don't want to leave you with blue balls, though. That wouldn't be very sisterly."

"I don't need sex, I just need you," he informs her, kissing her on the brow.

Shutting her eyes, Dean basks in her brother's warmth pressed against her.

He doesn't know how much she needs him right now, when That Day is on her mind. The day that the same scent, the touch of the same body, betrayed her in the most intimate way.

Maybe, she admits, she's not as over it as she tells herself. After spending all day thinking about it, one thing is clear to her: she's scared to relive it. All this time, and she's only had to actually tell two people what happened. One already knew the gist of it. The other was an Egyptian god who wanted to kill Sam. Her brother's life being at stake was bigger than her feelings about what happened.

Years later, and she's only realizing now how afraid she is to lay it all out for someone who knows nothing about it, how afraid she is to revisit what happened. She doesn't just have to tell 'someone,' either. She has to tell a person who will know exactly what emotions every word brings up and how weak she really is inside.

After Sam pulls away, he turns his back to undress for bed. Likewise, Dean finishes the job her brother started.
"When this case is done, I'm gonna tell Tophet about... what really happened," she says before she loses her courage.

Sam pauses. The atmosphere in the room feels raw, like even the gentlest, most well-intentioned touch is going to sting.

"Is this about what happened this morning?"

"She's lost her patience. Asked me what I was waiting for."

"And?"

"I don't know. You, maybe?"

"I was just waiting for her to know me well enough to give me a chance once she knows what I did," Sam admits.

"If you let me tell it, you won't need to worry about that."

"If you lie to her, Dean-"

"I won't lie."

"You gonna tell her about us?" he asks, gesturing.

"Only if it comes up."

The room falls silent again until Sam asks another question.

"How did it come up this morning?"

"It came out that she doesn't- Well, bottom line is, she can't have kids. Not on her own, anyway."

Sam's first reaction seems more like disappointment than anything else, which Dean wasn't expecting. Was he hoping for grandkids?

"That really sucks," is all he says.

"Well, she picked up that I wasn't surprised and called me out on hiding something big. So I promised I'd tell her once we were done here."

"Why weren't you surprised?"

"'Cause she's, y'know... ours."

Sam doesn't argue for once. He wants to blame everything on Tophet being theirs. That way it's both their faults and neither of their faults at the same time.

"You better start thinking of what to say to her once you pull a Vader on her," Dean says.

He scoffs.

"I've been thinking about what to say to her this whole time. I've got nothing."

"You mean you're not going to just apologize over and over for things you didn't do?"

"It's not about me or what she thinks of me," Sam explains. "It's what she thinks of herself. I don't
know how she's going to take this."

"Like I said, Sam. Let me tell it, and she'll understand."

"You're gonna let me be there, right?" he asks.

"Yeah," Dean says, with an implied "Duh." She gestures for Sam to join her in her bed, and he does so, curling up behind her with an arm around her waist.

She promised she'd tell their daughter everything. Everything means admitting how much she didn't want a baby in the beginning. Everything means explaining she pressured her brother into sex so she could re-learn that his touch meant safety, feel the meaning in just a brush of his fingertips.

Everything means confessing that she still has questions about That Day, but she's too scared of what the truth might be.

§§§

Tophet is awoken in the middle of the night by a panicked mental scream from the next room:

SAM!

Dean is terrified for her brother's life. Ferocious against the threat, she is going to defend him no matter the cost.

Whatever is happening on the other side of that wall, Tophet thinks, isn't something she wants to face. But now is the perfect time to prove herself to her mother.
By the time Tophet makes the decision to join her mother, her uncle, and what she identifies as the kitsune, Dean's panic has relaxed slightly to something fiercely defensive yet collected. Then her emotions are interrupted by a flash of oblivion. She's just been badly hurt by the kitsune, whose only goal is murderous self-preservation.

Sam's mind, for the first time since they met, isn't guarded. His emotions are similar to Dean's, except he isn't in as much pain. Tophet dashes through the open door and in the lamplight finds her uncle brawling with the kitsune, pulling it away from Dean, who's lying on the floor, a dark wet patch spreading on the carpet by her neck.

Sam needs a knife, Tophet thinks, but she doesn't know where to find one.

Wait, no. She does know where one is. It's in the bag a couple feet away from her.

The monster's head snaps up at the sound of her rifling through the bag.

No! Sam thinks when he sees her. Only that terrified word comes through. Tophet was supposed to stay hidden, stay safe. Now the kitsune wants to kill her first. It doesn't know how terrified and useless she is, even with the knife in her hands.

Her uncle knows that and he's quick to pin the kitsune underneath him, but their positions reverse almost immediately as he narrowly avoids getting slashed open by the kitsune's claws.

The question for Tophet is how to get the blade to her uncle without giving the monster a chance to grab it or injure Sam.

"Tophet, run!" he shouts at her.

It crosses her mind ever so briefly that it would be awfully convenient for Sam and Dean to die like this on a hunt. That would be a hell of a surprise for Daddy.

But the girl ignores both that thought and Sam's command. She isn't ready to betray the Winchesters, or to run away just because someone said so.

She's not like Rowena. She can't hold someone in place indefinitely, just a few seconds. But she holds out her hand anyway:

"Manete!"

She's not like Dean or Sam. She can't just charge at a monster that would kill her if it had a chance and she doesn't know if she can stab anything. But she can move a bit closer, and slide the knife, handle first, across the carpet to her uncle.

He has to lunge for it, but once he has the weapon he smoothly stabs the kitsune in the chest. Tophet flinches at the monster's final seconds of consciousness. It's terrified to die, just like any other creature. Just like any human would be.

It killed people, though. This is nothing more than it deserves, she reminds herself.

There's a hint of exhilaration, a thrill, in Sam as he pushes the defeated monster off and pulls out the knife, but it's momentary.
He's concerned for Dean, who is trying to get up and failing. Blood is pouring from her neck and forearm.

"Dean?"

It's striking to sense how devoted Sam is to his sister. His need for her is stronger than love. His feelings are literally powerful as he kneels next to her, speaking softly. If he was a witch, Tophet thinks, he could tap into that.

"Dean, hold still, don't try to move. You're gonna be okay, just hold still, let's stop the bleeding..."

As Sam gets to his feet, he remembers Tophet.

"Can you heal her?" he asks, just as she opens her mouth to volunteer.

"Yes."

His mind is decisive, unquestioning.

"Do it."

She kneels next to her mother and touches her shoulder to cast one of the simpler spells she knows:

"Redintegrat corporis."

Within seconds, Dean's torn flesh is restored, and she blinks as she regains full consciousness.

"You okay, Dean?" Sam asks, helping her to her feet. His relief is even greater than his sister's.

"Yeah, actually, I feel great." She seems confused but otherwise alert.

"That spell sometimes causes stomach problems, so stay near the bathroom for the next half hour or so," Tophet warns, sitting on the bed that doesn't have the rumpled covers of interrupted sleep. She senses Sam wondering why, and explains without waiting for him to ask: "It's quick, clumsy magic that just sort of resets the whole body. That can mess up your digestion."

"Oh, thanks for the warning," Dean snarks. Sam realizes that Tophet can read him and quickly blocks her out.

"I assumed you'd rather throw up than go to the hospital and risk bleeding to death," she retorts.

Dean's mind agrees with the logic but she's too proud to admit it in front of her brother. She looks down at the kitsune. Tophet was right about the mailman. Her mother is too proud to admit that, either, but she gives Tophet a nod.

They would have been fine without her, Tophet thinks. She just gave them a couple shortcuts. No big deal. But it makes her feel pretty good that she helped. That monster can't hurt anyone else.

She watches as Sam and Dean gather up their things, sidestepping the corpse on the floor and avoiding the massive wet patches of blood on the carpet.

"Thing is," Dean says, "we have to go, like, now. Pack up your stuff."

"Oh." They could have warned her about that earlier, Tophet thinks as she heads back to her room.

Just as she closes the door behind her, she picks up a burst of minor panic from Dean. Some fear that
someone knows something that she doesn't want them to. It could be either Tophet or Sam, so she ignores the thought.

§§§

Sam decides not to worry about whether Tophet might have noticed that only one bed was slept in. Dean is, but what the hell does that matter when Tophet is about to find out something so much more disturbing?

He's mostly grateful that the hunt went the way it did—they're all alive and Tophet got a taste of what it's like to hunt, up close and personal with a monster, without getting hurt. Something gives him a good feeling that she won't make the choice to go with them again. She's not cut out for being a hunter. That doesn't make her weak, at least not a bad kind of weak; it makes her privileged in a way Sam and Dean never were.

That's the life he wanted for her. A life where she just plain doesn't worry about physically protecting herself. A life where she feels safe.

*

Planning to simply drop his duffel bag in his room and return to the war room, Sam doesn't turn on the light until he notices something on his bed.

It's his truant sock, and he sighs when he sees DEAN written on it, accompanied by a red lipstick kiss.

He throws it into his laundry pile and glances around for an appropriately shaped item. Nothing, so he checks his bedside drawer. They keep a spare bottle of lube in there, that will have to be phallic enough.

He writes SAM on one end and brings it to Dean's door. It's unlocked, she's turned partly away.

"Here." He tosses it to her; she catches it backhand and then looks.

"Thanks." Dean puts it under her pillow.

"You ruined my sock."

"I designated that sock to fill in for me until we can sneak off to some corner of the bunker for a few minutes."

He informs her in a low voice:

"At this point, what I want to do to you is gonna take longer than a few minutes."

Dean flashes a grin but keeps her distance.

"Dude, she could show up any time."

Sam is sobered by the reminder of what's about to happen.

"You ready?" he asks.

"Does it matter?"

He approaches to give her shoulder a comforting squeeze, but the right words don't come.
Soon, Tophet will know everything. Soon, she will look into his eyes and know what he really is to her. Soon, she may hate him.

Soon, Sam won't let her walk out of the room again without telling her how much he loves her.

§§§

Although Tophet tells herself that she's giving her mother a chance to psych up before telling her the mysterious horrible truth, the two hours she waits before seeking her out are for herself. Whatever this thing is, it might change a lot. Dean thinks it will, at least.

She finds both Winchesters in Dean's room with grave expressions. Sam is leaning against the dresser, arms folded, and Dean is sitting on the bed. The desk chair is facing away from the desk. That's where she's meant to sit, Tophet gathers, so she does, the third point of a triangle.

"Did you tell Sam what I told you?" she asks her mother.

"Yeah, I hope that was okay."

Tophet shrugs.

"Did it surprise you?" she asks him.

"Not really."

So he's in on it, too.

"So, Dean. Why do you think I was born without a uterus?"

"Okay... to be honest, a lot of what's different about you is probably because early on, I drank, like, a lot. I wasn't so sure I wanted you at first, and I made some bad choices. I'm sorry for that. But you have Sam to thank for keeping me on the straight and narrow later on when things got tough."

Tophet processes that for a few seconds. She already knew her mother didn't want her that much. This shouldn't be a surprise. It doesn't hurt, exactly, but it still makes her sad that Dean was pregnant and didn't want to be.

The revelation also brings her back to health class in middle school. They had a unit covering the effects of alcohol on a fetus. When they showed the facial characteristics of a baby with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Tophet sensed about a half-dozen students having the same thought: they know someone who looks a little like that. It took her a minute to realize it was her. She's no textbook photo, but there was enough for the sharper-eyed kids to think of her.

They were right.

"What changed your mind?" she asks.

"A lot of thinking about what you meant, about what your dad is to me."

"Okay..." That makes enough sense, but something is missing. "Is that it? You drank?"

"That isn't the half of it," Sam cuts in. "Dean wasn't drinking a fifth of whiskey every night for a trimester, let alone the whole pregnancy, and not everything that could be caused by alcohol is. In fact, I'm pretty sure that has nothing to do with any kind of infertility."

"Then what do you think?" Tophet asks him.
Brother and sister look at each other for a few seconds, deciding who will answer, even though she asked Sam.

He does eventually explain:

"You were conceived when Dean was under the effects of a mangled, altered fertility spell. I always thought—after she told me about it, I mean, I thought it might have a permanent effect on her, but as far as we know it hasn't. I think that it might have had an effect on you, instead."

"What?!"

Suddenly Dean has a lot of mixed feelings that Tophet can't sort through. She's staring at her brother again, having some kind of an exchange that even an empath can't follow.

"You, uh... happened because I got hit by a curse that came from an ancient fertility ritual," Dean tells Tophet after about five seconds. "Breaking the curse involved..."

"With my father," Tophet finishes for her.

"Right."

Lost, the girl doesn't know what to do except be mad, and she doesn't know what to be mad at besides her mother:

"If that was such a big part of why I exist, why didn't you tell me?!"

Dean comes to a weighty decision and wants her brother to leave but isn't willing to ask.

"Sam, leave," the girl commands. He ignores the order. It's not the time for manners and morals, Tophet decides. "Dean wants you to."

He's taken aback and doubtful.

"Just go, Sammy," Dean says, although she's pissed at Tophet. "You don't have to listen to this again."

He swallows hard and nods. Tophet catches a mental glimpse of pain as he turns away, although it was already obvious from his face.

Sam's footsteps haven't even faded away before Dean begins:

"So there was this town, Beatrice, Nebraska."
Dean clears her throat. It's done. It's her brother's turn now.

"I didn't get to know your dad with his soul as well as Sam knows him. I want you to ask him about that person, with his soul, and the man Sam tells you about is your real father. Not- not the other guy."

Tophet shakes her head, wiping the tears from her face.

"If the person who raped you isn't my father, then no one is. You decided I was yours, just yours. You weren't even going to tell him."

"I was gonna, afterwards." Probably, Dean qualifies in her head. "I also wanted to do something for him. Your real dad is a good man. He deserves a legacy."

"Did he ever say he wanted to have a son or daughter?"

Dean opens her mouth to answer, but she can't. Sam loves their daughter, hell, he named her. He fought for her, but all Dean can think of is the harsh "No" he gave the night she asked.

"He didn't go after me," Tophet points out, as if to answer her own question.

"He thought you were dead."

"You said Sam knows him better. Sam probably didn't tell him because he knew my father didn't care. Wouldn't he have wanted help?"

"Sam didn't tell anyone. Just talk to him," Dean says, voice weaker than she expected.

"You've told me enough."

The girl rises, ready to leave, but then she loses the standoffishness:

"I understand why you didn't tell me any of this earlier. I'm sorry."

"It was years ago," Dean says dismissively, but it doesn't feel like it's been six years. It could have been a week ago for how messed up she is right now.

She didn't completely trust Sam without his soul, but she didn't think he would do that. She didn't think he would just go ahead and-

Son of a bitch, she's really going to start crying now. Hold it together.

After a pause, her daughter approaches.

*No hugging*, Dean thinks at her. She doesn't care if Tophet says she can't hear thoughts that well.
It makes her skin crawl to think that this stranger, raised by Crowley, can sense her emotions, her fears and weaknesses. As friendly as Tophet seems, she hasn't proven herself to be on their team. At any moment, she could destroy Dean with just words. Literally destroy her, if she felt like it.

"You're a strong person, Dean," Tophet says, putting a hand on her shoulder. "I see why Sam looks up to you, and I'm proud you're my mother."

Tophet simply leaves the room then, not asking for any acknowledgement or response.

For a few seconds, Dean is stunned. Her daughter couldn't really mean that, could she? Since when is anyone other than Sam really proud of her?

It feels nice, though. She told Tophet the truth and instead of getting pissy, the kid says she's proud to have a strong parent.

Tophet, proud of Dean.

Mia, proud of her mom.

Sam chooses to wait in the library until he sees either Dean or Tophet. Unsure whom he'd prefer, he picks an armchair that's relatively hidden from view, and grabs a book without looking at the title. He's not going to read it; he's just going to stare at a page blindly until someone comes.

After what feels like a very long time, he hears footsteps that are not Dean's. That means he has to be ready to face Tophet and tell her the truth.

"Sam? You here?"

He clears his throat, but his voice still doesn't sound the way he wants it to.

"Yup. Over here."

The footsteps approach. Finally she turns a corner and comes into view. Sam closes the book and sets it on the table beside him.

Tophet's face and stance are neutral, composed. Like a regal princess, he thinks, who must show decorum even in the worst of times.

In the unusual predicament of not knowing whether his daughter knows she is his daughter, he begins with something vague and neutral:

"It's a lot to process, I know."

"Dean sent me to you to ask about my father," she responds. "She said you know him with his soul better than she does."

Sam takes a deep breath. No games, no beating around the bush. Just say it.

"I don't want to know anything about him," she informs him before he can say a word. "Nothing."

Like when hot water from a faucet feels cold for the smallest fraction of a second, Sam's relief is quickly replaced by hurt.

"Why not?"
"Because either he's a soulless rapist, which Dean insists he isn't, or a victim like Dean, except he never made the choice she made."

"What choice?"

"Keeping me."

Sam fumbles for a response, not sure until the words come from his mouth whether to answer in the first person or the third.

"It wasn't his to make."

"From what you and Dean have said, the only thing that makes sense to me is if he didn't want me very much."

Unsure how Tophet will interpret his words, he takes the plunge, ready for either outcome:

"Why don't you ask him yourself, hear it from his mouth, instead of making assumptions about how he felt?"

There's a pause. A fleeting moment where she considers the implications of the question, how to read into it.

He thinks he sees the instant that it crosses her mind. A look in her eyes as she questions if her father is the man in front of her.

Then it's gone. Of course it's too absurd for her to even guess her uncle is more than her uncle.

"No," she replies. "I don't want him to know about me. He's out there somewhere, thinking I died when I was born, right? The way Dean talks, seems like they haven't spoken in years. Let's keep it that way. If he didn't want a daughter, then I don't need him as a father. I already have Daddy."

Sam gets up and stands directly in front of her. If she truly doesn't want to know, he won't force the truth on her today. But he has to try one more time.

"You don't want to know anything about your father? Not one goddamn thing?"

"No."

"Not even where he is?"

"No."

With all the stubbornness of her mother, his daughter turns around and walks away.

He opens his mouth, ready to say it. It's what he should do.

Just shout it out and tell her she's completely wrong, that he loves and wants her more than she can know, that he named her Mia because it means "mine," that she would have been conceived no matter what, that he's been dying to say it this whole time except he never realized it.

One word:

"Here."

She'll stop and ask what he means.
"I'm here," he'll say, "I'm right here and I love you."

Sam only needs to say one word.

Instead, he watches her leave the room.

She doesn't want to know.

*

Sam finds his sister sitting on the hood of her car in the garage, a bottle of whiskey at her side, half the lights in the room off.

Dean frowns as he approaches at a trudging pace.

"That didn't take too long."

Sighing, Sam sits next to her. He picks up the bottle.

"I didn't tell her," he explains before taking a swig.

"You chickened out?!"

"No, she didn't want me to. I almost did anyway, but... she's too much like you."

"What are you talking about?"

"Honestly, Dean, when you decide not to listen, you don't hear anything." He swallows some more whiskey continuing, "I dropped a couple hints, but she's not crazy enough to consider it."

Dean ignores the mild criticism and only replies to his latter sentence.

"She's had a mostly normal life," she points out.

"I don't know why I didn't just tell her point-blank," Sam muses before taking another gulp. The more he thinks about it the more he frustrated he is with his sister for teaching Tophet the soulless-soul dichotomy that he thought he destroyed five years ago. His daughter loves the King of Hell; she should be able to accept Sam even if she knows how thin a line there really is. He should have stayed in the room.

"You want me to do it?" Dean asks.

"No. I have to do this myself. Whenever she changes her mind."

They sit in silence, taking comfort from each other's presence. Sam wishes they were outside watching the stars.

Whatever happens, he thinks, he and Dean will still be together. That's what matters. If Tophet disowns him when she learns the truth, so be it. A week with her has begun to heal the past five years of wondering.

"How'd you get the idea to bring up the curse?" Dean asks. "You sure you weren't bullshitting your way out of telling her?"

"Well, it's true. I did always wonder if it had any long-term effects we didn't know about. In a few years we could go back, find out if any other kids born around that time have issues. ...How much,
"Uh, detail did you go into?"

"Enough. I told her what the curse was, how it happened, and how we figured out we could break it. Then I said her dad, who didn't have his soul at the time, made me break the curse with him."

"Nice euphemism," he replies bitterly.

"...What if it happened differently?" she asks about thirty seconds later.

"What do you mean?"

"What if you had your soul when I got cursed?"

Sam looks at her, grave. Did she fucking forget?

"If it was the real you asking, the answer would've been yes," she reminds him. "Guess I'm asking, what would it've been like if you came up to me asking to commit incest for the greater good?"

Sam studies her for a moment.

"...Are you asking to roleplay?"

She pouts in thought for a moment.

"Yes. Yes, I am."

Sam is not about to turn down sex with her; if she wants to try something unusual (not that Dean hasn't convinced him to roleplay before), he's game.

"Shouldn't you be desperately horny to start with?" he asks.

Dean leans over and whispers in his ear:

"Who says I'm not?"

She gets to her feet and takes the bottle from him. She sets it on the floor and gestures for Sam to start.

He brings himself back to those days of confusion and shame, of uncertainty and fear, questioning just how perverted he might be.

And then he gives himself the urgency of his sister's life and of the lives of a whole town.

Ignoring how silly and stupid it feels to start, Sam stands before her and speaks:

"How're you holdin' up?"

She answers in a sarcastic tone:

"How do you think?"

"...Look, um, we haven't made any headway on a way to remove the curse entirely, but right now we can stop it from spreading, and save your life. We might as well do it sooner rather than later."

"And who's gonna fuck me three times without asking questions?"

Averting his eyes, Sam crosses his arms and shifts his weight to the other foot.
"There's me."

"You?!!" Dean exclaims, "You want to fuck me?!"

"I never said I wanted to, I'm just the best option you've got!"

"You're my brother!"

He's into it now; he smoothly responds with sarcasm of his own:

"Really? I completely forgot!"

His sister thinks about it. Back then, he might have guessed that either the curse was really doing a number on her, or that she had less of a problem with incest than he assumed. (Or, in the present, she doesn't want to waste as much time arguing as they really would have.)

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Dean asks. "Are you sure you can do this?"

What the hell is that supposed to mean, "can he do this," Sam wonders before answering.

"It's your life, Dean," he says, finding the courage to look her in the eye. That's all he needs to say.

For three seconds, she has a perfect poker face. Then she sighs.

"Okay. Fine." She starts taking off her clothes.

"There's something you should know first," he says, looking only at her face, although now that just turns him on. He wants to see and touch her, not pretend he's embarrassed. God, he would have blushed like a teenager if she'd undressed in front of him like this...

"What?"

"This is- or was a fertility ritual. The guy, umm..." Sam can't remember the name. "Well, he only changed a few things, so the rest of the ritual should work as intended."

"Spit it out, Sam."

"You're going to conceive. Like, it's not a risk, it's a fact."

Shedding the last of her clothes much more slowly, Dean takes some time to reply.

"We're literally about to make a baby, is that what you're telling me?"

"We can still try a morning-after pill. Or, you know... get in touch with Dr. Robert if that doesn't work. I don't expect you- I don't want you to have a kid. Especially not mine."

There's a pause. That's not a surprise to Dean. Sam has no idea what to expect from her in response, however.

"...Right," she mutters. Dean opens the back door of the car and gets in.

Sam strips down to his briefs before joining her.

She's already lying on her back, waiting, legs open but tense.

"Dean, get up," he tells her.
"What?"

"I don't want this to be some awkward two virgins in a backseat thing, or you lying there thinking of the Queen. Let me- let me make this good for you."

"Okay..." Dean sits up. Now she seems self-conscious, and only then does Sam remember she'd never had sex with anyone in her new body. She was a virgin. ("What if we need virgin blood later?" "We'll just have to muddle through..."")

He touches her arm.

"You trust me, right?"

"I trust you with my life, you think I wouldn't trust you with my lady parts?"

Sam bites his lip until he can remain in character.

His hand skims up to her shoulder, her neck, her face. He would have been nervous, worrying he was taking advantage of his sister, being afraid of physically hurting her, maybe secretly hoping to impress her.

"Is it alright if I kiss you?"

"Are you a decent kisser?"

He would have just taken the plunge and let her decide for himself, so he does it now, waiting for her to relax and even kiss back before his hands start to wander—nothing too sexual, just sensual, touching her warm, soft curves, her hands on his chest.

He imagines this being the first time he's touched her body like this, imagines being almost embarrassed to hear her soft moan, but relieved that she seems to be comfortable with him.

Even so, on another level he would have hated this. Dean has never thought of her body as some sacred temple, but Sam knows that it is. She as much as anyone else deserved to choose the first time she was vulnerable with another person, whether it was a hookup behind a bar or in bed with a lover.

Breaking the kiss, he exhales sharply when Dean starts to palm him. It feels so damn good. Their foreheads rest together, both sets of eyes closing.

"Excited already?" she asks, finding him hard. "For your sister?"

His penis doesn't know how to roleplay, but Sam manages to keep the scene going.

"When's the last time you were this close to a naked woman and weren't turned on?" he retorts.

"Touché." She tugs at the elastic of Sam's underwear. "Are you going to fuck me or not?"

"Is this you or the curse talking?"

"...You're right about the curse, Sam," she admits. Sam looks at her now. She averts her eyes. "It's not just about getting off, it's about... making babies. Just take these off, get your dick inside me."

"If this is how you used to talk to your dates," he remarks, removing his briefs, "I don't know how you ever got laid."

"I could ask you the same thing."
Sam gently lays his hand on her knee. He moves it up and in, stopping when his thumb reaches the delicate skin of her inner thigh. He'll never get over, and he never wants to get over, all of her perfect flaws. From the moment he first saw her naked he's loved every hair on her body and every scar on her skin. Doubly so after he got it through his thick head that this really is Dean.

"You ready?" he asks.

"Why don't you find out for your-?" Words give way to a loud moan when he reaches the final inch to find her wet and wanting. His cock twitches at the absolutely lascivious parting of her legs.

"Deep, want you to go deep," she breathes. "When you fuck me, do it from behind. Please."

"I will," Sam promises, "I'll take care of you, Dean."

There's a pause then, where they look into each other's eyes once again.

"I know you will," she replies.

That declaration sets a new mood, one in which Dean can allow herself to relax with Sam, to let him be strong and in-charge.

He pulls her into his lap, her legs on either side of him, and kisses her again. She smells so good, sounds so enticing, feels like heaven and like sin all at once. Every time they do this, it's as if they're consummating the bond they've shared their whole lives. Allowing each other to satisfy their needs, to celebrate each other in a way.

When his fingers slide inside her a minute later, she moans into his ear.

"Sounds like you're more than ready," he whispers.

She nods and gets off him; he moves out of the way so she can spread her knees on the seat, facing the back window. Sam gets behind her and gently guides his cock in.

"You alright? How do you feel?" he asks, running hands up and down her sides.

Dean seems to hesitate, like she's embarrassed to answer honestly. She takes his hand and presses it to her heart, beating as fast as his.

"Good. I feel good."

"You'll tell me if it hurts, right?"

She nods, fingers tightening as they interlace with his.

Sam is extra careful to start off slow and gentle. He would have been in such awe that this was happening, that Dean was allowing him to... well, make love to her.

"You can go a little faster, you know," Dean says after a moment. "This curse... I want to be fucked, Sam. By you."

Of all the things her words could bring to the fore, Sam is hit first by sadness.

The tragedy of that day was that she would have said yes. It's quietly understood, after all these years, that she wanted to say yes. But she made a choice, the truly good and respectful choice, which Sam appreciates, that was immediately ignored. Instead, she was violated.
He kisses her shoulder and neck before replying. Right now they're pretending that day didn't happen.

"Faster... or harder?"

Just the question draws another moan from her.

"Whichever one you're into. You wanna make this good for me, show me what you're good at."

She knows perfectly well what the answer to that question is, so Sam doesn't give a verbal warning before he starts putting more force into his thrusts. Dean has happily relinquished control, letting Sam fulfill his most carnal desires to both inflict pleasure and satisfy himself as he fucks her from behind.

Soon his sister's cursing reaches a new pitch, one that means she's almost there. His hips move faster. Dean doesn't come just from being fucked, but he's gotten her close and he will never stop trying. After all, that particular failure is just as sweet as success.

Her scent, her voice—he can hardly take it. Sexual ecstasy is one thing, but with Dean, it's a sacred union. This is exactly where they belong, together. It's where they have always belonged.

"Oh, fuck," he moans as he tries to hang on just a little longer. He muffles his profane shouts into her shoulder, and she trembles in his arms as she too approaches climax.

Sam can't help but call out his sister's name as orgasm overwhelms him:

"Dean!"

As he mindlessly makes the final reflexive thrusts into her, filling her with come, his hand fumbles from her waist to her clit and gives her the friction she needs. Within a few seconds, her body convulses in his embrace and clutches around his cock, letting out a soft scream as she experiences the bliss of release.

He pulls out as he starts to soften and kisses her everywhere his mouth can reach as he keeps stroking her, making it last until she goes fully limp.

"Holy shit," she murmurs once she catches her breath, face buried in her arms.

"Are you okay?" Sam asks, choosing to remain in-character.

With some difficulty, Dean turns around and wraps her arms around his neck.

"I'm awesome," she informs him. "And officially impressed, little brother."

"It just felt good because of the curse," Sam says, turning his head away. He would have felt guilty then, guilty for enjoying his sister's misfortune, guilty for wanting more of this with her. Guilty for being glad that he needs to do this two more times.

"You okay, Sammy?"

"Yeah, fine."

"You just had sex. You should be a little better than 'fine.'"

"Well, yeah, that was amazing. But... are we just gonna forget we did this when it's over?"

"Hell no." Evidently, the scene is over for Dean. "From now on, this is what happened that day. It's
what should have happened."

Yes, Sam thinks. Between the two of them, this is what happened. He doesn't like to erase the past, but as long as it's just between them, he can accept it.

He holds Dean in his lap, basking in the touch of her bare skin against his. Whether it's before sex, after sex, or nowhere near sex, holding Dean and being held with nothing between them is one of the most soothing things in the world.

"Sammy?" she asks as he starts to get drowsy.

"Yeah?"

"Let's say this happened, I take plan B, and it doesn't work. Couple weeks later, I tell you you were right and I'm pregnant. What happens?"

"We take care of it. Doctor, spell, whatever."

"Just like that, no question? Don't even think about keeping it?"

Sam sighs.

"I'm happy that you're the mother of my child, I love that you... made Tophet as a gift to me, to us. It's amazing and incredible that you did that. But if I'd known I was the dad..." He trails off. He doesn't know anymore. Tophet isn't wrong or bad. Isn't he being hypocritical to say she's wonderful and perfect, but also that she never should have been born? Isn't he being ungrateful to reject what Dean saw as a gift to him?

"I don't know, Dean," he finishes. "At the time, yes, I would have insisted."

Dean seems unhappy with his answer, but instead of arguing she kisses him, taking their minds away from worries and toward the sense of closeness and oneness they only ever feel with each other.

*

Naturally, Sam and Dean spend the next day and a half holding their breath, waiting for Tophet to confront them. Though they weren't too loud, there's every chance she figured it out another way.

She says nothing about it, so Sam convinces himself the secret is still a secret for now.

Admittedly, his daughter isn't saying much about anything. Although she shows no signs of anger or discontentment with either of the Winchesters, she's not taking the news well. She watches her mother from across rooms, maybe with some of the same questions Sam had when he first found out.

He's careful with his own thoughts. Every part of his soul wants to just open his mind to her and say, "It's me, I'm the man you're not looking for. It's not what you think." Even without knowing how much of that might come across, Sam remains mentally silent. He and Dean will not tell their daughter any more potentially traumatic information until it's time.

He has no idea how either of them will know when it's time, but he wonders, when he sees a text message from Tophet on his phone, if it's going to be a lot sooner than they thought. Or, God forbid, she did hear or notice something.

i need to talk to you, the text message reads.

The words are ominously ambiguous, and Sam doesn't waste a second in heading for her room.
Sam lightly knocks on his daughter's bedroom door.

"Tophet?"

"It's not locked."

He enters and gently closes the door behind him. Tophet, from the bed, gestures for him to seat himself.

"I got your message. What do you need to talk about?" he asks, taking the chair at her desk.

"I don't know," she admits. She hugs her knees to her chest. "I guess it has to do with what Dean told me the other day."

Shit, Sam thinks.

"You having second thoughts about your dad?"

"No." Now her hair is partly concealing her face. "This isn't about my father. Not exactly, I mean."

"Okay." Sam is oddly disappointed considering how nervous he is about telling her. Does he or does he not want her to know?

"I don't know how to feel," she admits, blissfully ignorant of his thoughts. "The past couple days, all I can think about is what happened to Dean and I still can't... I don't know."

"Wrap your head around it?" Sam suggests.

She nods.

"I understand. It isn't something you just learn and tuck away," he says. "It was a terrible thing. And Dean... she pretended she was okay for too long when she wasn't."

"I'm actually really proud of her," Tophet says. "She got pregnant against her will, but she, like, owned it. She made a choice and stuck with it."

Good, Sam thinks, someone else sees how amazing his sister is, even if it's not for the same reasons.

"But that still leaves me," the teenager finishes.

And that, Sam thinks, is exactly what he didn't like about Dean's choice. There is a human being who exists because Dean needed a way to cope. Did she think about that? Not as much as she should have.

"What about you?" he asks.

"Like you said, I came from something terrible."

"I didn't say that, exactly. You came from something good, from your mom making a choice to give herself strength and because she loved you."

"Most people were conceived from their parents doing something because they loved each other or at
least liked each other. Dean could barely talk about what happened. I don't know how I'm not a constant reminder of that. I mean... is that part of why she gave me up? She did sort of wish she could have kept me, but maybe it was easier to give me to Daddy because of that."

"Don't say that," Sam tells her. He blinks away hot tears. "Dean doesn't see you that way. She never has. She sees you as her child, and as your father's child. So do I."

"I don't know, Sam. I kind of wish I didn't know."

"None of this makes you bad or worth less than anyone else," he insists. "If you liked the person you were three days ago, Tophet, you can go right on liking yourself. Not that it compares, but supposedly Dean and I's parents only got together because angels intervened, because they needed us to be born. We never let God's plans define us. You don't have to let how you were conceived define you."

"But if she could choose how she got pregnant with me..."

"If it was consensual, your dad would have known. And..."

"And Dean wouldn't have gone through with it because he wouldn't have wanted her to," Tophet finishes.

Reluctantly, he nods. That's what he told Dean, after all.

"And you try to tell me no, it's not that he doesn't want me," she says with a scowl.

Taking a deep breath, Sam makes a decision that makes him feel like a parent:

"From now on, any time you talk about your father not wanting you, I'm going to tell you something about him whether you want to hear it or not."

He detects a hint of "indignant princess" in her expression, but it's smoothed away quickly.

"Deal." After a deep sigh, she changes the subject. "I miss Daddy."

Sam listens, hiding the disgust he feels every time he hears her say that.

"He's been my best friend my whole life. There's nothing I can't talk to him about," she tells him. "Every night he asks me about my day, and he's always understood when I was upset, or when I was happy. He's always, always given me what I needed, even when I didn't realize it at the time."

And he's always been able to, Sam thinks. Crowley's been the perfect dad.

Suddenly, the hole in his heart that had started to heal since Tophet came to them is ripped wide open. There are things he doesn't like about how Tophet was raised, sure, but she's happy. Hell, she's so well-adjusted, she understands and appreciates what a wonderful childhood she had. When Sam and Dean tell her how they grew up, she's proven herself to be understanding and sympathetic, not incredulous or dismissive about how much messed up shit they dealt with. She's a good person, even if her ideas about morality don't completely line up with her parents'.

Maybe it's good Tophet doesn't want to know about him. What would the point be? He couldn't have been a better father. Yes, he and Dean would have loved her while the demon only pretended, but that feels like so little when the King of Hell gave her all the things they never could have provided, and she still grew into a woman Sam is proud to know.
As angry as he feels to hear that word, "Daddy," Sam has no more claim to it nor "Dad" nor any other name for a father than Crowley does.

"Are you alright, Sam?" the girl asks.

"Yeah, fine. Why?"

"Even though you're still blocking me, I could sense you were upset just now."

"I'm starting to see what you meant when you said you think the deal worked out well. Crowley didn't just do a good job raising you for a demon. He did a great job, full stop."

"And that's a bad thing?" Tophet asks, stiffening at the insult to her father.

"No, it's-" Sam can't believe he just took out his emotions on her. "It's a good thing. I'm sorry, I didn't mean that the way it sounded. It's just... you can't understand what the past five years have been like."

Tophet seems a little less mad and slightly more perplexed now, but she lets it go.

"...Thanks for talking to me, Sam," she says to dismiss him. "It did help."

"No problem," he nods as he makes his escape, more ashamed than anything else. He's lost something he can't name.

§§§

"Are you busy?"

Dean closes the hood of the Impala to see her daughter approaching.

It's a good feeling, that lately she sees Tophet as hers, rather than a stranger who is related to her and Sam.

"Nope, just finished here. What's up?"

"Just wondering how you're feeling after the other day."

Not that she has to ask, Dean thinks, but she gets that Tophet is trying harder not to make her feel like her brain's being picked.

"Aces. You?"

"...Aces," the teen echoes.

After Dean wipes most of the grease from her hands, she heads to the nearest sink, which is in the kitchen. Tophet casually follows her.

Once Dean turns off the faucet and grabs the towel to pat her skin dry, she begins to mentally count down to the moment she puts the towel back and Tophet begins:

"Actually..."

Knew it, Dean thinks.

"Remember when I got here and I told you that I have to cast a spell every once in a while?" the teen
asks.

"Yup." Dean has had a week and a half to decide that she's going to go along with it for now. No bitching or moaning.

"I need ingredients for the spell."

"What ingredients?"

The girl hands Dean a worn-looking piece of paper with a list in messy handwriting. After some squinting, Dean deciphers that there are five items on the list, all of which she is pretty sure they have.

"Alright, come with me."

She leads Tophet to a storage room, again troubled by the idea that her daughter is physically dependent on magic. On the other hand, she wonders if she should be a tiny bit proud that Tophet called on her to help with the spell, rather than Sam. Unless there's something going on; he seemed really upset a couple hours ago. He took a cab, said he was going on a beer run. Sure.

"When's the last time you tried not doing it?" Dean asks.

"You mean no spell, no blood?"

"Yeah."

"About... a year after I started doing the spell instead. It was slower, but the same process. Tired, dizzy, getting sick, then it's hard for me to stay conscious and my body starts to shut down."

"How are you feeling right now?"

"A little dizzy."

After shoving a few larger jars aside, Dean finds one half-full of a mixture some dried... things. Like some kind of creepy death-themed potpourri. She checks the label. Seems right.

"This the one?" she asks, holding out the jar.

"Yes." Tophet accepts it.

On to the next item. Dean has to admit that Sam cataloging every fucking thing in the whole bunker comes in handy when searching for things. Each shelf has a list of what's on it, so it only takes about thirty seconds to find the shelf and rifle through small boxes, Mason jars, and envelopes filled with powder to get the bottle of orange liquid she's after. She gives that to her daughter, too.

"Do you know what happened to Sam's hand?" Tophet asks suddenly.

"He's too picky about girls," Dean answers automatically, "He gets lonely."

Tophet gives an amused scoff.

"I meant the scar on his right- I mean, his left hand."

"He burnt it pretty bad a few years back. Actually, it was the same time he tried to bargain with Crowley to get you back. That's all I know."
"Really?"

"All he said was that he made a mistake. The hell he did, it took months to heal."

"I told him I could remove the scar, but he said it was a part of him."

Like her eye? Dean wonders to herself. Apparently Sam managed to ask about it one morning and give Dean a full report. Just like she suspected, her daughter has had it her whole life. Bottom line was that even with options—surgery to make it look more normal, spells that could restore the lost vision—it's a part of Tophet and she isn't ready to change it.

It still didn't make Dean feel any better. It doesn't matter what Sam thinks. She did that to Tophet.

The next two ingredients on the list are right next to each other on another shelf; Dean puts those into Tophet's arms and then hunts for the last item, ginseng.

"Something I've been wondering since I got here," Tophet begins, a bit shyly, "is how you knew it was me. When I first told you in the park."

Pausing the search, Dean rests her hands flat on the shelf for a few seconds, then turns around.

"Look, I've never had any kind of ESP, but I don't need magic powers to know the baby I carried for almost nine months."

"But you thought I might be a shapeshifter or demon."

"Habit, I guess." Or not, Dean thinks. There was a reason but it's deep in her subconscious now, which is not a place she likes going. She chooses to volunteer a little more information, however. "Always wondered about that happening if I met you."

"If?"

"Look, giving you to Crowley was scary. Scarier was when Sam told me he fucked it up and Crowley could do whatever he wanted to you. I didn't know if you were gonna be alive in eighteen years, let alone want to see me."

"I always wondered what you looked like."

"Good, because if Crowley had pictures of me... ugh." Dean shudders as she resumes her search. Thirty seconds later, Dean finds white Siberian ginseng, exactly what's on the list.

"Alright, here's the ginseng. What's next, Sabrina?"

Tophet shoots her a glare that would make her dad proud.

In the late afternoon, Sam, concerned that he hasn't seen or heard from his daughter since their not-great conversation yesterday, is about to knock on Tophet's door once again.

With his knuckles an inch from the door, he pauses. Dean mentioned she helped her cast the spell she needs last night. The spell gives Tophet a migraine.

He's never had one, but he can review what he knows—sufferers might be extremely, painfully sensitive to light, sound, vibrations, or other sensations. It can last hours or even days. There are other symptoms, and they vary greatly from person to person.
What if Tophet needs help, though? Maybe he can get something or do something for her. He wishes he could ask without disturbing her...

Maybe he can. Surely it will be less painful for Tophet to sense his mind than for him to open the door and speak aloud.

They were able to communicate things to each other without even trying, so what if he actually puts effort into it, uses the psychic muscles he hasn't even flexed in years?

It won't be fun and he doesn't like the idea, but he finds it much easier to disregard his mental safety and comfort when it helps his daughter.

Okay, now how the hell does he do it? He blocked her out at will, no real effort put into it, so maybe just by wanting her to hear him, he can bring the barrier down.

*Tophet, can you hear me?* he thinks.

He tries to listen for a response rather than just remaining mentally open, wondering if he might hear her voice in his head, or feel like he's reading a message when it comes in.

It's nothing like that at all.

Without justification, without reason, Sam *knows* the answer is yes, she can hear him.

It isn't soul-baring or painful; it isn't magical or trippy, it's just... he knows it with the same certainty as if he'd heard it from her mouth, except he hasn't heard anything.

Wow. He can communicate telepathically with Tophet. He didn't want to have powers again; he didn't want to use something given to them by demons. Now he sees that this isn't evil. It's just a link between them. Something unique he shares with his... niece.

Back to the task at hand.

He starts with a stupid question:

Is she in pain?

Again, the answer is yes.

Can he alleviate it? Is there anything he can do or give her?

There's no answer. Maybe the questions are too complex to come across their psychic link. They don't know how the hell this works.

He simplifies it: *Can I help?*

No.

Then a new thing happens, when in his mind's eye, he catches a glimpse of himself saying "thank you."

She's welcome, she is completely welcome. More than welcome.

*I'll go,* he attempts to inform her. It's not a question, but he expects a yes or a no.

He gets a yes from Tophet.
That wasn't so bad, Sam thinks as he closes off his mind again—this time he knows he did but he can't identify how—and softly steps away. Maybe, if Tophet asks again, he will work with her to find out how much they can do. Maybe this connection they have is worth exploring.

Like her vision and hearing, Tophet's telepathic powers become painfully sensitive when a migraine takes hold. Dean walking by her room would have been bad enough, but communicating with Sam was like bursts of screeching metal in her head.

Once the migraine fades somewhat and Tophet can think a little more clearly, she decides that it was worth it, because if Sam was willing to communicate with her once, he'll probably do it again.

And she really, really wants to sense his mind again. It's already amazing to catch glimpses of Dean's deep-down love and affection toward her, but her uncle lets himself have those emotions on the surface.

Having this kind of love directed at her is completely new—love where the giver takes their own feelings for granted. It's just inherent and automatic, no need or even a request to be loved back. That's the love a parent has for a child.

Tophet wonders what it would be like to feel that all the time from Daddy.

§§§

What Dean enjoys about being with Sam is that she's the only one that gets her brother to go from prim geek to sexually aggressive alpha male. Or from being a man's man to a romantic sap. Or, once in a great while, from good ole Sammys to dealing with emotional issues the fun way.

Whatever it is this time, Dean isn't going to argue when Sam guides her to their room and gets handsy. He sets a calm pace, unbuttoning her shirt like he's untying the bow on a gift.

Nah, her brother is the gift, she thinks a minute later when he lays her down, caressing her. Then he's above her, hair brushing her cheeks when he goes in for a kiss.

Dean smiles against his lips and holds on to him tightly. The weight of his body secures and grounds her, giving her a feeling of safety no one else can.

It's a feeling she needs right now.

Sam slides a pillow under her hips before slowly pushing inside her, then gives her a long, deep kiss. At first it could be lust, passion, but it's pure emotion, romance between them.

In these moments, when Sam is literally inside her and their lips meet, Dean definitely believes in soulmates.

Too soon, he pulls away.

"Are you ready?" he asks with almost enough formality for it to be a turn-off. Almost.

"Yes."

He gently rocks in and out, the way he does when they both need soothing after a bad day. She rolls her hips and holds him tightly, feeling the flex of his muscles, as he tends to her body like he's worshipping it. They each have theirs soft and quiet, Dean only giving a sharp gasp as her back
arches, and Sam whispering her name just before he hits climax.

Afterwards, they lie next to each other. Sam takes the wet spot without a word.

"So what was that about?" Dean asks.

He turns his head on the pillow.

"What?"

"Usually when you herd me in here at..." She checks the clock. "Quarter to five, it's because you're incredibly horny," she points out.

"Did you miss the part just now when we had sex?"

"On a scale of 'dry-humping in the kitchen' to 'play All My Love in the background while scattering rose petals on my body and kissing where each one lands'”—she pauses to appreciate Sam's amused grin—"that was a solid 'making love.'"

He raises his shoulder in an attempt at shrugging.

"We had a chance to take our time. I took it. ...Also, I'm taking that as a request."

Dean still has to remind herself that she did her time being tough and anti-chick-flick. When they're lying naked in bed, if Sam can be the strong one, she can be the one who pushes their sibling to talk about feelings.

"You don't have anything you wanna talk about?" she asks.

Sam takes a deep breath. When he exhales, it's shaky, like he's trying not to break down. He watches the ceiling fan as he answers.

"I've spent the last four and a half years mourning Mia and hating myself," he explains. "But she grew up happy. She loves Crowley and she's right to, because he gave her everything. More than we ever could. I should be relieved, but... for some reason, it fucking kills me."

"Maybe it's like when we give each other hell for doing something stupid and dangerous without getting hurt," Dean suggests. "What I did was wrong, there's no denying that. But for the three of us, I think it turned out alright."

Finally Sam turns onto his side and faces her.

"I'm starting to think so, too. But I'm not mad. It's just... something is gone. I don't know what it is, but it's something selfish, something I didn't earn. Something I need to let go of. But I don't want to."

"Just give it some time, Sam. Keep fightin' the good fight with me. Focus on our daughter and how awesome she is."

That cheers him up.

"She is. I never thought I'd be proud of someone for it, but she knows so much about witchcraft and magic. She actually showed me how witches invent spells. And she's learned so much Gaelic she can almost speak it. Latin, too."

"You would get excited over that, you- you hexalingual freak." Dean is pretty sure six can be hex or sex. As badly as she wants to say it, she's not giving her brother the satisfaction of being called
sexalingual.

"And I know I've said this a hundred times, Dean, but she is really beautiful."

Dean still thinks her brother is doing that thing moms do when they think their kid is the best thing ever, but he is right.

"She'd better be. I worked on her eight, nine months."

"Hey, I contributed," Sam fires back.

As the words leave his mouth, their eyes meet, shocked. He'd forgotten. Finally, after five years, he forgot for one damn second.

And now he's probably about to apologize, Dean thinks, because after five frickin' years he still doesn't get it.

"All you contributed to was the initial concept," she says in a patronizing tone.

She waits to flash a grin until he scoffs, shaking his head in disapproval of her pun.

"We did agree," Sam reminds himself. "The other day."

"Exactly."

Comfortable silence follows, then the rustle of bedsheets as Sam shuffles over. Dean takes her place as the little spoon, again protected instead of being the protector. Her brother's arm is draped over her waist, his hand over hers.

Dean feels like crying suddenly, out of something between relief and happiness. They'll remember the idea, the fantasy of "Mia" until the day they die, but they can stop hurting. The dream is gone, she and Sam have woken up to a different reality. A better reality.

***

The morning after she coerced her little brother into sex, Dean woke up in her single bed with Sam's arm around her, just like how they'd fallen asleep.

Damn. They went there. She and her brother finally crossed that taboo line.

It was actually the little one growing inside her who woke her up, kicking around.

'Morning, kiddo. Yeah, love you too. Settle down, we'll have breakfast soon.

'Maybe he or she was trying to be Dean's Jiminy Cricket, because even though she did return Sam's feelings, she had pressured him and taken advantage of him last night.

It worked, at least. She proved to herself that she had power over her own body by offering it to someone she knew she could trust. Someone who didn't even have to know what happened to give Dean the control she badly needs. She took her own clothes off. She let Sam pick her up. She told him to choose how to touch her. She wrapped her hand around her own brother's cock and made him come.

She used him.

§§§
The days are flying by for Tophet. Some of the "later"s from the first week actually turn into answers, although she can't bring herself to tell them about the "later" she gave them. Dean starts showing her some of the best movies ever made, supposedly. (Tophet finds it funny that the Winchesters enjoy horror movies but neither has seen or read *It*, until her uncle explains that Dean has a hard time with stories about losing little brothers, and he just can't do clowns.)

New questions still trickle out from both sides. None of them are really important, but Tophet wants to hear any details they're willing to share—pranks they played on each other, weird phases growing up, embarrassing moments, in-jokes. It's stopped being about facts, yes-or-no questions, or fill-in-the-blanks.

The feeling is mutual: Tophet's stories are just as fascinating to them. She gathers that they don't usually care to hear about the upper class spending seven thousand dollars on a pair of shoes (at least Dean had heard of Louboutins), but they love knowing about the things she did growing up (they never swam in the ocean) and the places she got to see (Rome is beautiful and no, Daddy can't go into Vatican City). Fun field trips, failed hobbies, proudest moments, spells gone hilariously wrong—the Winchesters want to hear it all, too. They're honestly happy she got so many experiences that they didn't have and never will.

Mostly. It makes Dean wistful sometimes, and probably Sam too.

Tophet waits, but he doesn't mention their mental exchange, and he keeps his guard up at all times.

* 

It's unspoken law: Tophet is absolutely forbidden from joining them on any more hunts. She doesn't mind. What happened with the kitsune showed it's not for her. On the other hand, she'd be willing to help out in the ways she's good at if they needed.

Sam and Dean each "work a job" alone while the other stays at the bunker with Tophet—Dean does one and Sam does two. Obviously they still don't completely trust her. As long as she calls her father "Daddy" they probably never will.

They're right not to, technically. Tophet doesn't let herself forget how this is supposed to end, no matter how much she enjoys spending time with both of them.

Daddy's instructions were simple: get close, remind them of what they missed. It doesn't matter if they trust her as long as she shows them what they could have. It doesn't matter if she really likes them or if she has to pretend. When it's time to leave, return to him.

"How do I know when it's time?" she had asked.

"You'll know, darling."

All Tophet knows is that she doesn't want it to be anytime soon.

* 

The beginning of the end, she thinks, is in the library one morning when Sam asks casually:

"Do you know what your name means, Tophet?"

She looks him in the eye.

"What do you think it means?"
"'Tophet' is another word for Hell, or Gehenna," her uncle says, swallowing nervously. "But it specifically refers to a place where people would burn their children alive as sacrifices."

"You're not wrong," she answers. "But when Daddy told me what my name meant, he explained it was supposed to make me think of myself as someone very strong, someone to fear. Nothing has ever defeated Hell."

"But it's Hell."

"Some people name their daughters Lilith because in Jewish myth she wouldn't submit to Adam," she informs him. "They don't care that in real life she ate babies for thousands of years."

"I see." Sam still doesn't look very happy with the explanation.

"You don't believe me?" Tophet prompts.

"You know how Crowley is. He likes to make people uncomfortable. To be honest, Dean and I have the impression that he named you Tophet in reference to Dean's deal. To upset us."

Tophet sighs, irritated. The Winchesters still don't like Daddy. Why, after she's told them all of the good things he's done for her? After everything they've heard has made them happier?

"Not everything he does is with bad intentions," she tells him firmly. "You think you know everything about him, but you don't. You can't."

"I'm going off of my experiences with him."

"Well that's not an excuse when you have his daughter right here, who's spent her whole life with him and can tell you the truth. Why is it so hard to believe that he cares about me?"

"He's a demon."

"And? Just because they can't love doesn't mean they don't care."

Sam's mouth stays shut, but his face says enough. He doesn't believe her.

"I'm sorry," he says after a few seconds. "You and I have had very different experiences with demons. We'll probably never see eye to eye on it."

"Probably not," Tophet agrees. He doesn't know how little time he has left.

On the other hand, she reflects as Sam leaves her alone in the library, it's getting more and more unpleasant to think about losing these two people. She gave up friends she made in school, and it hurt, but she got over it. She made new friends.

Giving this up, her flesh and blood family, will be permanent.

§§§

Sam takes a deep breath as he approaches his daughter's bedroom door. It's ajar, so he just knocks once before sticking his head in.

She's sitting on the bed with her phone, one earbud in, one in her hand. She knew he was there. She can sense him.

"Hey, Tophet. Just wondering what you want for supper."
"Anything," she shrugs.

There's an awkward silence. He's not sure why he did this, why he decided to let his guard down for this brief interaction, but it seemed like a way to break the ice, almost two weeks after their occult communication. And, perhaps, a delayed apology for the other day.

"...Did you hear my question just now?" Tophet asks him.

He shakes his head, stepping inside the room.

"I asked if you can tell when I'm sensing you."

"No, I- ...Wait." There is something different, something so soft and subtle he didn't notice it before. He furrows his brow. "I think I can."

"Try blocking me... And unblocking me."

"It's like really quiet white noise," he says, nodding. This is getting more interesting. "It's only there if I'm letting you sense me."

"Right now, you feel like anyone else," Tophet remarks. "I'd have no idea of what we could do."

"It's just random and sporadic unless I'm consciously listening," Sam points out—incidentally, he becomes aware that his daughter is frustrated with his vocabulary choices. He resists the urge to defend himself.

Tophet gets up and approaches.

"Try consciously listening, then. There might be other things that help, too. Like physical contact."

She holds out her hand.

Sam almost takes it, but he's hit by sudden paranoia that she's going to try something. He doesn't know what, just something.

"How about we try it another time?" he stammers. "Dean can, uh, observe."

He catches a hint of a thought from her, something a little disparaging about being afraid to touch a girl.

"What?" he asks.

Tophet's cheeks turn a shade pinker.

"Nothing. How about tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow," Sam agrees.

Tophet, Sam, and Dean pick the library. Tophet sits across from her uncle at the end of one table, and Dean perches on the edge of the next, resting her feet on a chair.

Her mother doesn't like this. She doesn't like that Tophet has powers, and she doesn't like Sam sharing them, forget about testing those abilities. Dean doesn't even care if Tophet knows it.

Sam's mind is open to Tophet. He feels more confident than yesterday, mostly because of Dean, but
something—Tophet guesses it's the idea of exploring their psychic link—is making him uneasy. He's worrying about being exposed, as if he's going to strip naked in front of Tophet. (She wishes. Oops, Sam might hear that.)

"What do we already know?" Dean asks. She's choosing to be professional, or at least Dean-professional.

"We know that Sam can block and unblock me from sensing him, at will," Tophet begins. "When he does allow me to sense him, we sometimes can exchange bits of information or questions beyond what I can normally pick up."

"But it seems completely random and out of our control," Sam adds. "Unless we're actively trying to communicate."

"Actively?" Dean repeats. Apparently Sam didn't tell her.

"We had a short 'conversation' when I was having a migraine," Tophet tells her to take some heat off of him. She first speaks to Dean, then Sam: "He unblocked me and I got that he was trying to communicate, so I focused on listening. I got that he was wondering if I was in pain—I would have known anyway you were concerned and trying to ask something, but I wouldn't have known what you were asking about. I said yes."

"I didn't hear it. I just knew you did," Sam tells her.

"I couldn't get the next thing but then you asked if you could help. I said no, thank you, and you responded with 'you're welcome.'"

"When you said thank you, I saw something in my head. Myself, saying thank you."

Tophet brightens up.

"I saw something, too. "You saw something, too."

"Did you just do the random thing?" Dean asks.

"I think so," Sam says. Speaking in unison made him happier, Tophet notices. It doesn't have the same effect on her mother.

"Anyway, I thought I saw someone familiar saying you're welcome. It was hard to make out, but that was with a migraine," Tophet continues.

"I think that's all we know," her uncle says.

"Uh-huh..." Dean nods. "And what's happening now exactly?"

Tophet decides to show her instead of telling her. She turns back to her uncle.

"Picture an object, Sam. Just in your own mind."

He's deciding... and chosen something.

"Try to project it," she instructs, closing her eyes to focus.

A second later, for what seems like no reason, Tophet pictures... light. A light. The lamp in her bedroom at home.
She looks at him again.

"A lamp?"

"Yeah."

"Try something harder," Dean challenges.

Sam makes a point to stare at her while deciding and then communicating with Tophet.

She snickers a little when she gets a brick wall. Wait, not just any brick wall. The one behind him. There's a sword on a stand.

"The brick wall behind you," she says, gesturing.

"...No." Sam frowns. "The wall behind you."

"I saw that wall. With the sword."

"Why was it backwards?"

At least Dean is a little more interested.

A few years ago, Tophet encountered a psychic whose mind was like a mirror for her. She sensed her own emotions instead of his.

She sends Sam "my father" without warning.

He's sobered by an uncomfortable memory.

"My dad."

"I was thinking of 'my father.'"

Sam blinks, mood dampened a different way. It's a little depressing to be around him, Tophet thinks. Everything troubles him.

"Shouldn't he have seen, uh, Crowley if you were thinking of your dad?" Dean asks.

"No. We're not snapchatting. We're sending..."

"Concepts," her uncle supplies.

"His idea of 'my father' is John Winchester," Tophet explains. She smiles as it clicks and sparks Sam's interest. He can't be uneasy when he's so intrigued. "So the brick wall behind me is the the brick wall behind Sam, even though he was picturing the other one. A little like how my left is his right."

She reaches across the table and takes his hand. (She realizes too late she took his left hand with her right.)

"What if you think 'your father' at me?" he asks.

"...Tell me what you see."

"Whoa..." He's startled.
"What?"

"I saw your birth father, but, uh, much clearer, sharper than before." Sam glances at his sister, who seems less concerned about who he saw than the resolution.

"You try something, Sam."

He thinks fast and Tophet sees in her mind's eye the silver chain and pendants around her neck. The image is sharp and clear.

"Tophet's necklace," Sam explains before she asks. "...Guess physical contact does help."

It goes on for maybe half an hour, Tophet and Sam testing what they can get across and what they can't. As long as both of them have a definition or image for a concept, they can share it. Hands on sleeves don't count as physical contact. Fingertips do.

"I wonder if touching hair counts," Tophet says.

"We can find out," Sam shrugs. He glances at her hair, which she happened to French braid earlier. Even if it was down, he'd be too shy to ask.

"May I?" Tophet asks, gesturing to him.

"Sure."

She starts to reach across the table, then thinks better of it and just gets up. Standing at the corner of the table, she gently combs her fingers through his soft hair. He's amused, not bothered at all by it.

"Eyes shut," she reminds him before trying to think of something new to try.

Her mother has been bored for most of the experimenting, but she's hit by jealousy as Sam closes his eyes, a slight smile on his face.

Tophet glances at Dean. Really?

Out of ideas, she settles on "pants."

"It's not sharp. Jeans?" Sam guesses, looking up at her again.

"Well, pants." Tophet smooths his hair back into place before stepping back. "I guess it's only skin to skin."

Although he says nothing, Sam can't exactly stop himself from taking that in more than one way. He only starts laughing when Tophet covers her mouth, face hot with embarrassment.

As anyone would expect, Dean snickers over it, too, but there's something between jealousy and fear growing inside her. Fear of losing... Sam. There are no hard feelings toward Tophet, which makes sense because how could Dean lose her brother to her daughter?

It's hard to be ashamed of a mistake when there's something so strange going on.

Is Dean okay? she asks Sam. He'll at least sense that she's asking about Dean.

He does, but he doesn't know what Tophet means.

Dean is jealous, she tells him.
He looks at his sister, who meets his gaze. For two people who don't read minds, they can say a lot without speaking. They have a beautiful bond, Tophet admits.

Their emotions sure are intense, for siblings anyway. That's not really a surprise either, considering how far Dean has gone and would go to save Sam's life. It's been obvious since almost the beginning that they're in a non-physical romance.

Unless...

*My lover*, Tophet expresses to him. He might not even realize it was her.

There. There's a flash of desire, and he has no qualms about it happening while he's talking to Dean. Thinking about Dean.

Sam slowly turns his head. Apparently he did notice whatever image popped into his head.

"What was that?" he asks.

"Just wondering something."

"And?"

Tophet looks between her mother and uncle. It seems possible, but really?

*Incest?* she asks Sam with her mind.

He turns red at whatever extremely raunchy thought that brings to mind.

"...Are you asking if Dean and I are together?"

"Yes, I am."

They answer with uncomfortable silence.

Son of a bitch, Tophet thinks. She did not see this coming.

"...How long?" she asks, not knowing how else to react.

"Since a couple months after Sam got his soul back," Dean answers.

That's before she was born, she thinks. Which means that they were having sex while her mother was pregnant. She was a tiny baby growing right there, two inches away from Sam's-

Ew.

Sam might have picked up her disgust, since he speaks next.

"We know it's messed up. We didn't want to freak you out by telling you right away."

"No, it's fine," she tells them. "Actually, I'm kind of relieved."

"Relieved?"

"Well, I didn't know how to tell you, but if you're together, then you'll understand."

"Understand what?"
"About me and Daddy."
We're finally delving into Tophet's relationship with Crowley, a subject which may be upsetting to some readers.

Sam and Dean are both filled with alarm and horror. Tophet blinks. This isn't what she was expecting.

"What about you and Crowley?" Dean asks. She swivels, resting her feet on the floor, holding on to the edge of the table.

"Well, remember when you asked me if I was seeing anyone, and I said 'later'?"

They don't say anything.

"I'm Daddy's consort," Tophet explains.

"Consort?"

"It's what he chooses to call me."

"Are you saying... that you have sex... with Crowley?" Dean asks, eyes shut.

"...Yes."

Her mother walks away, her mind a storm of disgust and self-loathing. She has to let her emotions out somehow, some way, and she doesn't know how except alone.

Sam jumps up to chase after her, his chair screeching against the floor as it's shoved back.

Tophet gasps quietly as she watches him catch up with his sister and push her against the wall just before she can reach the corridor.

"You are not sitting this one out." Sam's voice is shaking with fury.

"I- I can't-"

Whatever Sam says next is too low to make out, but it gets through to Dean.

"I'm gonna puke," she says, or Tophet thinks she does. "I mean it."

Sam thinks he will, too. Again, his reply is too quiet.

Together, the siblings come back to the table. This has changed something big, and Tophet doesn't understand why. She'll humor them for now, she decides, and sits down again.

They pick chairs directly across from hers. It's like the day they met.

"How and when did this start, Tophet?" Sam asks.
"Well, on my eighteenth birthday, Daddy explained that I'm an adult and that means first, I have to learn how to support myself, and second, I can make my own decisions."

They're still not relaxing, she notes. In fact, they're dreading every word that comes out of her mouth. She'd rather not continue, but there's clearly no other option.

"He said he could help me get started in whatever I wanted to do, but if I stayed with him, I'd have to... earn my place. He explained that he's been attracted to me for a while and was waiting until I was eighteen to tell me so I could decide what to do.

"I never thought of him that way—he's my Daddy—but I love him and I wanted to stay, so I agreed to try it. It was... alright, so that's what I've been doing for the past year..." Tophet trails off, realizing that she's struck a nerve and they're not going to pay attention to anything else she says.

There are too many strong emotions going on for her to sort them out beyond "mostly enraged." It's so loud she wants to shrink back, move away.

"A year. He's been doing that to you for a year," Sam seethes.

"He's not 'doing' anything to me," she insists. "He asks if we can do something and I say yes."

"What happens when you say no?" Dean asks.

Tophet hesitates. She's going to want to answer carefully.

"You never have," Sam says. "You've never said no, not once."

The link between herself and her uncle has never been so inconvenient.

"Well, I've never had to," Tophet tells them.

Dean shakes her head.

"Bullshit."

"Why is that bullshit?"

"You're trying to tell me that you're always down for whatever he has in mind?"

"Well... no, not always, but isn't love about doing things to make the other person happy?"

"Love is not about having sex with him even when you're not in the mood," Dean informs her.

The girl hides her frustration. They don't understand and they're not going to let themselves understand. They don't want to because to them, any sex with a demon is bad. Any sex with a demon is rape.

They'd really go crazy, she reflects, if they knew she's with them because she wanted a little break from it. It wasn't that she didn't enjoy it, it was just getting... a little old. She's even started to miss it.

"What about when you ask for something?" Sam asks in a low voice. "Does Crowley always say yes?"

"Well, we do it often enough, I don't need to want or ask for something," the girl tries. They don't like that answer, either. They don't get how Daddy knows what she needs and wants before she does.
"Exactly how often is that?"

"Does it matter? I have a feeling that no matter what I say, you're going to be even more upset."

Sam stares at her. He wants her to tell him, but... hidden. With her mind?

No, she thinks at him.

"You have sex you never asked for, with a demon you're not even attracted to, what, a couple times a week? More?" he says. "Because he won't let you stay with him anymore if you don't."

"You're making it sound horrible, but it's not! I'm giving Daddy something only I can give him. I love it, it feels good, and- and-" There are hot tears in her eyes and she almost can't keep her voice steady. "It's no different from what you and Dean do!"

The self-righteous rage takes a backseat when Sam and Dean have to defend each other's honor. Sam goes first:

"It is nothing like what we do. We say no to each other all the time. You can sense how I feel about Dean, can't you? And how she feels about me? Every second of every day. But we don't always want the same thing at the same time."

"Well maybe you do things a little differently, but that doesn't mean it's the only way," Tophet retorts. "It doesn't make our way wrong."

"Know what? Maybe I was a little like you, Tophet," Dean admits. "I didn't think of my brother that way, much, until I realized he had feelings for me. I'd die for him, but I didn't just go ahead and do it because he wanted. I thought about it. He didn't know what'd happened, I wasn't ready to tell him. What I was ready for was having some fucking control over my life after." Dean's voice breaks for a moment, as a whole new wave of emotional memories bombard her. And Sam, too. She starts again: "You don't fuck someone unless you trust them to only do stuff you both want. Sex is not about doing what they want when they want to prove you love them. Sex is not saying yes because you don't know how to say no to your daddy!"

"STOP IT!" Tophet screams. "You don't know anything about it! All you two ever do is try to make me hate him, try to make me think he's evil and wants to use me! You think everything Daddy did that you don't like was just to hurt you, like it's all about you. It's not! He cares about me for me. He raised me, I love him, and you are NO ONE!"

She stands up and stomps out of the library, not even sure where she's going, but somewhat satisfied by the hurt she's dealt them. They don't believe a demon can care, just because they've never seen it. They want her to think she's just a pawn to Daddy while they think everything of her.

Well, they're wrong. If anyone used her as a pawn, it was Dean. If they really cared about her, they wouldn't tell her that what Daddy does is bad and evil. Because it isn't.

§§§

Sam gets to his feet slowly as his sister dashes to the sink in the war room. Gripping the back of his chair with white knuckles, he watches her gag over the sink for about fifteen seconds before throwing up.

He's too numb to do that. He just trudges to what is once again their room. They've been separated long enough and moving his stuff back in gives him something to do.
Dean shows up shortly after he mechanically starts making room for his things, room that she had naturally taken over or camouflaged in his absence.

"We fucked that up," she sighs as she helps.

"He waited," Sam states. "He waited until she was eighteen."

"Yeah, after he groomed her. He brainwashed her."

"You're missing my point. She was eighteen. He could have done whatever the hell he wanted."

"He already could, Sam."

"Crowley kept to the terms of the deal. He waited until she was eighteen to take advantage of her."

"What is your point?"

"That I could have spent the last five years thinking she was dead and Crowley still could have done this. Or worse. Because you signed a contract covering the first eighteen years of her life, fuck the rest of it."

"You're blaming me for Crowley molesting our daughter?"

"You summoned him—don't fucking pretend you didn't—because you were ready to make a deal. You went through the contract. You didn't even think about what would happen after that time was up, you just threw your daughter, my daughter, to the wolves."

"I didn't have a choice, Sam!"

"I know," he says, tears spilling out. "I know you didn't. And I was finally ready to forgive you. But this is exactly the kind of thing I was afraid of happening, if we were lucky. He was a perfect father. Such a perfect Daddy that he could turn around and fuck her with what she thinks is her consent and we can't do a goddamn thing about it unless we want to lose our daughter forever, because she chose this."

"What do you want me to say, Sam?"

"I want you to say that if you knew this would happen, you wouldn't have done it. I want you to be sorry."

They stand looking at each other, tears rolling down their cheeks.

"I'm not sorry you're alive, Sam, and I'm not sorry our kid was happy for eighteen years."

Then Dean walks out, leaving Sam alone in the room.

Shutting his eyes, he wills himself not to punch the wall or start breaking objects. He's too angry to be concerned about where his sister goes or what she does. He doesn't own her.

Neither does he own his daughter. She is old enough to consent and she did. There's no easy way to show her how dysfunctional that relationship is.

Tophet is right. Consciously or not, they are trying to ruin her childhood, spoil all of her good memories, turn her against Crowley. And why? So she can get sucked into the Life with them? Sam and Dean have nothing to offer her.
At least, Sam thinks, he would rather his daughter be a hunter with them than live thinking it's okay for her 'Daddy' to use her like that. He and Dean might not have the healthiest relationship in the world but they could have at least set an example regarding consent and respecting each other.

Sam exhales sharply. He has to keep busy. He was trying to do something, wasn't he? Move back into his real room. He and Dean don't sleep apart if they have a choice. Anger will never be a reason to leave Dean alone in their bed.

Across the hall to his bedroom, then. He gathers up his possessions mindlessly.

He pauses just as he grabs an armful of clothes. There's that faint white noise in his head. Tophet.

He instinctively hides from it, and the sensation stops.

As Sam puts his things away in Dean's and his room, he thinks better of it. He wants to be open and honest. Tophet needs to be able to trust him.

When he opens his mind again, he's hit with such apprehension from her that he can tell where she is. That must be how things are for her all the time, he reflects as he goes out into the corridor.

He turns to his right. Tophet has stepped out from behind a corner, arms crossed like she's protecting herself.

But apprehension? Why?

Then a sort of terrified thrill washes over him as an answer presents itself. He can't be sure how long she's been there, can he? He only knows when he noticed the psychic white noise, not when it started.

Sam stands there helplessly as Tophet approaches. She stops about four feet away, eyes red from crying.

"We owe you an apology," he says to greet her. "We overreacted."

She shakes her head.

"I heard you and Dean."

This is happening now, of all times. Sam takes a deep breath, bracing himself. This is the kind of thing Tophet will remember forever, standing here looking at him when he tells her. He can't do much for the hurricane in his heart, but he can at least try to look like the person he wants to be in her mind.

"I'm sorry you had to listen to that."

"Most of it wasn't news to me."

That echoes in his head, "most." Truth is, he becomes aware, she thinks she heard wrong.

"...Do you need- do you want me to say it?" he asks.

She both nods and sends a mental yes.

There is a very fateful cliche he could repeat to her, but that isn't right. Maybe it isn't even quite true. What is true?
"Tophet, what I am to you is your decision. But you..." Sam wishes he could give her a hug and whisper it in her ear, not have to fear her initial reaction. Instead he looks her in the eye. "You are my daughter."
Holding his breath, Sam waits for Tophet to say or do something.

At first, she seems to be reconciling the new information with everything she's learned about Sam and about the vague character known as her dad. It should fit, he thinks. The cloudy timelines should match up and any holes should fill in.

As perturbed as she is, Tophet's expression eventually smooths out and she nods a little to herself.

"...That explains a lot," she remarks.

It's so quiet.

They stand looking at each other for a few seconds. Sam always thought there would be more to it when he told her—disbelief, or questions, or some highly emotional reaction.

"You know, I've been thinking about this moment since before you were born, and now that it's here, I have no idea what to say," he confesses.

"I don't know what I'm supposed to say, either."

"...I love you," Sam says when it dawns on him. He can say it now and he doesn't have to hide what he feels because she knows everything. "I love you so much."

A smile appears on her face and she looks down at her feet.

"It's nice to hear that from someone who really means it."

It chills Sam to realize she's probably referring to Crowley.

"Then I'm going to tell you something," he says, getting down on one knee before her. How precious and perfect she is to him, Sam thinks as he takes her hands.

In that moment he picks up how much she misses Crowley and his touch. The context is irrelevant; she's grown up to learn that love and affection is expressed through touch.

"You've learned a lot about me, Tophet. Good and bad things I've done, the ways I try to be a good person and the ways I've failed people I care about. You know my birthday, and my favorite book. You know how tall I am. You know that I went to Stanford for three years. Thanks to Dean, you even know the story of how I lost my virginity." He listens to his daughter laugh softly. "I don't know why she had to tell you about that, but point is, you know all of those things. You know all those things about me, but someday you might forget them. And that's okay.

"There's only one thing I need you to remember about me, Tophet. There is one thing that I wish will come to mind when you think of me, one way I ask you to define your father, and that is as a man who loves you unconditionally, and always will."

Her fingers tighten around his hands. She swallows hard, blinking tears away.

"How you feel about me," Sam finishes, "isn't as important to me as you knowing how I feel about you."

"I definitely know now," Tophet replies, clearing her throat.
Sam rises to his feet. He won't pressure her to hug him or to say anything back. What matters has been said and done.

"I'd suggest going out and doing something fun, but I think Dean took the car," he sighs. He's eager to put their conflicts behind them. Once his sister comes back they can apologize again, together. "You wanna watch a movie, make some popcorn?"

"No, um... I came over here in the first place to let you and Dean know that I'm leaving."

His heart nearly stops.

"You're leaving?"

"We agreed I would stay until we'd answered all of our questions, and we have. I'd be imposing on your hospitality if I stayed longer."

The words are so formal and distant, it hurts.

"It's not hospitality. You're our daughter."

"Technically. But you hate my name. You hate that I call a demon Daddy. Dean is jealous of me even though she knows better. She hates that I'm a witch. And you both hate that I love Daddy enough to let him touch me in... those ways. You may both love me, but you can't accept who I am, because that's who I am."

There's nothing to say to that when it's true.

"Is there anything we could do that will get you to stay?" he tries.

"No."

He knew this day would come. He had sworn to himself not to beg or grovel.

"Do you- do you need help packing or anything?"

She shakes her head. After an awkward pause, she turns and walks away.

As Tophet moves out of Sam's sight, he hears her burst into tears.

Standing alone in the corridor, he rests his head in his hands and quietly lets his own emotions take over.

§§§

"Where're you going, sweetheart?" a voice asks as a hand grabs Dean's arm.

She shrugs it off.

"Do I look like a sweetheart?" she replies as she turns to face the owner of both.

The man, discernible features not worth remembering, is a walking definition of "bad news." He's completely unfazed, probably because no one is paying attention to them in this dark corner of a shady dive.

"You look like a girl that's searching for something."
"You're not my type."

"Maybe not, but you sure are mine."

There's an empty seat at the bar next to him. Dean takes it and catches the bartender's eye. She'll buy herself a drink before he can buy her one.

"And what type would that be, pal?"

§§§

Sam waits in the library, afraid that Tophet will try to sneak out without saying goodbye.

Half an hour passes. Then an hour. He ruminates over the past month, wondering if there is anything he or Dean could have done better, or differently. They definitely messed up today, with their reaction to what Crowley does to Tophet, but he can't think of anything else he would change.

He begins to ask himself if they are being unfair. What if Crowley does care? What if Tophet is right to believe what she believes?

What if this is still a better fate than whatever the Life would have had in store for her had Dean kept her? What if he should be grateful for this?

Sam very briefly detects his daughter and snaps to attention.

"Tophet?" he calls out.

She comes into view after a couple seconds. She's ready to leave.

"You were trying to sneak out, weren't you?" he asks.

"I thought it might be easier."

He gets up, hands in his pockets.

"Not for someone who lost their daughter once already."

She nods, rebuked.

"And what the hell was I supposed to tell Dean when she came back and I didn't know where you are or when you left?"

"Are you going to try to stop me?"

"No. I'd like it if you stayed long enough to say goodbye to her, though."

"I'm not going to wait."

"Okay," Sam concedes. He clears his throat. "Just wish we had more time together as father and daughter."

"I feel like an idiot for not seeing it sooner," Tophet tells him. "The more I think about it, the more obvious it is."

"We were being unfair to keep you in the dark the way we did."

"You didn't! You were two seconds away from telling me once, and I never even guessed!"
"You know now. That's what matters."

"...Right," she agrees.

They stand awkwardly for a few seconds before Sam remembers something less substantial but still important that he's wanted to tell her.

"You have beautiful eyes, Tophet."

She huffs at him in frustration, as if he's insulting her intelligence.

"What are you talking about?"

He was ready for her to be incredulous:

"Well, Dean has beautiful eyes. The color is the most beautiful shade of green I know, and I love her long eyelashes. She passed those on to you, and I've loved the color of your eyes from the day we met. You have beautiful eyes the same way your mom does."

His daughter looks down, a shy smile on her face.

"You really believe that."

"Yes."

"...Thank you." Tophet closes the distance between them and wraps her arms around Sam, burying her face in his shirt. "I'm going to miss both of you."

"We'll miss you," he whispers. He shuts his eyes and sends her all the love he can as he holds her tightly.

Is this the first time he's hugged Tophet? He thinks so. This is another thing he's thought about since before she was born.

He just wanted to hold his daughter for a few minutes before giving her up. He just wanted Mia to belong to him and him alone for a little while before better people, human beings, took her and gave her their own name.

She's her own person now, and she believes herself to be Crowley's daughter. She will never be Sam's. She will never be Mia. It seems they can only ever collect sharp, painful fragments of the life that could have been for both of them.

He kisses her forehead. Tophet.

Her emotions come through, like a flash of lightning. Blood calls to blood; she cares about him. She could love him if she let herself. She could love both her parents but she's afraid to.

"Just promise me one thing," he requests when they pull apart. "The next time Crowley asks you to do something with him that you don't really want, say no."

"I'll think about it," she says, averting her eyes.

* |

Six hours have passed since Dean left. Sam starts making calls, cycling through all of the numbers she has before leaving messages. He waits a few hours longer before sending desperate texts,
pleading for her to just tell him that she's okay.

*@

Twelve hours. Sam is worried sick, but he isn't panicking yet. His sister isn't going to purposely get herself into any situations she can't handle. Probably.

She's not in a good place, which means someone or something might take advantage of her state. There could be a vampire sucking her blood or a creep stalking her in the shadows, a red light she ignored because she's drunk, or a hundred other things that leave her lying somewhere hurt and unable to get help.

§§§

Dean smiles a grim smile in the dark as she hears the men following her. It took five different bars and some unexpected... interaction, but she finally found a few guys drunk and homophobic enough to have a serious problem with a butch "lesbian" around. Serious enough that after she used the men's bathroom and left the bar, they followed.

There's three of them, she sees when she glances back quickly. Just enough for a good fight. She'll let them knock her around a little first, pretend she doesn't know how to defend herself, then take them out when they let their guard down.

She lets them almost catch up to her, then whirls around.

"Hey, fellas. Got a problem?"

§§§

At last, about fifteen hours after Tophet left, the door opens and Dean steps into the bunker.

"Dean?" Sam runs up the wrought-iron steps three at a time. "Where the hell have you been?!"

She's moving slowly, almost limping, covered with bruises and small cuts. Her knuckles are bloody, her clothes are torn, and there's dirt on the back of her jacket. A black eye and split lip complete the picture.

"What happened?"

"Good old-fashioned barfight."

"Barfight? Where?"

"Small town a few hours away, where men are men, women are women, and everyone prays the gay away." Picking up some speed once she reaches the bottom of the stairs, Dean heads for the liquor cabinet in the library. Sam follows and watches her pour herself a drink with shaking hands.

"What are you talking about?"

She gestures to herself.

"Do I look like a heterosexual?"

"...Not really."

"Exactly. That's why you get boners when I put on lipstick."

"
"I don't get-" Sam focuses on the matter at hand. "Are you saying you got beat up by homophobic assholes?"

Dean holds up one finger.

"I beat them up, too," she corrects before downing the whiskey.

Sam sighs.

"Let's just get you patched up," he says, touching her shoulder. She flinches.

"I don't need you to kiss me better," she says, shrugging him off, "Just need a fucking shower."

Sam relents on that point, but follows her to the shower room.

He almost asks why, but he already knows that Dean can be self-destructive when she's upset. She went out and found people who would hurt her the way she feels she deserves after what she and Sam learned and what he said to her.

"How's Tophet?" Dean wonders.

"...She's gone."

"What?"

"She left. Not too long after you did."

His sister says nothing as they reach the shower room. Sam holds the door open for her and then follows her in.

She turns on the water and starts removing her clothes stiffly.

Sam feels cold and sick as he's hit with the memory of watching her do the opposite in a kitchen almost six years ago, the smell of burnt ivory in the air. The same desolation, the same despair is in Dean again.

"Did you get a chance to tell her?" she asks, startling him slightly.

"Didn't have to. She, uh- she overheard us."

"Oh... How'd she take it?"

"Pretty well. She believed me when I said I love her. That's all that I cared about."

"She knows we both do, right?"

"Yeah, she knows." Sam watches Dean step out of her panties, and as she drops them on the floor he notices fresh bloodstains.

He sucks in his breath. Then his eyes go to her hips. There are bruises there, familiar ones, except bigger and darker than he's ever left. He's never been so violent with her. He's certainly never made her bleed.

His sister is standing there, ashamed and afraid, waiting for Sam to react.

"Dean. Did someone hurt you?"
"There was a guy who likes being rough—like, really rough—with girls who are into that kind of thing."

"And he just assumed you were one of them?"

"I told him I was."

It doesn't make sense in Sam's head. The words are like a non sequitur. *It does not follow.*

"Wait... You consented?"

"Yes, Sam." Dean steps into the shower and turns her back to him. She raises her voice and enunciates, "I was *unfaithful.*"

Dumbfounded, he stands there, watching her. His sister wouldn't cheat on him. That's not who Dean Winchester is.

The sound of the water muffles it, but his sister has started crying. Crying. That's not who Dean Winchester is, either.

Sam walks out of the room, numb.

He's supposed to feel angry or hurt, right? He's not. He understands. It's the same thing. Dean sought out something she felt she needed from someone who could give it to her, because Sam would no more give her a black eye than fuck her hard enough to make her bleed.

She doesn't deserve to be physically hurt, Sam thinks, but he doesn't know what punishment would be fitting. How can Dean repay Tophet for giving her to a demon?

That's something to ponder over later. He wants to take care of his sister right now. Microwave some towels, bring her favorite t-shirt and sweatpants plus her dead-guy robe to the shower room, and let her know they can put this behind them.

He waits until she turns off the water to come in with warm towels and dry clothes.

Dean is surprised to see him, and even more surprised that he dries her off himself, pressing a kiss to her cheek since her lip looks like it would hurt too much.

*They go to bed quietly, holding each other close.*

Sam keeps thinking of a nameless, faceless someone being allowed to touch his sister. Where did they do it, the back of the guy's car? Dean wouldn't let it happen in the Impala. Did they kiss or touch, or did she just take her clothes off and let him fuck her? Did she come, or did she fake it?

He tries to sleep, but the tears of frustration slip out all the same. Dean let someone abuse her body. Dean *wanted* someone to abuse her.

Their daughter is gone. His sister betrayed him. He can't bring himself to blame either of them for their choices; he can only think to blame himself.
Traveling by a series of taxis and buses gives Tophet way too much time to think about what she learned in the space of half an hour.

She thought it was bad enough when her mother admitted to trying to abort her. Then came the heartbreaking news that she's the product of a rape. And now it turns out her parents are brother and sister.

She's still too disheartened over the second piece of information to really be disgusted or disturbed by the third. Sam is right, anyway—she's the same person she was before. If her mother being raped doesn't affect what she's worth, neither does her father being her uncle.

What makes Tophet want to bang her head against a wall is that her father was right there. The whole. Freaking. Time.

Everything falls into place, and she feels like the dumbest girl in the world for not figuring it out, or figuring out that Sam and Dean were together, when there were clues and hints everywhere. That exchange when she first arrived, about whether her birth father is good-looking, has gone from amusing to confusing to cringeworthy. (So have some of her feelings toward Sam, but apparently incest runs in the family.) It explains everything wrong with her and the psychic connection with Sam. His emotional investment in her makes more sense, too.

One thing Tophet absolutely refuses to think about is their reaction to her relationship with Daddy. She was tired of it, but it wasn't wrong or bad. They might know everything about her now, but they do not know what it's like to be the daughter of the King of Hell.

* 

The last leg of her journey is more luxurious, being chauffeured by two of Daddy's demons back to the mansion she's called home for a year and a half. As familiar and comfortable as it is to hear "Your Highness" and "Princess" again, she finds herself already missing Sam and Dean.

Daddy meets her in the foyer. She drops her purse and throws her arms around him, then kisses him on the cheek.

"I missed you so much, Daddy."

"I missed you, too." After a few more seconds, he steps back to look at her. "...You're wearing flannel."

"It's a little chilly out today," she shrugs. After living with the Winchesters for a month, she understands what Daddy has had against plaid and buffalo check her whole life. She's chosen to ignore it now. It's just clothing, and it's cozy. She worries about high fashion exactly when she feels like it.
"You didn't call me once," he admonishes her.

"I didn't want to make them suspicious."

"Excellent thinking, darling." Daddy kisses the top of her head before they begin to make their way to her room. "Tell me everything."

"I don't know where to start," she sighs. Suddenly all she can think of is the questions her parents had about what she does with Daddy.

"Did you learn anything about your birth father?" he prods.

"They said you already know his name."

"I do."

"You knew Sam was my father?"

"I knew it was Sam, but I'm very curious as to why he impregnated his own sister."

"It's personal to them, Daddy."

"Have I ever failed to keep a secret?"

"I'd rather talk about it another time. But now that I know it's Sam... Everything about me makes a lot more sense."

"Can you read him like other people?"

"Yes, but he can block me, too." Tophet has a strange feeling that she should avoid telling Daddy how far it goes. To change the subject, and also test her father, she stops in front of her door. "I missed you in other ways, too, Daddy."

He smiles his unique affectionate smirk.

"Could we go to your room right now?" she whispers.

Daddy looks surprised, although it's nothing different from what he's done in the past, suggesting some time alone at random.

"Later, darling," he says smoothly.

The days crawl by. The Winchesters quietly mourn the loss of their daughter, but it's easier than before. They can rest knowing she is safe and happy, for the most part. And wherever Tophet is, she knows, without a doubt, that she is loved by them and welcome with them.

Sam watches over his sister carefully, kissing her and holding her at night the way he always has. They don't talk about what she did. It's easy enough to pretend it didn't happen, until the first time Sam suggests sex and Dean reveals she didn't use protection.

Mostly he's furious that she did something unsafe, but he feels some primal jealousy over it, too. As he is Dean's, Dean is his. She let some other person inside her with no barrier, no coitus interruptus, and now she is not his.
It's frustrating. It's not like they can't do anything at all; they're just waiting to exchange bodily fluids until Dean's test results come back. The easiest way to do that is not touch each other in any way beyond what normal siblings might do. Things won't get out of hand (or out of pants).

"Who knew watching TV was such a turn-on?" Dean asks after she and Sam catch each other's longing looks one too many times.

"You know what Netflix and chill actually means, Dean." He throws a piece of popcorn at her, which she tries and fails to catch in her mouth.

He hands her the bag after realizing he has no interest in eating any more of it. She polishes it off and starts to lick her fingers clean one by one. Yeah, that's all he needs to see, Dean putting her tongue all over her hands.

Sam looks at the TV screen. Netflix wants to know if they're still watching.

"...I'm wondering something, Dean," he begins before he knows what he's doing. "I promise I'm not trying to make you feel guilty, or-"

"Spit it out." She wipes her hands on her jeans.

"What was it like being with someone different after six years?"

To his surprise, Dean takes the question seriously, without turning it into a joke or trying to evade it.

"It wasn't like what we do, Sam. I said he could hurt me, so he did. It wasn't about affection or fun or anything like that. I just laid there and took it."

"But he didn't do anything you didn't consent to?" he verifies for at least the tenth time.

"You're just itching for an excuse to shoot him, aren't you?" Dean sighs.

"He made you bleed! I've never made you bleed from sex. Not even-" He stops himself. Don't go there.

"Not even when you weren't you."

Dean is looking at him with a sad expression, and Sam hates to think she's picturing the soulless face that betrayed her trust.

"I'm wondering something, too," she says, hugging her knees to her chest. "Not trying to make you feel guilty either."

Sam nods.

"You remember near the end, he said it was, or would have been, some of the best sex he ever had?"

"If you were cooperating," he specifies, with a voice that's lost all its strength.

"Why did he say that?"

"Because it was true for him."

"Why, Sam? Why did you enjoy it so much?"
"...What did you just say?"

"Why did you enjoy it?" Dean repeats.

For the first time, she's addressing the person that hurt her that day, who's still inside him:

"You didn't feel a goddamn thing, ever, but there you were telling me how good I felt and it was some of the best sex you'd ever had. How could it feel so good that you had to say something? I saw it in your face. You liked it more than that guy at the bar liked what he did to me. You didn't even have feelings!"

Dean's voice is raised, and there are tears in her eyes. All Sam can think is that she's finally, finally working through the things that she should have dealt with six years ago.

"I'll tell you, but you won't like it," he warns her.

"Just lay it on me."

"Okay," he says, more to himself than to Dean. As much as he tries to psych himself up for it the answer comes out slowly: "I enjoyed it... because it was you."

Sam sees goosebumps raising on Dean's neck.

"What does that mean?"

"It means that even then, I knew you were special to me. I knew we belonged to each other, soul or no soul, because being with you was the closest I came to actually feeling something. It means I enjoyed it because it was us."

His sister won't look at him. It's exactly what she was afraid to hear. Maybe even the absolute last thing she wanted to hear.

The clock turns from 5:27 to 5:28.

It occurs to Sam that Dean has finally found a way to be hurt by him that he won't object to. He'll tell her whatever painful truth she asks for. This isn't even a secret from her; it's just something she's chosen not to recognize until now.

"C'mere," he says to her softly when another minute passes.

"For what?"

"So I can kiss you."

"...If I'm too horny to sleep tonight, it's your fault," Dean tells him as she shuffles over.

"Noted." He takes her hands, interlacing their fingers, and kisses her sweetly until she smiles.

§§§

Three days after returning, Tophet says no to being propositioned for the first time, ever.

The surprised, wounded look on Daddy's face jolts her.

"'No'?" he repeats.
"I'm just not in the mood, Daddy."

"I see..." he muses. "You realize that until Sam and Dean are dead, you are still under the obligation you agreed to when you turned eighteen?"

Tophet almost backs down, until she remembers Sam's plea, and Dean's accusation. She stands up straight.

"I didn't agree to have sex when I wasn't in the mood."

"I'll let it go this time, darling, but I expect you to be in the mood next time."

Okay, Tophet thinks as her father walks away. She said no and they didn't do it. Sam and Dean can't say she doesn't stand up for herself, or that Daddy doesn't respect when she says no.

She's also relieved, which she wasn't really expecting.

Daddy still won't tell her the next step of the plan, but he promises it will be soon. For the moment, she is supposed to live life exactly as she did before. Go to parties, practice magic, practice drawing, maybe go on that cruise she was thinking about. Just forget that she spent a month learning about the life she might have had. Act like she doesn't miss them, like she doesn't care about those two people who love her and think about her every day.

§§§

Test results come back. Dean didn't catch any cooties from her bad decision and that's all that matters.

To celebrate, she finds her one sexy negligee and puts on her darkest red lipstick along with a few other touches of makeup. She's sitting on the bed, legs crossed, when Sam comes into the room.

In black lace and satin, she smiles at him seductively and tries not to laugh at the hilarious speed at which his dick rises.

*

After the fun is over, her brother helps her out of her sweaty negligee and tosses it on the floor, but he's not careful about where he holds it. Dean guesses from his facial expression that his hand is wet and sticky now.

"That'll teach you to come on my lingerie," Dean says as she hands him a tissue.

"You suggested it!" Once finished with it, he throws the crumpled tissue at Dean, who passes it on to the floor, along with the lace panties that somehow just never came fully off during their activities. Sam just worked around them.

They snuggle together, deep kisses and happy murmurs as they settle into a comfortable position.

"I love being with you," Sam whispers in her ear, rubbing her arm.

It's innocent and honest, but it hits Dean hard.

She shuts her eyes and presses her face against him before whispering back:

"I'll never do it again, Sam, I swear." If she could go back and tell herself not to, she would. The catharsis wasn't worth the shame of having let someone else touch her, when no one but Sam had
ever been with her since her transformation. She's stained by the affair, like she's less than whoever Sam signed up to be with and doesn't deserve him anymore. Cheating is a reason for couples to break up or divorce. He forgave her before she apologized.

He kisses her on the cheek.

"I swear it, too."

"But you didn't do anything."

"If you swore, I should, too."

"...Now we're really married, aren't we?"

"We can't keep living in sin forever," Sam jokes.

They share smiles.

Dean knows then: they're going to be okay. They can and will move on.

Maybe they'll even move on enough to try again.

§§§

There's a familiar knock on the door to Tophet's bedroom before Daddy enters.

"Hello, Daddy."

"What are you up to, darling?" He approaches her at her desk.

"Just sketching." Tophet sets down her pencil and spreads out the three drawings she's completed. Her father stands behind her and rubs her shoulders as he looks at them—a portrait of the actor who plays Dr. Sexy, a figure in the midst of a ballet pose, and Sam's face.

"It seems Sam had more of an effect on you than Dean did," Daddy remarks.

"I spent more time with him. He's more trusting than Dean, I think."

"Are you attracted to him?"

Tophet frowns. She'll admit to being interested before she knew he was both unavailable and more closely related than she thought, but this is present tense.

"No, why?"

"I like to know what's going on in my daughter's head, that's all." Daddy kisses the top of her head. She smiles and closes her eyes. His hands feel nice.

"Would you be jealous if I was?" she teases.

"I have no need to be jealous. I had you first, I've had you since. I'll have you again."

She had a feeling this was going to happen. Her father's hands have started to stroke her neck and hair in a way that tells her he has certain intentions.

"I was going to tell you to come to my room," he continues, "But if you're not opposed..."
Actually, Tophet is opposed, but she would rather not say no. It's not that she's afraid of Daddy, she's just afraid of disappointing him. She's proven that she can say no.

"Okay, Daddy." She waits for him to step back before getting up from the desk. "Should I put something else on?"

"No, darling, just take off your clothes and get on the bed."

She obeys, a thrill in her body but indifference in her head. She loves making Daddy happy and she enjoys sex. She just doesn't really want to have sex with him.

She wishes she could forget everything the Winchesters told her that's started to fill her with doubt every time Daddy touches her. Their definition of sex and love does not have to be hers and Daddy's.

She closes her eyes and lies there as he caresses and fondles her.

"I'd like you to be on top tonight, darling," he tells her. "Show me how much you love me."

She opens her eyes.

"What if I'd rather do something else?" she asks.

"Such as?"

"I'd rather... use my mouth on you."

"Beg, Tophet, and maybe I'll let you."

She blushes and clears her throat.

"Please, Daddy. Let me suck you."

"Be more precise."

"Let me suck your cock," she whispers.

That makes him smile. He closes his eyes.

"Beg a little more, darling," he tells her.

Tophet almost gives up. She doesn't want to keep begging. It's embarrassing and she doesn't want to give him a blowjob that much, but she'd rather do that than have full-out sex.

("What happens when you ask for something, Tophet?"

"I want to suck your cock, Daddy, please. I want to put my mouth on you and make you happy, I want to taste the pleasure I give you..."

She's rewarded with a grin. Daddy likes to hear begging and groveling, to feel power.

"You're beautiful when you beg, darling," he tells her. "Keep going."

So this is what happens when she asks for something. Tophet isn't sure how she feels about it. He isn't saying no, but it's not the immediate yes she's always given him.

Her father lightly strokes himself to the sound of her voice as she continues:
"Daddy, please..."

Sam wakes up to his phone vibrating. He picks it up, blinking at the screen until his eyes adjust.

His heart leaps. It's Tophet. He scrambles to answer.

"Tophet?"

Next to him, Dean props herself up on her elbows.

"Sam?"

"Hey." He shuts his eyes, grateful beyond words to hear his daughter's voice. "Dean's here, I'll put you on speakerphone. ...Are you okay?"

"For now, yes, but I just left home. I, uh..." Sam and Dean hold their breaths, staring at the phone. Tophet finishes, "I wasn't comfortable there anymore."

"Did something happen?"

"No, not exactly. Um, is it okay if I come back? For a little while?"

"Yes," Sam and Dean reply in unison.

"Can you come get me? I'm a bit north of Pittsburgh. I know it's far, but I'm worried they'll find me if I move."

"They? Demons?" Sam asks.

"Yeah. I didn't leave under the best circumstances."

"Okay, just text me an address and we'll be there as soon as we can."

"Please hurry."

"We will. We'll see you soon. ...I love you."

"I know. Thank you, Sam."

She hangs up. Sam looks at his sister for guidance. She's already gotten out of bed.

"It's got to be a trap," Dean says, pulling on a sports bra.

"You're still getting ready to leave."

"We're not taking that snowball's chance that it isn't, are we?"

*

Just over seventeen anxious hours later, Sam and Dean arrive at an old apartment building in McCandless, Pennsylvania. Tophet said she was holed up in Apartment 3A. Sam takes the demon-killing knife; Dean has an angel blade.

"Do you have any Spidey senses to tell us if she's actually around?" Dean asks as they approach the door to the complex.
"I won't know until we're closer."

About thirty feet down the hall from the door to 3A, Sam pauses and holds up his fist. Dean stops behind him.

"She's here," he whispers to Dean.

"Let's go, then."

"Hang on." He closes his eyes. He doesn't have to tell his daughter how much he loves and misses her. He doesn't have to tell her that he and Dean are worried that this is a trap.

Before he can think of what to say, Sam gets an image of a finger beckoning for them to come. Promise them first, he requests.

A hand on a Bible, and a query—swear what?

That this isn't a trap.

Bait underneath a metal cage balanced on a stick, paired with a "no" and then another query.

Yes, Sam expresses. He is asking her to give her word that this is not a trap.

He waits one... two... three... four... five seconds. There's no response even though she's still there.

Is it a trap, he asks his daughter.

It is.

Sam turns back to his sister and shakes his head slightly. They're going home without their daughter.

Tophet is sorry, or so she says. Sam receives the statement but he can't tell whether it's true.

He's sorry, too.

Sam and Dean move quickly. Tophet could still come out and incapacitate them with a spell if she wanted to.

As they enter the stairwell to leave the building, black-eyed demons greet them from both above and below. Behind them, in the corridor they were just in, two more demons block their escape route.

The Winchesters fight; it's what they do. Four of the six demons fall before the fifth pushes Dean down the stairs to the next landing.

Sam hears the angel blade fall to the floor as he finishes off the sixth demon. He looks down the steps to an ultimatum: surrender, or Dean gets her throat ripped out.

"Put down the knife, Sam," Tophet commands from behind just as the situation sinks in.

He places the demon-killing knife on the floor and puts his hands up. He and his sister lock eyes, afraid and uncertain.

"You almost got away," his daughter says, as if complimenting them. "That was good, being cautious and using the strength of my word against me."

"We love you, Tophet," he says, turning his head to see her, "but we also know who you love."
During the pause before his daughter answers, Sam senses a yearning in her to hear that again, that she is loved. At least she looks alright, if grave. She's unhurt and it doesn't appear she's doing this under duress. Behind her are four more demons; they must have been ready to ambush Sam and Dean in the apartment.

"Take a couple steps back, Sam."

"Why?"

"Trust me, in a couple seconds you'll wish you weren't so close to the stairs."

He obeys, nearly tripping over the dead meatsuit behind him.

"Somnia," Tophet utters, and everything goes dark as he sinks to the floor.
As Dean's eyes flutter open and her mind begins to work again, her first thoughts are for her brother and her daughter. Then she wonders why her hands are numb.

About ten feet away, Sam is facing her, wrists suspended above his head by chains attached to a column. She must be similarly restrained; that's why her hands are asleep.

"Hey," Sam greets, relieved.

"Hey. You okay?" Dean asks, looking around. They're in a large room made of rough-hewn stone bricks, large doors at one end and an imposing chair at the other.

"Had worse. You?"

"About the same. ...Is this a fucking throne room?"

"Crowley would have one." Sam exhales, looking around. His eyes settle on the manacles around her wrists as she tries to shift her arms a little. "You were right about her. The whole time."

"Yeah, well, I didn't wanna be." Dean stares at her feet. She has never felt less like gloating in her life.

"She knows how much we love her. And she does care about us. I sensed it, Dean."

"I guess we didn't realize how much she loves her 'Daddy,'" Dean snarks. She wasn't expecting the hurt look that appears on her brother's face.

"What happened after she cast that spell on me?" he asks next.

"We had a little chat, then she knocked me out, same as you." The five demons present for the conversation have some real juicy gossip to spread around, Dean gripes in her head. With her luck Sam will probably hear about it and then-

A smaller door next to the throne opens. In walk Crowley and Tophet, the demon escorting the teen with a hand on her lower back.

The King of Hell looks about the same as he did five years ago, but Tophet has changed.

She's not the confident young woman Dean got to know. She used to be proud; she used to hide a cocky attitude under good manners. Now, even though her head is held high, she's a subordinate. Her pride is the pride of a dog with her master, or a soldier with her captain.

It reminds Dean of herself and her dad.

"Sam and Dean..." Crowley looks them over. "It's been ages."
"Is this the part where you do your victory monologue before you kill us?" Dean greets.

"I'll wait until you're dead to celebrate."

"Don't you want to gloat, to tell us about your plan and how awesome it worked out?"

"What is there to tell? I presented only the truth to Tophet. I assume you did the same. What happened next was her decision, and here we are."

"But why'd you make her grow up in Hell?" Sam asks. "What was the point?"

"I suspected she would be of more use to me after she reached the age of majority," he answers. "Now do shut up. You're only still alive because Tophet asked me to let her talk to you, and I couldn't say no to my daughter."

"She's not your daughter and she never was," Sam growls. "She's mine."

As Tophet takes a step forward, Crowley's hand falls to her hip in a caress before withdrawing—a signal the Winchesters can't miss.

"I've never been yours," she informs him with a hard expression. "All I am is the baby that you never wanted, whose entire future was sacrificed to save a life that was already on borrowed time. Two months ago you meant nothing to me. Did you expect that to change in just a few weeks?"

The hurt on her brother's face makes Dean flinch. Tophet hit almost every weak point he has.

"What about in the library before you left?" he tries. "I felt, in my mind- And you said-"

"I lied."

"No, no." He shakes his head in denial, and Dean's heart breaks a little to see her brother trying to hold himself together. Then he looks Tophet in the eye. "We were touching. I would have known. You're lying right now."

She keeps her head high even as she fumbles for a response. Maybe Sam is right.

"Why are you doing this?" he presses. "Why did you betray us?"

"What you call betrayal is what I call being loyal to my father."

"Even after you knew how much we love you?"

A bitter smile forms on Tophet's face.

"No. Because of how much you love me."

The Winchesters wait for her to elaborate.

"I thought I had a privileged life. I thought I had a great childhood. In most ways I did. But then you both showed me what I'd missed out on my whole life: unconditional love. You both got to know me and my weaknesses and failures and you still loved me. Even the things you didn't like, things you didn't want to accept, you loved just because they were a part of me."

Dean still doesn't comprehend why she and Sam are being punished for loving their daughter. Neither does he.
"But I noticed a pattern, as I spent more time with you and you learned more about my life," Tophet continues. "You weren't surprised by the bad things, or things you didn't like. You were surprised by the good things. You expected worse. Which means you, Dean, handed me over to someone who you honestly thought might hurt or abuse me. And most of all, you cheated me out of a family that really loved me."

So there it is, the catch-22. As long as she was happy (brainwashed) with Crowley, she didn't mind. Now that she realizes how shitty a parent he is, she realizes how evil Dean was to make that choice.

"You've got every right to be mad," Dean says. "Nobody's saying I don't deserve whatever you want to do to me. But you can't take this out on Sam. He didn't do this. He tried harder than you can imagine to get you back. He is innocent."

"You threw away the life I deserved to save Sam's. I can never have the childhood I should have had, but I can get revenge." Tophet takes out a hex bag and bounces it in her hand a couple times. Then she approaches Sam. "This is what you deserve, Dean."

"No. Don't you dare."

Standing in front of Sam, toe to toe, the girl's face is hidden, but she's not tall enough to block his. Looking down at her, he pleads softly, over and over. It's not for himself, but for Dean. Something about watching him die is punishment enough.

The girl just shakes her head, then slips the hex bag into one of the inner pockets of his jacket.

"Don't," Dean says in the most authoritative voice she can summon. She's ignored.

One hand on Sam's chest, the other resting on the back of his neck, Tophet leans in closer.

"I'm sorry about what's about to happen to you," she tells him.

Dean feels an odd mix of disgust, horror, and jealousy when her daughter tilts her head up and kisses Sam soundly on the lips. His eyes widen in shock but he's unable to pull away.

It gets creepier the longer the kiss lasts, especially when now both Tophet's hands are on him, and- wait.

What the fuck is Sam doing?! Why is he kissing her back? What's going on? He's closed his eyes, he's leaning into it, and- Dean doesn't know what the hell is happening anymore. This is a nightmare, watching her brother do this with Tophet, right in front of her.

Sam is... cheating on her. Not even two weeks after swearing he never would.

With a glance at Crowley, Dean confirms that this was not scripted. Human and demon share a few solid seconds of uncomfortable surprise, although Crowley seems more intrigued.

Does that mean Sam was hiding something? Is this revenge for what she did? Did he have a reason to give his own vow? Was Dean right to have ridiculous paranoid thoughts about her daughter seducing Sam? What kind of touching happened between the two of them in the library?

This can't be happening. Dean had convinced herself it was all in her head; she was putting meaning into Tophet's actions that wasn't there. Just because her daughter is younger and prettier and smarter and less annoying than Dean wasn't a reason to think Sam would have any interest in her. She knew she was stupid to be jealous. Or so she thought.
No, Dean. Even if Tophet was attracted to Sam, which would be understandable, he does not have a thing for his own daughter. There's a non-creepy explanation for the creepiest thing Dean's ever seen Tophet do with Sam. It's probably just some code or psychic thing. Or maybe he was roofied or hexed. Whenever they get out of this, Sam will explain and Dean will listen to whatever he says, true or not.

Oh god, it's an open-mouthed kiss now. She's literally going to throw up if this doesn't end soon.

Fucking finally, Tophet breaks the kiss, with Sam chasing her slightly when she pulls away. There's bile rising in Dean's throat. That's how he looks when he kisses her. At least when she did what she did, it was about getting something physical he wouldn't give her. But this is real betrayal. He just gave something that belongs to her to someone else.

When her brother's eyes open, they're shining with tears.

"Please," he says, so softly Dean only sees the movement of his lips. "Please, Tophet."

They stare at each other, like they're having a secret psychic conversation.

"You've got more daddy issues than a whorehouse," Dean comments loudly before anything else can happen.

Her brother realizes then that she saw what he did. His face turns red as he looks away, ashamed.

The girl turns her head, calmness contrasting with Sam's clear desire to either shrink or disappear.

"Says his sister who sleeps with him," comes Tophet's retort.

"Listen to me, kid," Dean says. "Don't do this. Revenge isn't worth it."

"Daddy wants you both dead."

"And you always do what your daddy tells you?"

"Yes."

"You've spent all your life trying to make him happy, make him proud, huh? But you'll never feel it the way you want to. You told us you can't sense demons. No matter how hard you try, you'll never feel good enough for your daddy. Maybe in a few years you'll realize how much goddamn time you wasted trying to please him, just making yourself miserable."

She can't help but notice Sam's surprise then, as if he hadn't recognized the familiarity of Tophet's mistakes, or just didn't expect Dean to see it.

"Don't project your issues on me, Dean," her daughter scoffs.

"I'm just trying to stop you from doing something you'll regret. Is this what you want, or what he wants?"

"Both."

"I don't think so. It's what he wants, and you're pretending that revenge is worth murdering an innocent man. You know it isn't. You're better than this."

"Apparently not."
"You don't want to do this!"

"I think I do," Tophet replies, returning to Crowley's side. She snaps her fingers and to Dean's horror, Sam begins to choke.

"Sam?"

He can't answer. He's coughing up blood, leaving red flecks on the floor in front of him.

"You stop this right now!" Dean shouts at Tophet, pulling at her chains. "End the spell, or-"

"Or what? You're next."

Sam is only getting worse, but he forces out one word, directed at their daughter:

"No."

Then he screams in agony and the coughing becomes retching and vomiting.

"End the fucking spell!"

"It'll be over soon anyway."

"No! Sam!" The cuffs break Dean's skin as she struggles against them. She can't do anything to stop this or even hide from it. Shutting her eyes won't prevent her from hearing her brother dying, a part of herself dying. "Sammy!"

He's seizing, shaking, choking, making strangled cries that no human should ever make. He tries to raise his head, but Dean only catches a glimpse of his eyes—and the goodbye he wants to say—before the agony overwhelms him.

"Stop it!" Dean begs. "Please, Tophet!"

Then the worst happens. It does stop. Sam's body convulses one last time and he goes limp. His feet fall out from under him; he drops a few inches, held up only by the cuffs around his wrists.

"Sam?"

Nothing.

He can't be dead. No one can just murder her little brother in front of her. He has to be alive.

"Sammy," Dean tries again, softer as if it will coax him into waking up or at least drawing breath.

But there's nothing. His head is hanging, hair concealing his face. His hands are lifeless. The only movement is a slow drip of blood from his face to his chest.

"No!"

It's like each limb has been torn from her and the air stolen from her lungs.

Dean tugs at her chains again, harder than ever until blood trickles from her wrists. She pulls until the pain makes her howl, and then she puts even more force into it. To the bone, she will fight her bonds until all that's left of her wrists is bone, and maybe by then she'll have filled the room with enough echoing screams that Tophet will understand the crime she's committed.
"SAM!"
Pyre, Part One

The blood spatters on the floor have dried. Minutes have passed, and Dean has fallen silent.

They just let her scream and curse at them. Crowley could kill her at any time but instead he's making her wait, making her ache because her world has imploded.

Her heart is dead. The only thing that matters is gone.

Then Crowley makes a brief gesture. The manacles suspending Sam's body open and it falls to the floor with a thud. Two demons step forward; each takes an arm.

"Bring him to the Chamber."

Tophet looks alarmed at Crowley's order, and even the two hench-demons glance at each other uncomfortably.

"What is that? What's the Chamber?" Dean demands, though she can't speak louder than a whisper. She's lost her voice. "What happens there?"

"You really don't want to know," Tophet answers, watching as Sam is dragged out of the room. Dean's emotions have gotten through to her daughter; there are tears rolling down her cheeks. So she presses, weak voice and all:

"I hope you feel good about this, Tophet. I hope this brings you some fucking peace. Maybe it'll help you sleep better at night, knowing you killed the man who loved you more than anyone else ever has or ever will."

The girl swallows hard, unable to hide her guilt.

"It's one thing, tricking us into getting captured. I get it. You care more about your 'Daddy' than us and I can't blame you. But Sam? He's never hurt you. Hell, he'd come back right now just to give his life for you. He loves you, and you just fucking murdered him."

"He does, but not as much as he loves you," Tophet points out, sniffing. "If it was me or you, he'd choose you."

"You don't know that."

It seems like the teenager is going to argue, but instead she turns away, ashamed.

Dean has an odd, certain knowledge that she's about to speak her last words.

"I fucked up your life, Tophet. I know I did. But Sam? The only thing he was guilty of was wanting to be your dad."

With that, she shuts her mouth. She looks at Crowley, challenging him to go ahead.

There's a satisfied smile on his face as he flicks his wrist, snapping her neck.

§§§

With a gasp, Sam opens his eyes. Is he dead? It doesn't seem like it.
The last thing he remembers is his sister begging for his life.

He waits a few seconds before moving, assessing himself. His insides are raw like they've been sandpapered, his mouth tastes like blood, and his body, lying supine, is stiff. The light above him is too bright to make out the ceiling. The floor seems like—wait, he's not on the floor, he's lying on some kind of low surface about the size of a large bed. It's covered in leather.

Sam forces himself up with a groan—he notices then the bruising on his wrists—and looks around the room, blinking. Same dusty stone bricks, but this feels lower, subterranean, like he's in a basement. In the harsh light he notices... implements lining the walls.

His breath catches. For the first time in over five years, he squeezes his left hand, instinctively digging his thumb into his flame-scarred palm until it hurts. Nothing changes. Those things, devices of pain that he has no name for but knows precisely how each is used, are real.

But real doesn't mean the Cage. He's almost positive that he's alive. If he's alive, Sam reminds himself, he is not completely helpless.

He looks behind him and sees a few more items that are only slightly less concerning because they're sex toys. This isn't necessarily a torture room. It's the room of a person who prefers extreme amounts of pain with their pleasure. The Marquis de Sade would be impressed.

So far, Sam reflects, the only thing he hasn't been disturbed to find is the door.

After some more thinking, he concludes that he was brought into this room to be defiled. They must have really thought he was dead; he would have been restrained otherwise.

Hex bags don't just stop short of killing the victim and trick demons into thinking it worked, though. Magical items do exactly as they're made, or mangled, to do.

There was only one possible interpretation of what Sam sensed when Tophet's lips first met his, one exact translation:

_I'm saving you._

It seems that meant his life. He takes the little bag out of his jacket and opens it up. He finds, among more usual contents of a hex bag, a dried lizard's tail and what smells like cannabis.

Then he checks his belt. When Tophet kissed him, she covertly returned the demon killing knife to its sheath. He hadn't had time to wonder why. (Also, he's got to explain to Dean why he church-tongued their daughter. His cheeks burn, remembering that look of betrayal.)

He's still light-headed and dizzy; that hex bag was the real deal up until he lost consciousness. At the time, when he was vomiting blood, his throat trying to scream and gag simultaneously, he had zero doubt that he was about to die. Nothing Tophet had said could convince him otherwise.

So, maybe she doesn't hate them as much as she made it sound like. Tophet somehow fooled Crowley and the other demons into thinking he was dead. She probably couldn't tell Dean, though. His sister might be waking up somewhere, like him, thinking Sam is gone.

But where?

And why do the words keep reverberating in his head: _"I'm saving you"_? What's bothering him about that?
Sam gets to his feet and takes out the knife. He won't wait around for Crowley to show up and try to fuck him. He has to find Dean as soon as possible. And, he hopes, forget the sound of her breaking down and pleading. Dean is the pillar of strength he clings to and to hear her reduced to that state made his presumed death all the worse.

He opens the door and peers down the corridor. Nothing to the left, but to the right there's what he assumes is a demon walking in the opposite direction.

Sam closes the door quietly and sneaks up behind it. In a smooth motion he grabs it and puts the knife to its throat. He drags it into an alcove.

"Where's my sister?" he demands.

"Winchester." It's the least smug enunciation Sam has ever heard from a demon. It's a word of horror.


"She's dead."

Sam adjusts his grip on the blade, under the guise of pressing the tip into the demon's flesh.

"So was I. Tell me where she is."

"There's a valley half a mile north where we throw corpses." Gaining confidence, it adds, "If you hurry, you might find her before the dogs do."

*

There's a visible trail where they dragged Dean's body through the woods; Sam follows it with no concern for stealth.

The stench of rotting meat hits him first, so strong Sam stops in his tracks, gagging. All the more reason to press on and get his sister out of this place, he thinks, and he forces his feet to move forward again.

He sees Dean the moment he looks down into the hollow, at the base of the pile, limbs askew. He skids down the steep slope, struggling not to lose his balance on the slippery, damp leaves.

"Dean!"

In his hurry, he slips and falls down the last bit of the hill, and shamelessly scrambles on his hands and knees the last two yards to Dean's body. The smell of corpses, a couple fresh and crawling with flies, others in various states of decay, is almost overwhelming.

"Dean?"

Her skin is barely tepid. He shakes her, feels for a pulse, searches frantically for any sign of life.

All he finds are torn, bloody wrists and a broken neck.

"What?" he gasps, not knowing how else to react.

His sister is supposed to be alive, but a broken neck isn't an injury that you can pretend killed someone; it's a fatal injury, plain and simple. Especially when you get unceremoniously flung onto a pile of cadavers afterwards.
"No..." This is wrong. This can't be what happened. This has to be a nightmare, all of it. "No."

The horror of the situation and disgust from the setting churns his insides until he has to turn his head and vomit.

When his stomach is empty, Sam squeezes his eyes shut and searches for strength to get up. He doesn't know how he's going to find it.

But he does, somehow. He rises to his feet and picks up Dean.

He's done this before. He can do it again.

Slowly, carefully, he brings her out of the valley of forgotten dead. He keeps going until the air is fresh and there's a space for him to sink down in the grass.

How can he be alive and Dean be dead? Tophet said...

(I'm saving you.)

Him, Sam. Not them.

It was a singular you. The benefit of telepathy is its conveyance of things that not all spoken languages have. Except Sam failed to pick up on the nuance. Or his subconscious was in denial.

Tophet saved him. Only him. She let Dean die.

His fists clench. His daughter dared to put his life before his sister's. Dared to save him but not her own mother.

He has to find Tophet and make her fix this.

But right now all he can do is hug Dean, carefully letting her head rest on his shoulder as he lets out his devastation with quiet tears.

All he can think about is her last minutes alive.

Maybe physically it was quick and didn't hurt too much, but Dean watched him suffer, and more likely than not she died not knowing he was being "saved." She was chained up, surrounded by a dead brother, a daughter who hates her, and the King of Hell.

Death would have been a mercy for her, but now she's probably in Heaven looking for Sam and she can't find him because he's still alive. She's going to be confused and worried about him. Who's going to tell her where he is?

That thought wrings loud sobs out of his heart. Dean hates being alone.

Sam doesn't know anything about whatever plan Tophet had other than that he didn't agree to it. She must have known he wouldn't be okay with it. Maybe this is another thing she learned from Crowley—easier to beg forgiveness than ask permission.

No, he realizes. More likely she got it from Dean.

Even if she was planning from the beginning to save them both, even if they do get Dean back, Tophet is going to have to do a lot of begging after putting them through this.

Kissing Dean's hair (he doesn't think about whether that side of her head was touching dead bodies
until it's too late), Sam focuses on calming down, thinking logically about where he is and what-

He hears something. He cocks his head in the direction of Crowley’s abode, which turned out to be an abandoned insane asylum. Someone might be coming.

No, he didn't hear anything. It wasn't a sound; he just was so wrapped up in his own emotions that he didn't notice the light psychic sensation of his daughter's mind until now.

Now there's an audible rustling of leaves as Tophet approaches. Out of pure spite, he blocks her from reading his emotions. She moves faster.

She's coming from behind, so he waits until she's a yard or two away before turning his head.

"Is this what you call saving me?" he greets, his voice steadier than he expected. "Faking my death and letting my sister die?"

The guilty look on Tophet's face is answer enough.
Pyre, Part Two

Sam shakes his head as Tophet comes closer.

He uses the same words in the same calm tone he used with Dean years ago:

"Go to Hell."

"I didn't-"

"Don't try to talk to me."

"Dean-"

"Don't," Sam growls.

Tophet sits on the ground facing him.

"Sam, I'm-"

"No.

You have nothing to say to me. You betrayed us, now she's dead. I don't care who broke her neck, you killed your mother. You killed my sister!"

There's a kind of rage one can only harbor towards family. Fury on a deeper level than with anyone else, that cannot be expressed in the usual ways. Anger stemming from pain that only a loved one can inflict.

Sam and Dean can get away with taking care of their emotions physically, one way or another, but Sam hasn't felt anger like this towards anyone other than his sister in a decade.

The moment for retribution is literally at hand, yet Sam is unable to harm Tophet. He is boiling in rage but he can't make himself lay a finger on her.

"If you expected thanks for sparing my life, you were wrong. Whatever the hell you were expecting to happen, you were wrong."

Tophet starts to cry.

"Look, I don't blame you for being angry at Dean. I- I wanted to kill her when she told me what she did," he confesses. "But she's your mom. You'll meet other people who love you, Tophet, but you will never find another person who carried you inside her, who loved you when she was scared and alone, who loved you even when I didn't, who set aside her pride and everything she believes herself to be to ask and to accept help when her love wasn't enough. She's never wanted anything but good things for you, and God knows she's failed you, we both have, but she did her best. She was no more deserving of death than I am."

There's guilt in his daughter's eyes, and Sam continues:

"When you said you were saving me, I thought maybe you were saving me from this, from having to see my sister dead for her mistake." He gestures to Dean: "This is not saving me, Tophet!"

Before he can stop himself, he psychically stabs at his daughter with his anger and grief.

When she gasps in pain as if she's been struck, Sam knows he's gone too far. Just as too bright a light
can blind, too loud a sound can deafen, and too strong a blow can bruise, his weaponized emotions have overwhelmed her.

There is no comfort or satisfaction in Tophet crying from his mental assault. He didn't have to do that for her to know how he feels; she has learned nothing from this except that Sam will resort to psychological violence with her.

How could he? How could he do practically the same thing that made his blood boil every time he saw it happen to Dean?

"I'm sorry. That was wrong of me," he apologizes. He, the worst human being to ever live, then shuts his mouth.

All Tophet does at first is look at the ground and sniffle. She feels horrible for her mistake, that much Sam senses from her without even trying.

"I deserved it," she whispers.

The words, yes, Sam agrees in his head, but not psychic corporal punishment. Why? he asks with his mind.

"Dean said that the only thing you were guilty of was wanting to be my father. She's right. I told you once that I don't hurt people who did nothing wrong."

"Didn't it occur to you that murdering my sister would hurt me just as much as it hurt her watching me die?" Sam is bitter but he holds back from saying any more. This has nothing to do with his supposed innocence. She just wanted to make herself feel better about killing her mother by sparing his life. Because his daughter has a human conscience that Crowley could never take from her.

Though the question was rhetorical, Sam expects a response of some kind. He just doesn't expect the response Tophet gives him:

"She's not dead, Sam."

Sam must have heard wrong.

"What?"

"She's not dead."

He blinks, confused and incredulous, but daring to hope it's true. He looks down at Dean's body.

"But how? Her neck is broken."

"After you showed me what you showed me, and she thought you were dead, I realized I was making a mistake," she says like she made an error in arithmetic, if a particularly dreadful one. "So, right after Daddy broke her neck, before she actually died, I cast spells that kind of... pause her and hide her life from demons."

"So she's in some kind of stasis?"

Tophet gives the nod of a person who isn't completely sure what they're agreeing to but simply continues:

"If you can heal the injury before the spell ends, she'll live."
"How long do I have?"

"Almost three hours."

That's barely enough time to find a spell to use, let alone procure ingredients, Sam thinks. He doesn't even know where they are.

"Wait. You used a healing spell on her before, something like 're-integrate body.' The one you said was a clumsy spell. Can't you do that again?"

"I can heal her, and I will, but first I need your help with something."

He frowns.

"What do you need?"

"The room you woke up in, that's the Chamber. It's Daddy's, uh, grown-up playroom. I didn't realize he had plans for your body. I thought you and Dean would get thrown out here, you could just leave, and Daddy would think you were dead as long as you laid low," she explains. "Any time now he's going to go into the Chamber and see that you're gone, if it's not too late already."

Of course Crowley has a room devoted to extreme BDSM called the Chamber, Sam thinks.

"You have to be in there, Sam," Tophet continues. "I don't have the power to create an illusion he'll believe, and he can't find out that you're alive, because he'll know it was me."

Sam is completely done being civil about the King of Hell.

"Neither of us are going back into that place. Heal Dean now, then we're all getting the fuck out of here. He'll hurt you once he finds out you tricked him, and I'm not going to let that happen."

"Daddy would never hurt me," she dismisses, "but he'll be upset, and I don't want to make him angry, or think that I don't love him. I'm not leaving him, so if you want me to heal Dean, do what I tell you. Otherwise you're on your own, hundreds of miles away from anyone who will help you, or even the pathetic collection you have in the Impala."

The ultimatum feels a little like being slapped in the face. Tophet hasn't saved Dean's life; she's skillfully taken it hostage and she'll hold it above Sam's head as long as she needs to. Her guilt only extends so far, it seems.

"You are your father's daughter," Sam scoffs.

"Are you trying to insult me?"

"Are you asking me to lie there and let a demon rape my body so that you can stay on his good side?"

"No. I'm asking you to let me prove that Daddy cares about me, that I am safe with him. I'm going to ask him not to touch you, and he won't do it."

"And if he doesn't listen?"

"He will."

"What if he doesn't?"
"I won't let him do anything to you, Sam," she insists.

"Give me your word that you'll allow me to defend myself if you're wrong."

"You mean kill him with your knife, don't you?"

"If necessary."

"Fine. I give my word," she says with a sigh. "But it won't happen. You'll see."

Sam can only hope, for his daughter's sake, that her faith is right, and his fears are wrong.
Against all reason, logic, and instinct, Sam finds himself back in that creepy, harshly-lit room filled with things that make his skin crawl.

It's okay, he tells himself. It won't actually happen, and even if it does it can't be as bad as in Hell. Besides, it's for Dean. He can and will endure anything if it means he'll see her again.

"Get on the divan," Tophet urges in a low voice. "Hurry."

"What exactly is the plan here?" he asks as he lies down, as close as possible to the carefully laid-out position he found himself in before.

She brushes some dirt from his jeans onto the floor. There can be no evidence that he was outside since being "killed."

"You play dead, I convince him not to touch you. A couple of demons will come in to drag you out to the pile. I'll heal Dean, wake her up, and guide her out."

Supposedly the simpler the plan, the less likely things are to go wrong, but all Sam can think of is the hundred disastrous ways each step could fail.

"What am I supposed to do when he comes in, hold my breath?"

"No, I'm going to put you in, uh, stasis, like before, but keep you conscious this time. I'll show you right now."

"Okay..."

Tophet murmurs something too low for him to make out. Immediately, Sam loses all sensation in his body. He can't move. He can't breathe. He can see, smell, and hear, as well as sense Tophet's mind, but he can't even close his eyes.

No. He can't do this.

He mentally begs Tophet to let him go, but she only speaks to him softly:

"Sam, it's okay. You're not going to die. You don't need to breathe. I'll let you go as soon as you calm down."

Calm down? How is he supposed to calm down? He's paralyzed and his sister's body is hidden under Tophet's bed and if they don't heal her in the next few hours, she'll die.

Just breathe, he thinks, before remembering that he can't.

He's stuck here, fully conscious, and a devil is going to come in here and rape his body; he will be helpless. Just like-

"Sam, this isn't the Cage," Tophet says, leaning over him to look into his eyes. "I won't let Daddy hurt you."

She squeezes his hand—or so he guesses—and some of her certainty gets across, reassuring him.

This is doable. Even if Tophet is wrong, Sam will be able to defend himself. She gave her word.
"I'm sorry to put you through this, Sam," she says, ending the spell.

Sam sits up, just breathing at first, appreciating more than ever the fact that he can move his fingers and blink at will.

"I'll live," he says. He hopes.

Half an hour passes quietly.

"He's taking longer than I thought..." Tophet muses. "Sam, do you mind if I cast the spell now? It's safer to be ready..."

"It's fine." He resumes position and closes his eyes, since that's how he woke up.

Again the magic words are spoken under her breath, and Sam is completely immobilized. His skin has no feeling; he can't open his eyes; and he can only guess Tophet's location by sound. There's a creak of leather as Tophet sits somewhere to his left.

He attempts to ask Tophet if Crowley takes her into this room.

"What?" she whispers.

Crowley. Tophet. The room we are in.

"Daddy's never brought me in here, is that what you're asking?"

That's a relief.

"He's never rough with me. ...Well, nothing extreme."

Sam would like to get off the topic of sex. He has nothing positive to say or think about Crowley, which means nothing he has to express is something Tophet wants to hear.

It's true; she has the same blind faith in Crowley that Dean had in Dad. It scares the hell out of Sam, knowing how his sister still struggles with that, ten years after the man's death.

"I did what you asked," Tophet tells him.

What is she talking about?

"I said no to Daddy. Once."

That lifts Sam's spirits a little. Just her trying it gives him hope.

What happened? he queries.

"...He didn't touch me, if that's what you're wondering."

Crowley didn't make the despicable choice. Sam is relieved for his daughter but has no less hatred for the demon.

"That's how I know this is going to work," she continues. "He isn't like you and Dean, but he does care about me."

All Sam wants for his daughter is for her to be safe and happy. He's come to accept that she won't be
happy with him and Dean. He has to hope and pray that she'll be safe with Crowley.

Sam wonders, can they expect to see Tophet again after this? Will she ever visit? He asks her by simplifying it to *Tophet, bunker?*

"Am I still welcome there?"

As far as Sam is concerned, yes. He trusts her. Dean might be another story.

"I'd like to."

Sam clearly recalls—or perhaps is reminded of—an exchange they had one day in the library, a few words between them that struck them funny. Tophet laughed until she cried.

That was a good day, the afternoon when he forgot his pain and fear, years of knowing he had no hope of seeing his daughter. He could forget every bad thing that had ever happened to him when Tophet was laughing.

"I think that's the closest I came to figuring it out on my own," she tells him. "I sensed how happy you were. It was the kind of joy I've only felt in parents. I don't know why I didn't question it."

Because it would be insane to wonder if he, her uncle, was her father, Sam thinks dryly.

They've been psychically conversing for a while; Sam's mind is fatigued from all the effort of listening and projecting his thoughts. He blocks her out for a few seconds and simply rests.

Physically he can't be uncomfortable, but he's getting more nervous by the minute.

*Clock?* he thinks at Tophet when his brain feels refreshed. The concrete translates more reliably than the abstract.

"We still have over an hour left before we have to worry about Dean."

*Heal Dean now,* he tells Tophet.

"What?"

*Dean's neck,* he expresses with a sense of urgency.

"If I leave and Daddy comes in here while I'm gone, he's going to lock the door."

*Unlock the door with magic?* Sam suggests.

"The door is warded."

Sam has a question too complex to get across, so he tries to break it down:

*Crowley touches me-* No, not "me." That will get switched around.

*Crowley touches Sam for how long?*

"I don't understand."

*Crowley hurting Sam."

"...Okay, what about it?"
How long? Then Sam thinks better of the query and tries instead to send her an image of a running stopwatch.

"Stopwatch?" she mutters to herself, thinking. Then it gets through. "Oh. How long, is that what you're asking? ...He's known to spend hours in here."

How many hours, Sam dares to wonder. He persists in sending the image of a stopwatch.

"I think a day is the longest he's ever been in the Chamber," Tophet admits. "And he's going to want to make the most of having you here."

Okay, Sam thinks. Keep waiting for now.

* *

As Sam becomes more frustrated, Tophet becomes more impatient and restless. It's an internal struggle between royal composure and Dean-like boredom, which is oddly comforting.

He hears her sigh, then some movement next to him on the leather surface. There's a change in the light beyond his eyelids; he guesses Tophet has turned his head.

Then Sam's eyelids are lifted and he finds himself face to face with his daughter, who is lying on her side next to him.

He can't help but remember what she did earlier. He expects to feel his cheeks blush hot but not even the blood vessels in his face can move.

"I'm sorry I freaked you out," Tophet says upon realizing what he's thinking about.

Sam accepts the apology. She had to give him the knife somehow. It ended up being a factor in Tophet changing her mind and saving Dean's life, anyway. There are no illusions between him and Tophet about the nature of their kiss, so it's fine. Weird, but fine.

"I don't think you noticed, but Dean was really upset," the girl says. "She didn't know what was going on and she was already kind of suspicious."

Suspicious? Really? Sam is incredulous. Dean isn't always totally reasonable, but she wouldn't be dumb enough to be afraid of a nineteen year old girl "stealing" him.

"You know how insecure she is underneath all that... Dean Winchester."

He concedes the point, and Tophet further explains:

"I have a connection with you that she doesn't and she thinks I have more things in common with you. She's afraid that as she gets older you won't be attracted to her anymore. And, well, you were definitely the one kissing me."

Sam is indignant at the implication that he would ever stop wanting Dean more than anyone else, no matter what she looked like. She could be a shriveled hundred year old raisin, or be invisible, or look like the old Dean from before, and if she wanted it from him he would still make love with her all the time. The point is that it's Dean.

"I don't know exactly what you're thinking but maybe Dean needs some reassurance about it. She already knows you'll always be her brother."

What a time to be getting relationship advice from a five year old.
Apparently that gets through to Tophet, because she smiles like she's about to laugh.

Prepared for Tophet to be irritated with his nagging, Sam inquires about the time yet again.

She exhales sharply before peeking at her phone.

"We have twenty, twenty-five more minutes," she says as she gets to her feet and stretches. "Probably more. It should only take a couple minutes to talk to Daddy, so I think we should keep waiting."

Sam disagrees. Go, he orders. Save Dean.

"Are you sure?"

Yes. He'd rather risk whatever Crowley has in store for him than lose his sister.

"...Okay." Tophet kisses him on the cheek before closing his eyes and turning his head to its former position.

Sam hears three footsteps before she stops.

There's a sound at the door.

In his head, Sam sees an old, old memory of his own father, back when he still called him "Daddy."

Crowley is finally here and Sam is very afraid.

Tophet quickly backtracks and sits next to Sam again. She touches him.

It's going to be okay, she's trying to tell him. She doesn't just believe that; she knows.

As Crowley enters the room, the physical contact ends.

"Daddy," she greets. Her voice is suddenly a little higher than usual.

"You're not allowed in here."

That's one more parenting decision Sam has to agree with. Keep the sadism and masochism away from his daughter.

"You're not allowed to touch his body," she replies. Sam realizes that he's never heard Tophet speak directly to Crowley. She sounds so submissive, even when trying to give an order.

"Says who?"

"Says his last living relative."

"Oh? What was all that about not being his?"

"...I don't know. I wish I hadn't said it." Tophet's voice is quiet, vulnerable, childish even. It's disgusting to hear her regress like this for a demon. No nineteen year old woman should be talking to her father like this, like she's three.

Crowley's tone softens as he approaches Tophet and Sam:
"I told you before you left that killing a blood relative is not an easy thing. That's why you weren’t to harm them."

That's a disturbing thought, that Tophet may have been ready to be an assassin in earnest. Sam decides it's best to forget he heard that.

"That's not the point, Daddy. I hurt and betrayed the only two people who actually love me—loved me—for you. I had to stand there, feeling everything Dean felt when she watched her brother die. The least you could do for me is grant my request. We've done enough to them already."

"I'm not just doing this for fun, darling. Sam and I had a standing agreement."

"An agreement?" Tophet asks both Sam and Crowley, "What was the arrangement, exactly?"

Fuck if he knows, Sam thinks at her. All he remembers from the last time they spoke, before today, is that he broke Dean's contract. But there was something else...

"That, in return for seeing you, which he has, he would be subject to depraved sexual acts involving an of-age, consenting party."

Shit. Now Sam remembers.

Whatever Tophet tries to ask or express to him isn't very clear. Then she just sends images of the letters W, T, and F.

Crowley is right, he answers, ashamed.

Sam had forgotten about his idiotic desperation five years ago. He's not even sure if he can in good conscience ask Tophet to try to stop it. A deal's a deal and the Princess of Hades is the last person who will help him out of something he agreed to.

What matters to him is Dean, he reminds her before blocking out his daughter. No begging, no pleading. His fate is in Tophet's hands; he won't try to sway her decision no matter how badly he does not want to be touched. If she thinks he should take it like the bitch he agreed to be, she's not wrong.

If the sudden radio silence has taken her aback, Tophet doesn't let it come out in her voice.

"Did you specify the... other party?" she asks.

"Not as such."

"Then you don't need to do this. He's more than fulfilled the terms."

"...What does that mean?"

There's a pause in the exchange, and Sam guesses that Tophet has turned around, as if hiding from Crowley. He opens his mind again to echo Crowley's question. What is she doing?

"It means I know for a fact that he's committed incest with a consenting adult since then."

That is depraved by most standards, Sam acknowledges. She's good.

"...Who?"

"Who do you think?"
"I would have said Dean if he hadn't kissed you like he did."

Tell him whatever he wants to hear, Sam encourages.

"They do share a bedroom," she admits.

"What exactly did he do to you?" Crowley asks.

"If I tell you, will you leave his body alone?"

"No. I just want to know what sordid things Sam Winchester did to you."

"Daddy, please," Tophet says. "You don't have to do this."

"Of course not, but I want to. What he did with his female relatives has nothing to do with our deal. I have every right to do as I please with him," Crowley says. "Run along now."

Sam expects to hear footsteps, but there's nothing.

It's alright, he tells Tophet then. As long as she saves Dean, she can leave Sam to Crowley's devices (literally), and she will be forgiven.

"...I want to renegotiate for him," she says.

He doesn't deserve a daughter like Tophet, he thinks. She has every reason to let this happen, but she won't if she can help it.

"What can you offer me that will have remotely the same pleasure as sodomizing Moose's corpse?"

"Well... there's me," she tries. "We agreed once they were dead I wouldn't have to do that anymore, but we can have one last time. Whatever you were going to do to him, you can do to me instead. The things that you're afraid I can't take."

NO, Sam tells her. Absolutely not.

There's a pause, and when Crowley responds, his tone carries cruel condescension:

"Tell me, Tophet, when you were with Sam and Dean, did they try to tell you that I don't really care for you?"

Sam's heart aches as his daughter's fear comes across their mental link. This isn't how he wanted her to realize what he and Dean already know. This isn't the kind of revelation he would wish upon anyone.

"They didn't exactly say it, but they thought it."

"Well, they were right. I played the long game. I invested time, resources, fake emotions, and incredibly boring sex into creating the best possible tool to use against the Winchesters. It paid off and I no longer have to pretend your body interests me or that I care about your little feelings. You have nothing to offer me, Tophet." It sounds like Crowley is starting to remove his clothing. "I'm going to do unimaginably disgusting sacrilegious, scatological, and violent things to your real daddy's corpse, and you can go back to your room and draw pictures, or study your magic, whatever it is you want, as we agreed. Or help me with his clothes here, for that matter."

Subdued and hurt beyond words, Tophet slinks back.
Okay, Sam thinks. They planned for this. All Tophet has to do is end the spell keeping him still and he can use the knife. They agreed.

*Tophet?* he thinks, when freedom is not forthcoming.

She doesn't respond.

The angle of light above his face changes slightly. Then he hears the unsettling rustle of his own clothes.

There's his belt buckle.

A few seconds later, his heavy jeans hit the floor, which means he doesn't have access to the knife anymore.

Fuck. This is happening.

Okay. Okay, he can do this. He won't die. He won't actually feel anything, anyway. He'll just have to hear it while it happens, and it will be hell, but he'll live. This is not too high a price to pay for Dean's life. He agreed to this, and Tophet even tried to get him out of it. That's as much as he could ask for.

*Dean,* he reminds her. *Go to Dean.*

She still won't acknowledge him.

*Please?* he tries. The last thing he needs is Tophet watching whatever humiliating thing Crowley is about to do and sensing his mind turn into a blubbering, dissociative mess. In his head he's already whimpering for it to be over.

A few seconds later, his daughter gasps in surprise at something; it sounds like she's near his feet.

"What the hell do you think you're doing with that?" Crowley hisses.

*With what?* Sam demands. What's going on?

His daughter doesn't answer him. She's struggling, both emotionally and physically. She's angry.

"You've lied to me my whole life," she says to the demon. "You never cared about me, you just cared about hurting them!"

"That's right. And now that you've shown me how you feel about that, I think I know what I'm going to do with you."

"Wh-"

There's a burst of panic in Tophet and fear of a very specific thing.

*Run, Tophet,* Sam urges. *Whatever it is, run. Get somewhere safe.*

No footsteps, no door, just scuffling. Then she cries out as she's struck. The knife, or what sounds like it, clatters to the floor as her body falls.

"No, don't!" she screams as the demon grabs her. She continues to fight against the unknown thing, a life-or-death thing.
Her voice is muffled; Sam demands to know what's happening but all he gets is a mental "no!"

Then it's like a switch was flipped.

He can breathe and move again. He can feel the cool air on his skin, the stark absence of clothes on his body.

But he can't sense his daughter's mind anymore.

Dead. She must be dead, Sam thinks, horrified. He's lost her.

He sits up—what does it matter if Crowley sees him?

The demon is standing over Tophet, his back to Sam. The girl is collapsed on the floor.

Sam needs a weapon and he needs to end the King of Hell, now. Crowley has taken everything from him. Nothing will get between Sam and his revenge. He has no one to be human for now.

"On your knees, Tophet," the demon commands.

Oh, God, she's alive. But how is Sam supposed to keep her, or himself, alive if he doesn't find the blade?

There it is, at Crowley's eight o'clock. Sam gets to his feet. At least he likely won't be heard; he's wearing nothing but briefs, socks, and his watch.

"On your knees!"

Tophet sits up and then kneels, crying softly. Sam can't see her face.

"I would have kept my word," the demon rants. "I would have let you stay here, without a care in the world, if you hadn't picked up that knife."

"...Are you going to kill me?" she whimpers.

"No. Your parents were much despised and I'm sure someone will pay to get their hands on you as a consolation prize."

Hearing a growl, the demon whirls around, and finds himself face-to-face with a man enraged on the most primal level.

Sam gives himself a fraction of a second to appreciate the shock and dismay on the demon's face before he shoves the knife into his heart.

"You should have given her back when you had the chance," he informs Crowley, watching the orifices of his face flicker with yellow light.

As the King of Hell, Crowley isn't the type to die quickly. Sam withdraws the blade and pushes the demon's body to the floor before stabbing it again, this time in the face.

Although he was careful to block Tophet's view, Sam didn't think of trying to muffle the wet sound of the knife plunging into flesh. His daughter shrieks in horror behind him.

Once Sam is sure the demon has perished, he flips the corpse over to hide most of the gore and turns to Tophet, who had backed away to the wall only to sink to the floor again.
His heart, racing with adrenaline, stops in his chest when she lowers her hands from her face, revealing blood smeared across her mouth and chin. Not because it's hers—it isn't. It's the foul poison she was struggling against, Crowley's blood. The dark, evil substance that gives her life, but leaves her powerless.

The horror of the situation sinks in like frozen lead filling his veins.

Dean.
Although the panic in Sam's heart is telling him to drop everything and run to his sister's side, he listens to the sliver of common sense left in him, the whisper of his conscience reminding him that he has responsibilities beyond that of a brother. In front of him is a hurt, lost girl who needs him, though he can't be sure whether as a friend, an uncle, or a father.

He does at least know that whatever Tophet needs from him will not be accomplished when he's nearly naked. Besides, the few seconds it takes to tug his jeans and t-shirt back on lets him plan out what to address or attend to first. She has just lost, in more than one way, the most important person in her life. She's had demon blood forced on her and she may be injured. She might not want Sam's help; he wouldn't blame her. He's partly responsible for shattering everything she thought she knew about her life.

He doesn't bother with his belt and he forgoes his boots in favor of attending to her. She's in shock; the first thing she needs is something warm. His flannel will do; it's softer than his jacket.

Once it's around her shoulders, Sam crouches in front of her, carefully blocking her view of Crowley's dead meatsuit, and with a handkerchief wipes the blood and tears from her face.

"Are you hurt?" he asks as he puts the cloth in her hand, folded over to a clean side. He then subtly takes the opportunity to buckle his belt.

Clutching the handkerchief and hugging her knees, she shakes her head no.

Sooner or later Tophet will have to see the body; Sam can't shield her from it forever, so he sits next to her against the wall in a similar position, knees drawn partly up.

She looks at it and swallows hard before giving one whimper of grief. Then she covers her face with her hands.

Sam waits almost a minute before daring to touch her shoulder.

She looks up, face red and crumpled, and meets his eyes. It seems poignant in a way that she can only see from one eye, but both are filled with tears.

"You're still here."

Of course he is. She shouldn't need her powers to know he would never up and leave her alone in this disturbing room with Crowley dead on the floor.

"I can't save Dean now," Tophet tells him. "She'll die."

Swallowing the lump in his throat, Sam takes his daughter into his arms, resting his chin on her head as she buries her face in his shirt. They're hiding from each other, Sam thinks. Being told his sister will die is the absolute last thing he needs right now, while Tophet, he realizes, is more afraid than sad.

"We don't know that," he says as evenly as possible, as much for her as for himself.
"I do. Every choice I've made has been wrong," Tophet sobs. "This is all my fault. I didn't believe
you and Dean, and I had so much time to save her but now you'll hate me and I'll be alone."
Anything else she meant to say is lost in a fresh burst of tears.

"No, I won't," he reassures her. "You've already felt how angry I can be, but I could never hate
you."

It's ironic, Sam thinks, that she is afraid of him hating her, when all this time he thought he would
alienate, not to mention traumatize Tophet by killing the demon who raised her, whom she loved.
She's not devastated by the loss of a father; she is simply scared to lose the other.

"Dean will die because of me."

"Don't say that. You didn't cause all this. Sure, you've made decisions, but your life, everything
about you, has been shaped by other people making choices." Sam thinks of the very first decision,
and he adds, "Ones that weren't theirs to make. You didn't cause this on your own. Neither did
Crowley, neither did I, neither did Dean."

Tophet seems to be comforted by his words, so he continues:

"I asked you to remember one thing about me. Just one thing. Do you?"

She nods.

"I want you to say it."

"That you love me... and you'll always love me."

"Even if-" God, he can't stand the thought, but he has to say it. His promise is meaningless if he can't
name the worst thing that can happen. His daughter needs to hear it. "Even if we can't save Dean, I
will love you."

There's another round of tears before Tophet says one word, slowly as if it tastes strange in her
mouth:

"Dad."

Sam may be accustomed to answering to names that aren't his, but this one is now his to accept. It's
something he's wondered about for years.

It makes him shudder.

His instinct is to reject it. Though his heart leapt at the sound, he isn't ready for the burden it puts on
his shoulders. Besides, he doesn't deserve it. Tophet is just a scared, lost girl clinging to the first
source of comfort she can find. She's hurt and mixed up, and for Sam to usurp Crowley's position
would be like taking advantage of her confused state. This is neither right nor healthy.

Just like every other relationship Sam has had with family.

It's not up to him. This is the beginning of the rest of Tophet's life. She needs somebody and Sam is
better than nobody. He is the only person she can rely on, so he must answer to whatever she
chooses to call him. That is the nature of parenthood.

"I'm here," he replies, kissing his daughter's forehead.
When they do finally leave the chamber of paraphilic horrors, they move quickly to return to Tophet's room, where they hid Dean. Her life is not a lost cause, no matter what the resident expert witch thinks.

As Tophet locks the door behind them, Sam rounds the bed and lifts up the dust skirt, terrified that Dean will be missing. He hated the idea of stuffing her under there but it was the safest option. Crowley might have come in for all they know.

Dean is there, exactly as they left her. Sam is as gentle as possible as he drags her body out, especially with her head and neck. When he lifts her limp body, he doesn't let himself look until she is fully laid out on the bed.

It brings tears to his eyes.

They have hours, maybe even a solid day before anyone questions the absence of the late King of Hell, but that doesn't really help them at the moment.

"Are your spells from before still active?" he asks Tophet, brushing dust from Dean's shoulder.

"What does it matter? Even if they are, the one keeping her alive will end in a few minutes. I can't do anything." She sits at her desk with her arms crossed, slumping in despair.

"Maybe you can't use your magic, but what about other spells? The kind either one of us can cast?"

"All of my good spell ingredients are at the mansion in Pennsylvania. This isn't where I usually live, in case you hadn't guessed. I just have what I need to cast my demon blood substitute spell, plus some odds and ends."

Sam glances around the room. It does seem small and sparse for a princess's bedroom.

"Could we put together some kind of cleansing ritual for you?" he tries.

"It's almost impossible to un-profane demon blood with quick spellwork, Rowena tried. We can't do this, Sam! We can't save her!" She's starting to cry again, so he goes to her and takes her hands.

He speaks as calmly as he can:

"We might not have a lot to work with, but we have to try. You said once you could invent spells. If you can't heal Dean, maybe you can find a way to buy us more time."

At Tophet's resigned nod, Sam pulls away. He watches her stand and head for a small table in the corner. From underneath, she pulls out two small wooden boxes and a rack that rattles with glass bottles of colorful powders and liquids.

"Let me know if there's any way I can help," he says.

"What do you have on you?" she asks as she opens the boxes and starts going through the contents. "Hex bags, talismans, anything. Just empty your pockets. Dean's too."

He takes out everything—coins of magical value, coins of monetary value, his lockpick set, pocket knife, phone, what's left of Tophet's hex bag, two fake IDs, a paperclip, the demon-killing blade, a flattened roll of duct tape, his wallet, his revolver, a Vodou charm, a pack of gum, and lastly, the amulet he keeps so well hidden from Dean.

As if drawn to its emotional significance, Tophet picks it up.
"What's this?" she asks as he goes to his sister to rifle through her clothes.

"I gave it to Dean as a Christmas present when we were kids. We found out later it's supposed to burn hot in God's presence."

"...Hang on. You. We have you," she says, eyes lighting up.

"What about me?"

"You and Dean. There's actual power in how you feel about each other. I sensed it once. I think you might be soulmates."

"Something like it," Sam confirms with a frown, recalling their brief time in Heaven. "But how much power? What can we do with it?"

"Well, you can't reenact the end of *Tangled*, but you told me you overpowered Lucifer to save Dean. That power probably helped you, so at best, it might rival an angel."

"Angels can heal injuries like this," Sam points out as he puts the contents of Dean's pockets on the table.

"The problem is getting to it..." Tophet muses as she abandons the amulet and opens the hex bag Dean's carried for about ten years now. Sam can't remember what it's for.

"What about... demon blood?" he tries, feeling sick at the thought. "If I had that in me, could that help us?"

"Maybe, but I wouldn't try to use demonic power to access the opposite."

Sam is relieved, slightly, but mostly he's anxious, having nothing to do while Tophet evaluates what she has available.

"Have either of you worn that amulet during sex?" she asks.

"What?"

"If you have, it could have picked up some energy that we can use."

"Uh... Not with each other." Sam bites his lip before volunteering more information, for the sake of putting everything they have on the table: "Unless having it in my pocket counts?"

"What were you doing?"

"...Sex," he stammers.

"Look, I don't want details," Tophet says, "but you need to be a little more specific than that. In magic, there is a huge difference between, well, different kinds of sex. Have you... gone past third base with Dean while the amulet was on you?"

"No."

"Then this amulet probably can't help us."

As Sam returns it to his pocket, he wonders if Dean would think that was funny, that oral doesn't count, magically.
Hang on, oral.

"I'm just spitballing here, but is there such thing as 'true love's kiss'?” he asks.

"That just wakes people up, Sam, did you even read any fairy tales?” Tophet deadpans without looking up.

"Everyone knows the mouth has occult significance,” he points out with a shrug. "Demon deals are sealed with a kiss. Hell, the two of us just found out that it enhances psychic communication. Maybe it can help Dean, too.”

Tophet pauses, then nods.

"You might be on to something. Go look in that dark blue book on that shelf."

Sam flips through the book indicated until he finds a section on the supernatural properties of the mouth and lips. For some reason the book has some sections written in Latin and others in pre-Shakespearean English; it's an unwanted brain exercise switching between languages in his head two or three times per page.

Finally, there's a handy chart of sigils and their uses, spanning almost fifteen pages. More than once he perks up, only to see there are requirements they simply can't fulfill, like hard-boiling a phoenix egg, or using fresh lamb's blood. But at last, he finds an entry that isn't filled with restrictions or steps they can't follow in the time they have.

"I found something. I think. Something about this glyph here-" He shows Tophet the page. "-sealed with a kiss between Heaven's pairing or two halves of man's essence can put someone into a death-like sleep."

"Heaven's pairing would be a couple who were matched up by a Cupid, but man's essence... yes. This could give us time to save Dean."

"Great, where do we put the glyph?"

"Hands are a safe bet. We have to put hers on her palm to make her the receiver." She grabs what Sam identifies as an eyeliner pencil from one of the boxes on the table. "Does it need to be drawn in anything specific?"

"It doesn't say here."

Tophet gives him the pencil.

"You'll want to draw yours on the back of your hand, otherwise it might knock you out, too."

He carefully copies the vaguely Arabic-looking symbol on Dean's right palm, and on the back of his left hand.

"Do I just kiss her now?" he asks as Tophet takes the book and pencil from him.

"Take her hand first."

Sam sits on the side of the bed, interlaces his fingers with Dean's, and leans down to gently press his lips to hers.

His sister's skin is cold, her body still. It's a nightmare, being so close to losing Dean when they're so close to saving her, too.
For all they know, she might already be dead. This kiss, and whatever they do to heal her, might be in vain.

"It worked," Tophet says.

Sam lifts his head. His hand was glowing purple, though now the light has faded away.

"Does that mean she's still alive?"

"Yes, for now."

Exhaling sharply, Sam takes a moment to rest his head in his hands. They have time. They can do this. They will do this. They are going to save Dean. Somehow.

* *

Half an hour and two hushed phone calls to Bobby later, Sam is extremely frustrated with his daughter:

"We have the ingredients for this spell Bobby gave us, Tophet."

"I know. I already thought of that spell, but we can't use vervain on her."

"Why not?"

"We just can't."

"You need to explain why."

"...Potential side effects."

"What are they? What's going to happen?"

"I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

"Please, Sam, just trust me."

He sighs, sitting on the side of the bed.

"You need to give me a reason to trust you."

She starts to cry.

"I know I've hurt you and Dean a lot today. I'm just trying not to make things worse."

"Why can't you tell me what the problem is?" Sam presses.

"Once you find out, you'll understand."

"When will I find out?"

"I don't know. If you want to cast that spell, I can't stop you, but I won't help you, either." She sits at her desk, arms crossed.

"If you don't want me to do this, you need to give me another option."
Tophet composes herself, wiping her eyes.
"...There is one, but you're not going to like it."

"What is it?"

"Sex magic."

"Okay..." Sam has to tell himself to at least hear her out before saying no. "How would that work?"

"I'd paint some sigils on you and Dean that will gather and focus the power in your..." She waves her hand around and finishes the sentence in a much better way than he was afraid of: "Your being soulmates. I'll give you the right words to say before and after that direct it into healing."

"Before and after what, exactly?"

The teen blushes.

"...Orgasm."

Just keep it professional, Sam thinks. He is a hunter consulting a witch. This is only as embarrassing as they make it.

"What would I have to do?" he asks her.

"About what you'd expect. You need to be in sexual contact when you cast the spell."

"With her?"

Tophet answers with cringeworthy sarcasm:

"No, with me."

"She's unconscious," Sam protests. "How do you even know this is going to work?"

"The same way you know that silver hurts shapeshifters. I know that there's power in the bond between you and Dean, and I know that as long as both souls are present, you can channel it with the right sigils and the right words. Sure, it's morally wrong by human standards, but you wanted me to invent a spell for you, and this is what I've got."

Sam shakes his head.

"There has to be something else. What if we find more ingredients somewhere else, another room? Maybe we could find a substitute for vervain."

"No," she says quickly. "The only other room here that might have anything is locked and warded."

"How long is the new spell going to last?"

"I don't know. It might end in an hour, or maybe it could last a hundred years. You have two not-great options now, or you can risk losing her by looking for an apothecary or a doctor out there."

"And you're positive that non-consensual sex magic is a better choice than that spell Bobby gave us?" Sam asks her.

"Yes. Not that it counts for much, but what would Dean say to this if she was awake?"
"Oh, Dean would love this," he scoffs. "She'd be all over it—all over me." Rubbing his eyes, Sam psychs himself up, and turns to look at his sister lying so still and lifeless. The thought of touching her, entering her, when she's in this state is nauseating. It dimly registers that him being essentially coerced into sex is a form of rape as well, but for him, it's not rape if it saves Dean's life. Nothing that happens to him or that he is forced to do to save her life is wrong.

"And..." Tophet remarks, "It's not like you're trading her baby to a demon and plan to lie to her about it."

Sam won't deny that, but he's surprised to hear his daughter playing that card.

"That doesn't mean it's a better option than these 'side effects' you're not telling me about," he points out. "And you said, she might be fine like this for years, let alone a day."

"She might, but we don't know, and we're in this mess because we waited for something that came too late. I promise this is the best, surest way to save her right now."

Sam thinks bitterly of how the day they met, she promised she wasn't there to hurt them. She wasn't, but it was part of a trap. She lied by omission. So, should he believe her again? Tophet has no reason to be dishonest when she has no one else to turn to, but Sam isn't so sure she has reason to be honest with the man who killed her once beloved father, either.

"Best for whom?"

"Dean," she answers without hesitation.

"And what do you get out of it?"

"A clearer conscience."

"And me?"

"Same thing, clear conscience."

He scoffs. A clear conscience, after what he's about to agree to?

"What do we do first?"

Chapter End Notes

I meant for WWCI/Tophet to be the last major work I did in which Sam did *not* keep the Samulet, but then of course it had to be the one time I list the contents of his pockets. Canon was more convenient.
Stripping down to his jeans to have sigils drawn on his torso is one thing, Sam thinks. He can handle being shirtless, especially since Tophet is quick and professional about painting the arcane symbols over his solar plexus.

Then they do the same to Dean, Sam removing her jacket and pushing her shirt up out of the way for Tophet to do her work. No need to expose his sister further.

"The rest of the sigils for the spell need to be near the, ahem, genitals," Tophet says as she finishes up.

"Maybe I should do that," Sam suggests.

"Do you think you can copy the symbols right, and put them in the right positions?"

"I've been doing this kind of thing longer than you have," he reminds her, a bit more sharply than he means to. "Even from your perspective."

"Okay." Tophet gets a piece of paper and draws a simple diagram showing what he needs to do. As she does so, she continues, "But I'm going to do yours."

"Mine?"

"Yes."

Sam scoffs.

"No."

"It's harder to apply things to yourself. Anybody who wears makeup can tell you that."

Sighing, Sam gives up. He'll think of it as penance for what he's about to do.

"Okay, just, uh... just gimme a second."

He turns and puts a few feet between himself and his daughter to give himself the same mental pep talk as before: this is only as awkward as they make it. This is for Dean; Tophet's gender, age, and relation to him are irrelevant.

On the other hand, doing this feels like abuse, like he's exposing himself to his teenage daughter. Nor can he fully deny Dean's half-sarcastic comment from earlier.

Just get it over with. The sooner he gets his clothes off, the sooner this will be over.

Besides, he thinks as he takes off his boots, if he's willing to rape Dean, why should something so
mild in comparison stop him?

Jeans off, briefs off, hands awkwardly covering his manhood, deep breath, and finally Sam turns around, shivering from his agonized shame.

"Are you ready?" Tophet asks, politely looking elsewhere.

"As I'll ever be." He's at the foot of the bed; he lets Tophet come to him rather than approach her.

Blushing red, she gets on her knees to do her work, painting as swiftly as before.

Sam looks at his sister. How the hell is he supposed to tell her he ignored basic morality and common sense just because Tophet told him to? He has no other excuse for violating Dean's body.

It's too quiet.

"Have you ever used sex magic before?" he asks, unable to think of a better way to break the silence.

"No, just studied it. It's underrated and underused if you ask me."

No response Sam can come up with seems appropriate, so he says nothing. More awkward silence. He's going to have nightmares about this, he thinks.

"Sam, you, uh... you do actually have to move your hands. I have to draw right here," Tophet says, gesturing to an area covered by his wrists. After about three seconds pass and he doesn't move, she tries another approach: "There's nothing wrong with having a micro-penis."

He is not amused.

"Literally the last thing I need from you right now is for you to act more like Dean," he informs her, gritting his teeth.

"Sorry."

Leaving one hand to somewhat preserve his modesty, he holds the other at his side in a fist and stares at the ceiling.

"I already hate sex magic," he remarks.

"Even if you aren't proud of doing this," Tophet says as she gets back to work, "you should be proud that you can do it. Only two soulmates together can tap into this. Like, how many people know they've found their soulmate? ...Switch hands."

One back to hiding his body, the other in an even tighter, more stressed fist.

The intellectual aspect of it is kind of neat, Sam supposes. Now would be a perfect time for him to inappropriately geek out over something, as Dean puts it. He could really use a distraction from the sensation of his daughter painting magic sigils two inches away from his dick.

This is one of the worst days of his life, Sam thinks, in so many ways, and it's not even over yet.

A few more brush strokes, and Tophet is done. Sam is too embarrassed to offer a hand when she gets to her feet; he just backs away and looks for something to hold in front of himself until... well, until it's time to do what he has to do.

Dean is totally gonna buy the psychic communication story now, he reflects. No, Dean, there's no
remotely incestuous element to my relationship with our daughter. That's why she was on her knees trying to make jokes about the size of my dick.

Tophet is checking Dean's palm. She smudges the glyph from before until it's definitely inert.

"I'm done here. Do the same to Dean, give it a minute to dry, then you can go ahead."

He swallows hard and nods.

Tophet heads for the door. Sam is confused.

"Where are you going?"

"Uh... I assume you want privacy."

Sam hadn't even considered that; if he was going to do something this despicable to Dean, an audience was irrelevant.

"Yeah, but what if someone sees you?"

"No one but us knows that Daddy- that Crowley is dead. I'm still the Princess of Hades." As an afterthought, she takes off his flannel. It would be suspicious for her to wear that.

"Right, right..." Sam feels stupid. "I'll, uh, text you when it's done."

She nods in agreement.

"Oh, and..." Blushing yet again, Tophet goes to her dresser and retrieves something from the top drawer. She leaves it on the bedside table. "You might need that," she mutters as she hurries from the room.

Sam identifies it as lube, and shudders at the implication it brings to mind.

He locks the door and turns to his sister. First things first.

As he starts to unlace Dean's boots, he has to blink away tears. He remembers far too clearly doing this six years ago. She was unconscious, like now, and he felt nothing, like he is trying to now. He could and should have waited for a better option, even though they never did find a cure for the hundreds of cursed people in Beatrice and he saved more lives by refusing to wait. Maybe, he thinks, this will also turn out to be the least of possible evils.

Even with that hope in mind, just taking her clothes off is a violation, Sam reflects, furthered by painting sigils in the same intimate places as on himself.

When he's done, he double-checks the arcane artwork against both what Tophet put on his body and the guide she drew for him. He did perfectly.

Sam has the words of the spell memorized. The paint is dry on Dean's body. The next step is... to commit rape.

He parts her legs like she's some kind of doll, then gets on the bed between them.

Though it's long established between him and Dean that a little light somnophilia is fine to wake up to in the morning (better than fine), the idea of actually penetrating her, let alone finishing inside her, is absolutely abhorrent.
He told her he would do this. He told her that if it was the only way to save her life, he would do worse than what he's about to do. There is nothing he won't do to save Dean.

Besides, there are other pathetic excuses he can make, Sam reflects as he retrieves the bottle of lube. His sister would be okay with this if he were to explain and ask. In fact what she'd hate the most is the part about them being on Tophet's bed.

Once he's used an absurd amount on Dean, he squeezes a little more lube into his palm and starts to stroke his completely soft cock.

He shuts his eyes and pictures Dean the way he loves to see her, color on her lips, teasing scraps of lace covering a fraction of her body.

Nope. Even with that image, he can't forget where he is and what's happening. His cock responds only to the friction of his slicked-up hand, not the fantasy he conjured up.

He focuses on himself until his body has no choice but to approach climax. He can't start the spell until he's actually inside her and he doesn't want to be inside her until the last minute.

When Sam tries to guide himself into Dean's body—oh God, she's not even breathing—he finds her so tight it almost hurts him. He can't imagine how it would feel for her. Perhaps most sickening is that she's not warm inside like she should be. She's just dead. There is no practical difference between this and necrophilia.

He closes his eyes until the new wave of nausea fades somewhat, and then begins the spell Tophet gave him.

"Invoke potentiam animi nostri cum coitui nostro," he enunciates.

Now he has to just get this over with.

Hands on either side of Dean's body, he begins to thrust. He lost a lot of ground in the time it took to push himself inside Dean, but again his body responds to sexual stimulation even if every other fiber of his being is fighting it.

Let it happen, he tells himself. Don't focus on his misgivings in the present, but on the moment she'll draw breath and open her eyes. She'll be happy to see that he's alive, at least briefly. She'll be pissed once he admits what he did, but he can take it. He'll live, because she will.

Once again, he's brought back to the last time his sister had to go through this, lying there doing nothing, her right to autonomy dismissed. He can practically feel the scratchy material of that sofa under his knees, see the tear tracks on her cheeks... He can remember the cold logic of his decision changing to the exhilaration of finally sexually possessing the body he craved. No soul, and yet he knew this was the one who belonged to him, and to whom he belonged. He never wanted to waste time again having sex with anyone else. Not when being with Dean was the closest he'd ever come to feeling something again. He wanted more of it.

And now that he has his soul again, should he not feel that connection even more keenly?

He wraps his arms around her body.

"Dean," he whispers before pressing a kiss to her cheek. "I told you once that we need to change, we need to let go of this dark thing inside of us that makes us, or lets us do evil things in the name of family. I haven't, and I'm sorry for that. What I'm doing is evil but it's to save your life. You don't have to forgive me, just understand why."
Somehow, the unheard confession lifts a weight from his heart. He closes his eyes, inhales her scent, and basks in the oneness of being with her. Yes, he thinks. He can feel it. Dean is his other half, his soulmate. All that matters is Sam next to Dean and Dean next to Sam.

Forcing himself closer, closer, almost there, instinct taking over, the point of no return, and he gasps his sister's name like he's praying for her return.

He exhales sharply as he comes. It's more a simple release of physical stress than anything else.

Now what? Right, he has to recite the other half of the spell before he pulls out, which doesn't give him much time:

"Potentia animi nostri, sana nos."

He waits, holding his breath.

Then Sam feels a kind of energy draining from his body, an energy neither physical or mental. The sigils on both him and his sister glow white, brighter and brighter. The energy returns to him, and just as something in Dean's neck shifts, Sam feels his bruises and injuries disappear. The torn flesh on her wrists heals. Then the markings on their bodies fade back to their original color.

"...It worked," he pants, grunting in pain as he pulls out. He rolls onto his back next to her, nearly crying in relief. He did it. She'll live.

After a few seconds, he realizes his sister has started to breathe again.

§§§

Dean's body is cold, her eyelids are heavy, and the room smells like sex. Although she doesn't think she just fucked herself with a dildo that would make Sam insecure, it sure feels like it.

When she forces her eyes open and turns her head, it's a relief to see Sam lying next to her on the unfamiliar bed.

"Sammy?"

"Dean."

She finds the strength to sort of lunge at her brother so she can hug him. She doesn't even know if they're alive or dead, and it doesn't matter as long as Sam is here. She just wants to forget watching him die, forget the gasping and choking, the blood...

Then things start to sink in. She pulls away and looks around.

Her brother is naked and sweaty. They're in a bedroom she doesn't recognize—though it looks like Crowley's weird castle-home—and she is naked below the waist but fully dressed above. There are funky sigils on Sam's chest and around his junk, and matching ones on what she can see of her own body. Her wrists, raw and bloody last she knew, look and feel perfectly fine.

Going by the body paint, the guilt on her brother's face and the ache between her legs, Dean comes to an uncomfortable conclusion that although they are alive, she and Sam's bodies have been used for something.

"What happened?" she asks.

"It's a long story." Sam starts to get up, like he's ashamed, but Dean doesn't let him.
"Get back here, I'm cold."

Reluctantly, Sam stays, grabbing the edge of the comforter and pulling it up around her. She clings to him, shivering.

"Talk to me," she demands.

"I did what I had to," he says, still trying to avoid her eyes. "I couldn't lose you."

That doesn't sound right coming from Sam. That sounds like he agreed to whatever just happened.

"What are you talking about?" Dean asks him. "What did you have to do?"

"Your neck was broken and I used sex magic to heal you. We had you in a kind of induced magical coma, but we didn't know how long we had before it ended. This was the best option."

There's a very strange hollow feeling in Dean's chest. It's less that she feels violated—it's impossible for her brother violate her—and more that she's surprised at him for doing it. He knows damn well that whatever he did was rape. Reluctantly or not, he forced his way inside her.

It's okay, Dean tells herself. It doesn't matter. She had it coming anyway; this is exactly what she deserves after what she did to save Sam's life five years ago. It's fine. She wouldn't have minded anyway if he'd been able to ask for her consent; he has to know that. Her brother didn't even need to ask.

It's fine, she repeats in her head. Doesn't bother her at all. Besides, if what Sam did was the best option, she doesn't want to know what the others were.

"...Are you alright?" Sam asks.

"Yeah, I'm good." Dean doesn't know why she has to force a chuckle. "Just disappointed that I missed the sex."

Sam doesn't seem to believe her.

"You sure?"

"We can talk about it later," she dismisses. "What did you mean, 'we had you in a magical coma'? Who's 'we'?"

"Me and Tophet." He pauses and explains, "That hex bag didn't actually kill me. She saved us both by faking our deaths."

Well shit, Dean thinks. She might owe Tophet an apology.

"So, she was on our side the whole time?"

"Let's just say she's on her own side."

"She's a damn good actress," Dean comments wryly. She decides against confronting her brother about that kiss, for now. Whatever the fuck it was about, or whatever he did to her, they'll sort it out with whatever combination of drinking, sex, or killing monsters they need. Or talking about it.

"She is," Sam agrees before getting off the bed. He tosses Dean's absent clothes within arm's reach, then starts getting dressed.
"Hang on, why couldn't she heal me?" Dean asks, hugging her jeans to her body to warm them up.

Her brother replies with more bitterness than she's heard from him in a long time:

"Crowley forced her to drink demon blood."

"Is she okay? Where is she now?"

"I don't know, but she's waiting for me to send a message to let her know the spell worked."

"And Crowley?"

Sam sighs.

"I killed him right in front of Tophet," he states as he digs out his phone, after getting his pants on. "Can't say I'm ever gonna be proud of that."

* 

Hardly a minute later, there are five light knocks on the door. Sam unlocks it, and Tophet slips in. Her eyes are red and she's sniffling.

She takes a quivering breath and looks around, some relief in her face when she sees Dean sitting up on the side of the bed.

"I made a mistake, just like you said," she blurts out. "I didn't mean to hurt you and Sam so much. I'm sorry."

Dean believes it; she's just not ready to openly forgive Tophet's actions.

"What matters right now is that we're alive and we're together," she tells her. "Let's just get the hell out of here."

"If there's anything you want to take with you, now's the time," Sam adds.

"I don't want anything from here." Tophet goes to her dresser. She turns off her phone and sets it down. To Dean's surprise, she then unclasps the silver chain around her neck and lays her necklace on top of the dresser, the two small pendants side by side.

Then she claims Sam's huge flannel shirt, putting her arms in the insanely long sleeves and then buttoning it like she's scared of losing it.

She heads for the door, and as Dean follows, she sees Sam lingering, studying the necklace.

It's all headed for an ending too good to be true, Dean thinks. Tophet abandons the King of Hell for Sam and Dean, and they escape unscathed? That can't come free. Besides, everything her daughter said was true; Dean cheated her out of a loving family. There's no way Tophet has forgiven that, even after what she's done already. There's going to be hell to pay, and Dean doesn't know who or what she's going to lose.

Chapter End Notes

Declinating verbs and nouns in a language you have never studied is fucking hard.
Anyone who actually knows Latin is invited to correct/verify the grammar of my magic spell.
"Where are we?" Dean wonders once they put some distance between themselves and Crowley's "palace" which according to the weathered sign outside used to be called Needham Asylum.

Tophet doesn't answer right away, so Sam checks his phone's GPS.

"Oh..." he says, surprised. "We're in Massachusetts."

Which means her car is hundreds of miles away, Dean thinks. Not okay.

"Why would Crowley nab us in Pennsylvania and then bring us here?" she asks.

Her brother shrugs.

"The mansion where we normally live is in Pennsylvania. He wanted to kill you here," Tophet informs her. "Probably so he could just have Sam put in the Chamber right away."

"Will you tell me what the hell the Chamber is now?"

"Crowley's playroom," Sam cuts in, tensing a little. "His adult playroom."

Dean shudders, then changes the subject.

"You think the car's where we left it?"

"I know it is," her daughter says.

"Good. Now we just gotta get to it."

Sam nods at a parking lot a few blocks ahead of them.

"So, Tophet, ever hotwired a car?"

Tophet was shaking. She couldn't make any mistakes.

"I'm sorry about what's going to happen to you," she told Sam, putting a hand on the back of his neck. She meant it. He didn't deserve the suffering the hex bag would cause.

She licked her lips, heart pounding, before standing on her toes and kissing Sam on the mouth.

I'm saving you, she told him.

Like she expected, he resisted at first, feeling both violated and guilty. But then Sam had an idea and began to kiss back, which had to be one of the most surreal plot twists in her entire life.

As she carefully smuggled the demon-killing knife back into its sheath on Sam's belt, she listened to what he was trying to tell her—and ignored her mother's disgusted confusion.

The kiss wasn't actually for Tophet. It was for Dean. Sam was kissing her as if she were Dean, to show her the strength of his feelings, the depth of his need, and his desperation.

It was like he was begging her, "Please save her. See how much I love and need her. Tell me you
won't let my sister die."

*Tophet was moved, but not enough.*

No, she told Sam.

*He still pleaded with her. It was so raw and sharp. The mouth, Tophet realizes, made their link even stronger and clearer than ordinary touch.*

When Sam picked up that piece of information from her, he parted his lips, inviting Tophet to take this further. He had to make her understand. He had to show her every ounce of meaning that Dean held for him, and there was no touch too intimate if it might be the difference between life and death.

Well, fuck, she thought. *How was she supposed to just ignore him when it came to something that mattered so much? Sam didn't deserve to lose his sister, likely his soulmate, not when he'd done nothing wrong. If this was how he really felt about Dean, there would be no point in saving his life.*

Please, Tophet, Sam begged again. *His tongue passed over her bottom lip, which told her it was time to stop this. No need to French her in front of Dean, she got the message.*

*He chased after her slightly when she pulled away, which made her heart flutter. Daddy never kissed her like that.*

*What now? she asked herself. She couldn't just do nothing. Should she ensure Sam would be killed after all, so he and Dean can be together in death? Or should she try to save her mother?*

*—*

Tophet—or whoever she is, since she doesn't know anymore—shuts her eyes and pretends to sleep in the backseat of the clean-looking but unusually smelly car the Winchesters stole. Surprisingly, she fools them. They start talking.

First, Sam quietly summarizes everything that happened after he woke up. It's silent in the car for a minute or so afterward as Dean absorbs everything, including the revelation that Tophet was originally going to let her die.

"...She is so grounded," her mother says eventually.

"I'm angry, but she fixed what she could. And after what Crowley told her... she's been punished enough."

"It's not about being punished." There's a pause, then Dean's voice lowers: "How does she expect us to trust her?"

"She doesn't, but I trust her. Once she has her powers back, I'll be able to sense her basic intentions, anyway."

"And what does that sensing involve?" Dean asks.

"What are you talking about?"

"What the hell was that kiss about?"

"I know how that must have looked, it wasn't like that. She was giving me the demon-killing knife. I was begging for your life."
"Begging for my life?"

"Yeah, and it worked, so I'm not gonna apologize for doing it."

"Alright." Dean shifts position like she's bored. Sam insisted on driving. ".Is she a good kisser?"

"Dean, that's gross, she's practically a kid."

"She's legal, you can have an opinion."

"I didn't notice," he says primly.

There's a pause that tells Tophet that her mother, correctly, disbelieves him.

"...Well if she was good, I'd be proud of her," Dean says.

Tophet feels a tiny bit better.

*

Later on, the conversation gets heavier.

"About that spell Tophet refused to help you with... you seriously have no idea why?" Dean wonders.

"Something about vervain having bad side effects. She wouldn't say what except that once I found out why, I'd understand."

"And you took her word for it?"

"At the time, I was the only person in the world she could turn to. I trusted that she wouldn't risk alienating me by hurting you."

Dean doesn't say anything at first. There's no way she hasn't guessed why Tophet was so insistent.

"I'll ask her," she says eventually.

"When we get back, I'm going to look up vervain, try to figure out what these 'side effects' are she was so worried about."

"Don't waste your time," Dean tells him, a little too quickly. "She'll tell me."

*

Approaching the apartment complex where the ambush took place, Tophet psychs herself up for dealing with Dean's coming overreaction.

"Where the hell's my car?"

"Invisible," Tophet answers.

"Invisible?"

"Yup."

As soon as Sam parks the stolen car, Tophet gets out and goes over to where she moved the Impala. The spell she cast was meant to remain in effect until broken.
"I parked it over there," Dean says, pointing.

"I moved it just to be safe. I didn't know for sure how long it was going to be sitting here."

"You moved it?!"

"I would never let a demon drive your car."

"But you don't drive..." Dean is starting to panic; Sam takes her by the shoulders and tries to calm her down.

Tophet ignores them and inches forward until she finds the rear bumper of the car. She feels her way along the side until her hand encounters the handle to the driver's side door.

When she opens it, she find the interior of the car still visible, as it should be, and the key still in the ignition. Tophet sits down just long enough to turn the engine on and then gets out.

As expected, the car becomes visible in all its shining metal glory.

"Wait, you left the keys in there?" Dean asks, alarmed.

"Where did you think they were?" Tophet asks.

"I thought you had them," the Winchesters say to each other.

"Nobody steals invisible cars," she points out.

Dean glares at her a little before doing a walk-around, inspecting the car for damage.

"What the fuck is wrong with this mirror?" she demands.

Tophet looks at the side mirror and taps it with her fingernail. From some angles, there is no reflection, and from others there is an upside-down reflection. Every once in a while it flickers and the surface briefly becomes a black void.

"Side effect from the spell, probably. It'll wear off."

"But why?"

"Invisibility requires bending rays of light around an object," Sam volunteers. "Mirrors reflect light, so maybe making one invisible would-"

"Never mind," Dean sighs. "Let's go home."

Dean gets into the driver's seat and shuts the door. Sam waits for Tophet to move.

"You wanna sit up front?" he offers.

She walks about ten feet away from the car. She's fixed what she could. It's over.

Sam follows her, concerned.

"You have Dean," she tells him. "You have your car. You don't need me for anything else."

"Need you? This isn't about needing you. We want you with us. You shouldn't be alone right now, anyway."
"I'm fine."

"You're really not."

"Sam..."

He looks down at her.

"You called me 'Dad' earlier. Give me a chance to be that for you."

Bursting into frustrated tears, Tophet wraps her arms around him. She just wants Daddy, who cared about her and for her, who was her best friend, who she trusted completely.

Her biological father is right in front of her, offering her that. He thinks he can be that. He can't. No matter how earnest he thinks he is, Tophet will never be first in his heart.

How is she supposed to trust anyone who calls themselves her parent, anyway? Her birth mother gave her to a demon and that demon lied to her for nineteen years. Even Sam lost his temper with her when he thought Dean was dead.

"Look, if nothing else, you need a place to crash for a couple days," Sam reminds her.

He's right, Tophet admits to herself. She has nowhere to go.

"Okay," she whispers.

He holds her at arm's length and then tilts her chin up.

"Mia," he calls her.

*Mia.* That's her birth name.

No, that's the closest thing she has to a *real* name. At least until she figures out who she is, what name she wants to carry.

She's not Tophet. She's not Mia Winchester. She's not even Taylor MacLeod. She's just lost.
Dean, although still internally seething over the fact that her car's side mirrors are fucked up, makes sure to be the one to walk Tophet back to her bedroom when they get home.

"If you need anything from me or Sam, you know where we are."

The girl nods and opens the door.

"Wait a sec," Dean says.

Tophet faces her, crossing her arms like she's protecting herself.

Dean says one word:

"Vervain."

Her daughter looks at the floor as she explains:

"Some types of healing magic treat pregnancy like you have a parasite inside you. If we'd used a spell with vervain, you would've lost your baby."

Exhaling sharply, Dean closes her eyes. She'd been scared to death that Tophet had done the opposite, insisted on a spell that would hurt the baby. It would have been the perfect revenge—nobody else would get hurt, nobody would even know it happened.

"I couldn't just let Sam cast that spell when I knew what would happen," Tophet continues, her voice thick with emotion, "I'd hurt you too much, and I didn't know what to do or if I should tell him, or what you'd want. I'm sorry- I just- I didn't know!"

"It's okay, Tophet. You made the right call. ...C'mere." Maybe it's hormones making her more maternal, maybe it's gratitude, or maybe it's just that there's a girl who needs it, but Dean follows her instinct to give her daughter a hug for the first time since they've met.

This is the one thing, Dean thinks as Tophet sobs in her arms, that she can trust the teen with. Whatever her feelings are towards the Winchesters themselves, Tophet will protect her future brother or sister. Even from Sam.

Dean finds her brother in the library, having a drink. She could use one, too, but she's sworn to herself to do it right this time. No booze, not one drop down her throat.

She sits on the edge of the table next to him and puts her feet on a chair. Sam already poured a glass for her. She nods once in thanks and fake a sip before setting it down on the opposite side from him to hide it.

He looks up at her, looking more grave than he has since she woke up next to him on Tophet's bed.

"I hurt her."

"Who, Tophet? ...What does that mean, you hurt her?" Part of Dean is imagining worst-case scenarios, another part assumes Sam is exaggerating his sins again.
"When Tophet found me with your body in the woods, I wouldn't let her talk, I just shouted at her."

Dean nods. He hadn't said that before, but she'd gotten the picture.

"By the time I was done yelling at her, I was so..." Sam stares at his glass like he's too ashamed to face his sister. "You were dead, and it was her fault, so I shoved every negative emotion I was feeling at her. With my mind."

Dean stiffens. The more she hears about this psychic link Sam and Tophet have, the less she likes it.

"I could never lay a finger on her," Sam continues, practically babbling, "It didn't occur to me that that could physically hurt her, but it was like I slapped her in the face."

It bothers her more to think about it than she'd have thought it would. Growing up, she never thought much of it—so what if Dad hit them once in a while when they messed up—but picturing Sam hurting their daughter, even accidentally, even without touching her, even after what Tophet did, makes Dean's skin crawl.

"Well, you obviously feel like shit about it already," she remarks, faking another sip. "Which you should. She saved your life, which is exactly what I wanted her to do, even if I don't like how she did it."

Going by the look on her brother's face, he hadn't even considered the fact that he punished their daughter for doing what Dean begged her to do. Eventually he responds.

"I just didn't want it to seem like I was hiding it from you, y'know? I fucked up and hurt our daughter. And I'm sorry."

"You apologize to her?"

"Yeah, of course, right after it happened."

"Then we're good." She makes a private decision to kick his ass if he ever so much as shouts at Tophet for obeying her again.

Picking up her glass, Dean gets off the table. She's started to memorize every sink and drain in the bunker. It's going to be a few weeks before Sam finds out, which means a lot of faked drinks.

"Hey, you didn't get a chance to ask Tophet about the spell just now, did you?" her brother asks as she turns to leave.

"I did. You were right to listen to her, so don't start being weird about sex on my account." Dean figures he'll be weird about it anyway long enough for her to forget or deal with how confused she really is over it.

Sam gives a sigh of relief that he's probably been holding for the whole day and a half since it happened.

That's over with, then. Dean gives his shoulder a squeeze before walking away.

"And?" he calls out after her.

"And what?"

"What were the side effects she was so worried about?"
"Nothing important."

"She talked me into raping you over 'nothing important'?"

"It isn't important to you. All you need to know is that you made the right choice," Dean informs him in a strict tone. "It's over."

§§§

Sam knocks on Tophet's door. It's been seventeen hours since they returned to the bunker, and seventeen hours since either he or Dean heard from their daughter.

"Tophet, can I come in?"

He doesn't hear a response, so he tries the doorknob. Unlocked, so he opens the door and slips in.

The light is off, so he leaves the door ajar just enough to be able to make out some shapes. She's face-down on the bed.

"Tophet?"

She lifts her head and looks at him, though he can't see her face properly.

"I brought you a glass of water," he says. "I'll leave it on the desk. Unless you want it over there."

"Desk is fine," she mumbles before laying her head down again.

"Can I get anything for you?"

"No."

Sam almost leaves, but he decides against it. Instead he sits on the side of the bed, near the pillows.

"I'm so sorry," he says.

"For what?"

"You lost someone you cared about."

"He was evil and used me, just like you thought. I'm glad he's dead."

"That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about when he told you the truth."

Tophet doesn't respond right away, but then she breaks down:

"It was all a lie," she sobs. "Everything. Everything he said and did, everything he gave me and taught me. He just made me sleep with him because he could. I was nothing to him once he thought you were dead."

Sam finds her hand in the dark and squeezes it, then he gingerly touches her face. From there he smooths her hair back and strokes it from the part to her neck, over and over.

"It hurts now, Tophet, and it's going to keep hurting. You can't skip it, you can't get around it. But you'll make it, I promise. It will get better."

Her only response is to cry harder. With a soft sigh, Sam leans back against the headboard. He should have seen this coming, shouldn't he? There was no way to gain Tophet as their daughter.
without her in some way losing Crowley as her father. There would be nothing resembling a happy ending for him and Dean without a painful journey on her part, just as there would never be a pleasant resolution for Tophet without them letting go.

Right now, knowing just a fraction of the grief Tophet is experiencing, Sam finds it hard to believe that this is all worth it. He never wanted to tear her away from the life she knew and loved.

"None of what you feel or why you feel it is wrong," he continues. "And whatever you need, Dean and I will be here for you."

Minutes pass without words as Sam sits with Tophet. He strokes her hair over and over, a promise that he is with her and that he loves her.

§§§

If she told Sam that she feels like nothing, would he still say it wasn't wrong?

Everything, good and bad, valuable and meaningless, that defined her life is gone. The beings she knew and cared about, the ones she hated, the possessions she owned, the loyalty of every demon in Hell, artwork she was proud of, the videos on her computer, her favorite purse, and right now even her ability to use magic and read emotions.

Without those things, she doesn't know who she is. Maybe Sam and Dean would say that she's their daughter, but that doesn't mean anything. She was Crowley's daughter until he got what he wanted.

Everything she knew is gone, and when she thinks about her new surroundings, there's only bad.

She doesn't even have a name anymore. She hates "Tophet" now, but she has no clue what she wants to be called instead. The only thing that fits is "insignificant."

In the space of minutes, her definition of "father" went from a powerful demon who insisted she prove her love by sleeping with him to an ordinary human being who wouldn't dream of touching her even if she has. That's awkward enough without adding what they had to do. She'd almost forgotten how attractive Sam is, and then she had to get up incredibly close and personal with his body.

Even when she thought he was just her uncle, she knew it wouldn't happen, but now all she can think is that the person she wants will never want her that way. It's so fucking stupid that she had to fall for him. She's stupid, and nobody is ever going to really want her.

Then there's Dean's baby that Sam probably still doesn't know about. Once he does, and once the baby is born, they're going to like it better. How could they not love it more when it's a happy accident they can raise themselves, and she's... what she is? They will have a favorite child, and it won't be her.

Although she can't imagine hurting Dean, Sam, or their unborn baby, she's still angry. What her mother did was wrong, and even if she was dealt more pain than she deserved, it's not fair that it's already over. The former Princess of Hades lost everything, while Dean has her life, her brother, and a baby on the way.

Sam is still petting her hair, which is a nice feeling. She's sensed how much he loves her. So she has that, she admits. And Dean loves her, too, deep down.

That loving family she said she was cheated out of is hers if she wants it. She's traded the material world Dean threw her into for a world where you don't have anything except family who loves you.
She got something she wanted, she admits to herself. It just cost a lot more than she thought it would, and it kills her to reward her mother for the deal she made. Dean gave her unborn daughter up for Sam's life. Why does she get to have both of them now?

After a while, the teen curls up next to Sam against the headboard. He puts an arm around her and holds her as she cries again, overwhelmed by her emotions.
When Sam finally leaves his daughter's room, it's later than he expected. Dean might already be asleep; she's been really tired lately.

And yet, he finds her awake, listening to music, which she sets aside as soon as he comes in.

"How is she?"

"About what you'd expect from a nineteen year old who's lost everything," he answers as he strips.

"You do know I'm only trusting her because you're so sure with your psychic link that she's really sorry. Like you said, she's on her own side."

"She doesn't have a side of her own anymore."

Sam tugs on a t-shirt and sweatpants, then studies his sister, who's sitting innocently on the bed in an old t-shirt, bare legs stretched out and crossed in front of her. She definitely wants some kind of attention.

"There a reason you waited up for me?" he asks. He isn't in the mood for sex but nor is he opposed to being seduced.

"I wanted to be the last woman you saw before going to sleep," she teases.

He scoffs at his sister like someone who's not nervous about her reaction if she found out that Tophet painted sigils on him while he was naked, less than an hour after he encouraged her to imply to Crowley that he'd done things with her.

"Well, it was dark in her room, so no worries," he tells her as he reclines on the bed.

"Oh, you were in her room?" She sounds like she's pretending to be a jealous girlfriend, which might have been a little funny six weeks ago, but not now.

"You're kinda weirding me out, Dean," Sam says.

"Well I'm still weirded out by seeing you kiss our daughter!" she retorts, "Like, really kiss her."

"Look, I'm sorry you had to see that, but I've explained myself to you twice now. I won't apologize for doing something that saved your life." Even as he says it, though, Sam thinks of the other, much worse thing he did to save her life and realizes upon reflection that Dean isn't troubled about the kiss.

He touches her face and strokes her cheek with his thumb.

"But that doesn't mean I'm not willing to... make up for it somehow. If there's anything I can do, Dean, just let me know," he continues. "That goes for any desperate measures I took that day."

His sister understands what he's not making her say, and actually moves closer like she wants to be held. He of course obliges.

After about a minute of peaceful cuddling, Dean speaks up.
"...Who's gonna turn off the light?"

"This is why we have a lamp next to the bed," Sam sighs, holding out his hands, one palm-up and the other above it in a fist. Dean matches the gesture.

"...One of these days, I'm gonna throw paper," she informs him five seconds later as he gently shoves her away.

"Sure you will." Sam turns on the lamp before getting under the covers. Dean flips the switch by the door and returns to the bed to join him.

A minute later, that softer light goes off too, and the siblings draw close to one another.

"Good night, Dean."

"Good night, Sammy."

Evidently, both of them lie awake in near complete darkness thinking for some time. Sam is still wide awake when Dean whispers his name.

"Sam?"

"What?"

"Let's keep it kinda PG, or PG-13 between us, until things are less weird."

"...What?"

"We can still kiss, maybe do some heavy petting, but your dick isn't gonna get any attention from me." She seems very self-satisfied.

"...What?" he repeats, confused and admittedly dismayed.

"No sex. Just for a little while. Kinda like what we had to do a few weeks back."

The idea seems more kinky to Sam than it seems like therapy or punishment, though he can imagine some unpleasant nights ahead.

"If that's what will make you feel... empowered, or avenged, or whatever, I'm all for it."

"I'll let you know the minute your sexile is over," Dean promises.

"That's not a word."

*

Late the next afternoon, Sam is surprised to find Tophet in the kitchen with a somewhat disjointed meal of graham crackers, jello, and marshmallows. Well, the marshmallows and crackers go together, he thinks, but not at room temperature.

"Dean had a feeling she should have jello on hand for you," he greets.

The girl nods in appreciation, though her expression is listless.

"I don't know how she developed Mom senses so quickly," Sam remarks. He's almost envious.

"Mind if I join you?"
She takes a second to think about it, then answers without inflection.

"Sure."

After he seats himself next to her, she nudges the plate over half an inch:

"Do you want a marshmallow?"

He takes one that looks slightly smaller than the others.

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

There is a comfortable silence between them for a couple minutes. Sam is just glad to see her up and about, let alone eating. This is the first time he's seen her out of her room since they got back.

"'Dad' is okay, right?" she asks suddenly, without looking at him. "Sometimes?"

Sam's heart beats a little faster. Pride, love, and responsibility all rolled into one syllable.

"Yes." In return, he asks, "Is 'Mia' alright?"

"Yes. Sometimes."

Sam thinks he finally knows the pride his sister has in being the only one allowed to call him Sammy.

Tophet finishes eating and pushes her plate away. She sighs, and almost seems to shrink.

"I should have listened to you," she tells him.

"About what?"

"Everything. I should have healed Dean and gone with you when you first said to. I could have gone and healed her as soon as you were in the Chamber. I still didn't listen when you told me to leave you there with Crowley."

"You didn't know."

"Because I'm an idiot," she says, breaking down.

"No, you're not an idiot," Sam tells her. He rubs her shoulder.

"You're just saying that," is the best translation of Tophet's barely intelligible response.

"I believe it. You were being a loyal daughter to a father you loved and trusted."

"But you were angry at me."

"I didn't say I approve of what you did. I'm saying I understand."

His daughter continues to cry, leaving Sam with the memory of hurting her with his mind when he was furious and devastated. In essence, he hit his own child, the person that grew inside his sister, the little thing that Dean told him: "She really likes your voice." He can't take back the psychic blow; he can't erase what he did. His daughter will always remember that he was angry and that he hurt her.
He loves her so much, but he can't seem to do anything right when it comes to her.

"It doesn't matter," Sam says suddenly. "Maybe you're right, maybe you were an idiot. I still love you. We're all human, we fuck up. Dean and I, we've both made choices that got people hurt. We stuck together and cleaned up the mess the best we could, even though we couldn't change what happened. That's all we can ask from you, and it's exactly what you did."

Tophet, although still crying, seems to take more solace from that. She leans her head against him.

§§§

After four quiet days in the bunker, the girl with no name finds herself pulled aside by her mother.

"I need you to do me a favor, Tophet," Dean says. She looks so anxious, for Dean anyway, the currently not-psychic girl can practically sense her. Maybe, she imagines, Dean is anxious because she knows her daughter owes her no favors at all, ever.

"What is it?"

"Grocery shopping. With me."

The teen blinks.

"What?"

"I'll explain once we leave."

§

As soon as they're on the road, Dean talks:

"I'm gonna give you a list and some cash, and drop you off at the store."

"Where are you going?"

"Ultrasound for the baby, and a test."

"What kind of test?"

"An amnio center... centric... amnio cent something. Checks for genetic problems. They do it for ‘older moms.’ And moms who say, 'Hey, my baby daddy's my brother, so can you double check that she'll have a mouth?'"

The girl wishes she could laugh.

"How far along are you?" she asks Dean. They haven't mentioned the pregnancy since the day they got back.

Her mother takes some time to answer.

"If Sam found out today, I'd tell him I'm ten weeks."

Which sounds like it might be a lie, the girl thinks.

"Why haven't you told him?"

"He won't want me to go through with it. He'll make me get an abortion."
That arouses a fury.

"Tell him to fuck off. Sam can't make you do anything."

"You don't understand, Tophet. I can't say no to my brother. Once I get the test results, I might- the baby might have a chance."

Her mother sounds kind of crazy, but the girl decides to go with it. Dean is very protective of what she already thinks of as her child.

"I'll help you however I can," the teen promises. "And I won't let Sam talk you into doing something you don't want to do. If you want to have that baby, you'll have that baby."

"...Why would you help me? I'm literally the worst mom you know."

"Because if a woman wants to have a baby and can, nobody should get to tell her no. Raising it is another thing, but no one is going to stop you from having that baby. I don't care what you've done. And if we have to kick Sam out of the bunker, we will."

"We won't go that far," Dean says, though her expression softens like she wants to smile.

"If you and him are so... whatever you are, why can't you ask him to let you do this? Wouldn't he do anything you asked?"

"I already called in that favor. And for the past few years I've had to watch him do every stupid, dangerous thing he could to get himself killed. He never even pretended he wasn't. Rest of the time, he acted happy, but all he wanted was to get you back, or die on the job."

"...He must have been upset when I left."

"We both were, but we weren't scared for you anymore. We knew you were going to a place where you felt safe and happy."

The girl reflects on the intense, mixed-up relationship between Sam and Dean. They know there's something wrong with them. Even now, they would choose each other over her.

It makes her wonder if there's going to be a time where she has to protect her sibling from both of their parents.

★

Having successfully purchased all the items on the shopping list, the nineteen year old is waiting outside with a number of bags when the Impala drives up.

"How was it?" she asks Dean once they're on their way back to Lebanon.

"...Fine." She seems to shudder slightly, as if fighting the urge the cry. She adds, "Results will be back in a couple weeks."

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Dean, I can tell you're not okay."

Her mother forces out a chuckle.
"You sound so much like Sam."

"Don't change the subject."

"...It's twins," she says. "Or, it was twins. I've already lost one of them."

"...Oh. I'm sorry."

"It's fine," Dean claims. "Two hours ago, I thought I was having a baby. That hasn't changed."

§§§

Dean suggests to Sam that they watch a movie. She needs something to take her mind off the little not-baby that didn't make it.

It's still in her. It will get reabsorbed by her body, they said, but right now it's still in her, and she can't even tell Sam.

Openly cuddling together, they talk throughout the movie, like they usually do, but it's hard to keep up the usual commentary when all she feels like doing is crying.

Two more weeks, and Dean will know what she's dealing with. Two more weeks, and she can tell her brother.

*

Every day, she worries Sam is going to question something she does. Being pregnant is tough to hide from someone who knows literally everything about her and her habits. Thank God they're not living in each other's pockets in motel rooms anymore.

It's only worked so far because Tophet is helping her. Thanks to their daughter, Sam has no idea that Dean is drinking juice from beer bottles and stuffing her face with veggies and Skittles (dumbest craving ever) every day.

Tophet can't hide Dean's changing shape, but as long as Sam doesn't see his sister naked, it can pass for being bloated from all the crap food she eats.

Not being seen naked is a million times easier thanks to her "punishment" for Sam. She doesn't have to pretend she suddenly lost her libido, and the way she turns away when changing clothes comes off like she's teasing him. The fun of sexually frustrating her brother more than makes up for how much she misses being with him. For now.

*

Leaning against the doorframe to the kitchen, Dean watches her brother and daughter. They haven't noticed her.

"I don't understand, Sam," Tophet is saying as she stirs something on the stove. She's an average cook, but she enjoys it enough to volunteer to make meals for the three of them every couple days; Dean figures if Tophet did still want to kill them, there are better ways of doing it than poisoning their food. "I cast my spell four days ago. The demon blood should be completely out of my system now, so why don't I have my powers back?"

Sam is leaning against the fridge, watching her.

"You may never get them back now that Crowley's dead."
The girl is quiet, like she's just heard horrible news.

"...I guess I'd get used to it."

"Most of us don't have empathic powers and we make it through life," Sam points out. Finally he notices Dean but only gives a brief nod that Tophet doesn't catch since she's turned away. "We learn who to trust, who to love, who loves us."

Neither of them say anything for a while.

"I don't know if I want to hear 'I love you' from someone whose mind I can't sense," Tophet confesses. "After hearing it from Crowley so much."

That puts Sam in an awkward position, Dean thinks. All he does is say that to her.

"I don't have to say that out loud anymore," he tells her.

"No, you can keep saying it. I know how happy it makes you."

"You shouldn't automatically put other people's happiness over your discomfort," Sam says. She looks at him.

"Are you comparing yourself to Crowley?"

"You're doing the same thing, ignoring how you feel to make someone else happy."

"Well, Dad, you aren't doing the same thing he was. You can always say 'I love you' to me. I know it's true, I've sensed it from you before."

Holy shit. Did Tophet just call him Dad? Dean gapes at the scene. Sam is smiling softly, looking at her like she's his whole world.

"Besides, I-" The girl loses her confidence and a couple seconds pass before she tells Sam shyly, "...I love you, too." She looks up at him.

As Sam takes their daughter into his arms, he glances in Dean's direction.

She's never seen her brother smile like that before, not thrilled or ecstatic but just fulfilled on the deepest level. And with a look, he's telling her something he's never told her before.

As appreciative as Sam always tried to be over the years, he never wanted a child with her; he never liked what Dean did for him even though he knew how much it meant. He didn't ask her to have a baby, but he acknowledged she did a difficult thing as a gift to him.

Now, Sam is looking at her and saying thank you, Dean.

She gives him a nod and turns away before he notices the tears rolling down her cheeks.

She gave him this. She had the daughter who grew up to stand in that kitchen and say "I love you, too." Dean hurt her brother more than anyone else ever had, but now she's made him happier and more at-peace than she's ever seen him.

This is why she has to have this baby, Dean thinks. If she could just do it right, she could make up for all the mistakes she made with Tophet. If she could make Sam happy like this again without all the pain, she can redeem herself.
Chapter End Notes

I'm running out of words related to fire.
Sitting in the library, staring at his computer screen, Sam notices... something. Not a sound, but some kind of light psychic sensation. At first it startles him. What's in the bunker?

Then he remembers what it means and he grins to himself.

*Hey!* he greets Tophet, then listens carefully.

She greets him in return and a moment later emerges from the corridor.

"How does it feel?" he asks, closing his laptop.

"Really good." She sits next to him with a little sigh. "After more than two weeks, I was really starting to think I'd never get any powers back."

"Are you a full-fledged witch again, too?"

Beaming, she cups her hands together.

*"Rosa, flore."

Sam watches as a pink rose appears to bloom in her palms.

"Is that a real flower?"

"It's just an illusion—smell it, though!"

It actually smells like a rose when he sniffs it. Amazing, he thinks. Until he met Tophet, he never considered the artistic applications of magic.

"It's beautiful."

"Thanks." His daughter is pleased with herself for impressing him; Sam in turn is proud beyond words that she values his opinion.

The flower disappears and she nods at the computer:

"What are you doing?"

He opens the lid.

"Might've found a case for me and Dean. Grave desecrations."

"What do you think it is?"

"Could be ghouls. Thing is, this article is really vague. It just says multiple grave desecrations, which could mean anything, and some sightings of the people whose graves were disturbed. Ghouls would make sense, but those sightings could be ghosts, and the desecrations salt-and-burns by another hunter. It's not too clear what order the sightings and desecrations happened."

"This Miranda Open..." Tophet squints at the screen and gives up on reading the surname of the person who wrote the article, which is Oppenheimer. "Whatever her name is, isn't a very good journalist."
Sam scoffs in agreement.

"Dean and I'll check it out. You gonna be okay on your own for a couple days?"

Tophet is very concerned about something.

"I'll be fine," she says.

"You could stay with Bobby if you don't want to be alone."

"I said I'll be fine."

"You sure?"

"I guess I'm worried about you and Dean."

He smiles.

"We can take care of ourselves. Besides, I think Dean is going stir crazy. She's been a little off lately."

"I hadn't noticed."

They fall into a comfortable silence as Sam starts typing, searching for a better source of information.

The next few weeks are going to be interesting, he reflects. He only chose to let her sense him just before she left; they haven't lived everyday life side by side with his feelings as clear to her as Dean's. There might be more to learn about what they can do.

§§§

Yup, Dean thinks as she looks at the row of exhumed, half-eaten stiffs in front of her. It's ghouls.

She and Sam, FBI partners once again, have a bullshit conversation to keep the forensics woman from asking questions. (Dean wonders, do they send the bodies back to the same coroner who took care of them the first time?) In the Midwest, they can blame everything on an imaginary group of insane liberals who sacrifice human body parts in support of Clinton and get very offended if referred to as a cult. No one ever doubts it. Election year is great.

Once they're done at the morgue, it'll be back to the motel room and out of their suits, which Dean can't wait for. Sure, the blazer hides her stomach; unfortunately, that doesn't help if she can't even get into her FBI skirt. A safety pin got the job done this morning, but she can't up and tell Sam in the middle of a job that she's pregnant.

As soon as they get back to the bunker, Dean promises herself, she'll tell him.

§

Undressing quickly, Dean gets down to a bra and pantyhose before her brother takes notice and creeps up behind her. Not that she can't tell he's there. He never actually sneaks up on her.

She's just slipped a t-shirt over her head when Sam's hands rest on her hips.

"I've been staring at your lipstick all morning," he confides. "Can't help but think of all the things that mouth can do."
Dean bites her lip. She misses being with him, and she's so hormonal these days she doesn't know how to say no. All she can think about is his hands, his fingers, his tongue, his body rocking into hers... Fuck.

She can't. If he gets a good look at her, there's no way she can pass it off as just getting fat.

"Or... I could help you out of your stockings," Sam suggests, which is unusual. He never presses when she's hesitant. The fact that he's even trying to initiate something right now is surprising. Son of a bitch, how badly does he want her if he's breaking his own rules?

"We're in the middle of a case, Sam," Dean says.

His hands are gone instantly, though she can practically feel his eyes ravishing her as she puts some distance between them. It makes her tingly.

She also gets the distinct feeling that her brother is about to try to have a talk with her. She might want to change her answer about the sex.

Right on schedule, Sam starts talking:

"You've been hiding your body from me lately," he comments as he resumes undressing. "You used to be fine walking around after a shower without a towel—hell, you did that before you got transformed—and now you turn away to change your shirt."

"I don't want to remind you of what you're missing."

He's definitely not satisfied with that answer.

"If this was about what I did-"

"It's not. I know you can handle naked me without getting turned on, but I didn't want to make things harder for you."

She thought that, especially the pun, would shut him down, but the pause before he responds was just him thinking.

"Are you trying to hide the fact that you've gained weight?" Sam asks.

 Fuck, fuck, fuck is the mantra in Dean's head as she struggles into her jeans.

"What's it to you?" she asks.

"Nothing, except that you're being weird about it."

Time to pull the bitch card:

"Why shouldn't I be weird about it when you spend hours every day with someone who's younger, girlier, has hair you like better, and, uh, oh yeah, is into you?"

Sam actually looks pissed.

"Are you kidding me? 'Cause it's kind of insulting that you seriously think our daughter is some kind of a threat to you, or to us. God knows we're both going to Hell for it, but I will never want anyone but you, let alone a nineteen year old girl. What I want to fuck or make love with isn't what I see, it's you."

"You wanted me before you really felt like I was me," Dean argues. Even though she doesn't really believe Tophet could steal Sam, it feels kind of good to listen to her brother refute it. "Hell, you wanted me when you didn't even have a soul."

"That's how this started, sure, but if you were forced back into your old body now, I'd still want you. You really think that you being heavier would make me want to go back to being a normal brother and sister?"

It strikes Dean then that her brother trusts her so completely that he isn't even asking if she's pregnant even though it would make all the sense in the world. Because she'd never hide something like that from him, right?

She blinks away tears. She can't cry in front of him, but Sam is too good for a sister with as many insecurities as her, playing the jealous girlfriend when she's half the reason Tophet spends so much time with him anyway. She doesn't deserve someone who reassures her with exactly the words she wants to hear when she's lying to him every day.

"I'm sorry, Sam," she tells him before giving him a kiss.

He seems confused by how easily Dean changed her tune, but kisses her back with more affection than she's got any right to.

When they pull apart, Dean forces herself back into tough older sister mode:

"Let's hunt some ghouls."

§§§

As soon as the requested ten minutes of keeping her father occupied was over, the nineteen year old girl tracked down Dean.

"What did they tell you?" she asked, pretending she couldn't sense her mother's joy.

"It all looks great," she said with a smile, "She's awesome."

"It's a girl?"

Dean nodded excitedly.

"So... does this mean you can tell Sam?"

Her mother lost some of her cheerfulness, but remained optimistic.

"Soon. Could be tonight, maybe tomorrow."

"What should I say after you tell him?" the teen wondered. "Should I pretend I didn't know?"

"No, just leave out the parts where I already went to the doctor."

"Got it. ...I'm happy for you, Dean."

As the young witch walked away, she lost her smile. After what she had done, how could Sam and Dean not love their perfect, innocent baby girl more than they loved her?

§§§
All of the ghouls are dead, Dean lost a chunk of her forearm, and Sam has some nasty bruises along with a possible concussion.

"Let's take a look at that bite," he says after they burst into the motel room, as if Dean was going to ignore the bloody mess that is her left arm.

"It's not that bad, Sammy," she insists as she gets her jacket and flannel off. Then she looks at it.

Shit. That's gonna leave a scar.

"Just pour some whiskey on it and sew my arm back together," she instructs, limping over to the bathroom sink. She's gonna have a huge bruise on her hip and thigh tomorrow, too.

She leans against the counter and rests her forearm over the basin. Some flesh is actually missing. Sam can't stitch it closed without fucking up the rest of her arm.

"Now would be a great time to use that sexy healing spell," she points out when he comes in with bandages and hard liquor.

"We'll have to get it from Tophet when we get back to the bunker," he answers, oddly gruff.

"...And basically announce to her that we're gonna fuck," Dean realizes.

She winces as her brother cleans the wound, first with water and then whiskey. Then he gives her a couple stitches near the edges of the bite, which makes her grunt in pain.

"Sorry, here," he says absently, offering her the bottle of liquor as he turns to their collection of bandages.

Dean accepts it automatically, ready to pretend to take a swig. Then she hesitates.

There were way more ghouls than the two or three they expected; she got knocked around a lot. Coming clean while her brother is still administering first aid is weird, but what if something happened to the baby? The only way her timing could be worse is if she starts hemorrhaging and then says, "Hey man, I might be having a miscarriage. By the way, I've got a bun in the oven."

So, it's time. The job's over, isn't it?

She places the bottle on the counter.

"I can't."

Sam looks up. She never refuses whiskey when there's pain involved.

"What does that mean, you can't?"

"I shouldn't."

For a couple seconds, Dean can see the wheels turning in his head. Then the pondering stops, only to be replaced with complete, blank denial.

"You can't be pregnant," Sam states uncertainly.

"Why not?"

"The implant is supposed to be good for like ten years..." he tries.
"Well, it wasn't."

Shoulders slouching, her brother turns his attention back to her wound. He isn't looking at her anymore, but in the mirror above the sink Dean sees an expression of defeat.

Taking a deep breath, she psychs herself up. What she's about to tell Sam will hurt, but she needs to give this baby every chance for life—a normal life.

"It's not yours," she professes.

He looks up again. It's a hurt expression she hasn't seen in a long time, the quiet flick of his eyes that gives him away when words pierce just a little deeper than he was ready for.

"What?"

"I'm twelve weeks pregnant."

That's all she needs to say. Sam is smart. He knows exactly what that means—conception took place ten weeks ago. He knows what she did ten weeks ago. What her brother can't know, or at least won't remember, is exactly what the two of them did or didn't do together ten weeks ago.

It only takes a second or two for Sam to go through that thought process.

"Right," he scoffs in resignation. He reaches for the gauze.

"I'm sorry," Dean says. She means it; she wishes she could tell him different.

"You weren't in a good place at the time," he reminds her in a monotone. "You don't need to apologize again."

It was supposed to be a relief when she told Sam; it isn't. Dean presses her lips together to stop herself from taking it back and telling him it's his daughter.

"You can't be twelve weeks along accidentally," Sam remarks, carefully laying gauze over her arm. "What's your plan?"

"Give her—uh, him or her—up. I wanna do right by this kid."

"Okay." He won't look at her as he finishes bandaging her up, tying it tightly.

"...'Okay'? That's all you've got to say to this?"

"What am I supposed to say? Not my baby, not my body, not my business." Finished with his medical duties, Sam leaves his sister alone in the cramped bathroom.

Dean does her absolute best not to cry.
The nineteen year old stands in front of the small mirror in her room. She feels stupid, even though there's no one around to hear her.

"Mia," she says. "My name... is Mia."

It doesn't sound horrible, she decides, but does she even look like a Mia? When she was Tophet, she was unique, a little exotic even. It felt like an excuse for having a weird eye and weird dietary restrictions. If she's Mia, she's...

Well, she's not nothing anymore. She has a clean slate. She can ask herself, who is Mia?

Mia can still tell a ten year old who's secretly embarrassed about their new haircut that it looks great. Mia will never be able to afford another pair of limited edition Manolos. Mia has no friends to impress with designer shoes. Mia can invent magic spells. Mia will always keep her word, like she was raised to. Mia won't let anyone use her like Crowley did. Mia's biological parents are still together. Mia has made mistakes and will make more mistakes. Mia's just like anybody else. Actually, Mia is a freak because she's a cross-eyed phenylketonuric psychic witch.

Mia was named before she was even born by two people who love her. It's a simple, pretty name that means mine.

Mia thinks it could work.

"Mia... Winchester," she says in the mirror.

Is she really one of them? She doesn't feel like a Winchester. Maybe she'll just try to settle on her first name for now.

"My name is Mia," she tries again, like she's introducing herself.

It's starting to feel right. She smiles at her reflection.

§§§

Sam steps out of the motel room and closes the door behind him. He just needs to put some space between himself and what he just learned.

He is not upset.

Why would he be upset? Dean didn't do this on purpose.

He is not upset.

It's none of his business whose child Dean has. Her womb is hers; he doesn't have dibs or veto power.
He is not upset.

He doesn't want Dean to have his kids anyway. Why refuse to father a child and then take issue when she has someone else's?

With no clue of how long he's been walking or even in what direction, Sam sits on a park bench in the moonlight, resting his head in his hands.

He is very upset.

He should have known. He's seen his sister's middle growing over the past weeks, she never bitched about getting her period, there were little changes in her behavior—he couldn't possibly mistake the signs. But he was in complete denial.

How incredibly obtuse he was isn't all that distressing, however. That Dean's hidden this from him isn't the problem. He doesn't even care what changes he'll have to make in his life to accommodate and support his sister in the coming months—they're miniscule in comparison to what she's about to do.

What troubles him is that six years ago, Dean didn't know what she was getting into when she chose to devote her body to creating a small human being. She knew it wouldn't be fun, but she did it as a gift to Sam and their family as a whole. She's told him that she kept Tophet because she was his. She wanted to give him a legacy, because he deserved it.

This time, she knows what she's getting into, and she knows she'll hate it. This time, she's giving someone else the exact same gift she tried to give him.

This time, Sam won't lie to himself: he does not want Dean to have this baby.

*

Some hours later, when the sun is almost up, Sam wanders back to the motel.

Outside room number 14, he checks his pockets for the key, but finds none.

He knocks on the door sheepishly.

"D-"

The door flies open before he gets the word out.

"Where've you been?" his sister demands.

"Just needed some air," he tells her, shouldering past.

Dean closes the door firmly and locks it.

"That was a lot of air."

"That was some big news." He shrugs off his jacket and then realizes he's kind of gross all over. He was killing monsters last night. He should shower.

"Sam, if you don't like this..."

"I never said that."
"Could've fooled me. You find out I've been knocked up and walk out like I kicked your favorite puppy."

"I was just- processing it," he tells her, taking off his boots. "...How long have you known?"

"When I went in for those blood tests a couple weeks after it happened, one of them was for pregnancy."

"So you've been hiding this for almost two months?" he asks, unable to hide the slightest tremble in his voice.

Dean's voice isn't much stronger:

"I didn't know how to tell you."

Sam admits to himself that if he got someone pregnant under similar circumstances, he might never tell his sister.

"And you're positive it's not mine?"

Without the slightest hesitation, she replies:

"They could tell how far along I was because of hormone levels or something like that. You hadn't actually fucked me for a little while before I went off and... you know."

"That was months ago, Dean, how can you remember?"

"At the time I only had to think back like three weeks. Tophet was still with us, we hardly did anything."

She's right, Sam reflects. But he has to be sure.

"We should have a test done."

"Are we on Maury?" Dean groans. She looks him in the eye: "Trust me, Sam. You are not the father."

The words sting; he has to look away. His sister, his partner in everything, is bringing life into the world that he had no part in creating beyond pushing her into the arms of the man who impregnated her. If he had just kept his mouth shut...

He steps into the bathroom—it seems like so long ago that he was standing there cleaning up Dean's arm—and turns on the water.

She follows.

"Sam, if you've got a problem with this, spit it out."

"I don't. You're saying it isn't mine, so, like I said, it isn't my business." He takes off the rest of his clothes and tests the temperature of the shower. Still too cold, even for him. He changes the subject while waiting for the water to warm up: "You were barely showing when you were twelve weeks the first time."

"And?"

"You have been for a few weeks now." Which of course was the real reason Dean was trying to
hide her weight gain. She was never really worried about Sam losing interest in her, which makes him angrier that she tried to drag their daughter into it, as if she were competition. He could never see Tophet that way. Even if she is technically an adult, nineteen is practically a child in his eyes.

"Things are different the second time around," she explains.

Sam nods, too weary to question it, though that thought echoes in his mind as he steps into the tiny shower stall: the second time.

What she's telling him about how she got pregnant is an awful lot like the lie she told him about Tophet at first. Just a one-time hookup, no need to tell the dad.

What if Dean's lying again? What if...? She isn't lying about being with someone. She isn't lying about them not doing much together around then.

She could be lying about being absolutely certain they didn't do anything around that time that could get her pregnant. Sam is fairly sure she's right, but after three years in the bunker it's easy to forget things like that, even when their trysts were all the more memorable for their desperate secrecy at the time.

He shoves the thought away as he closes the shower curtain. He can't get his hopes-

Sam does a mental double take. What is he thinking? He doesn't want to be a father again. Definitely not with his sister. It's a good thing if the baby isn't his.

Besides, if Dean is willing to be the mother of some other man's child, apparently having Mia wasn't as special as she made it sound. Some other man whose name Dean's probably forgotten, some stranger she only slept with because she wanted to be hurt—now she's giving him a child just like she meant to do for Sam six years ago.

§§§

Mia looks at her phone, wondering if she should text Sam. He called to let her know that he and Dean killed the ghouls last night and are on their way home now. He sounded fine, but the call was barely twenty seconds, so he must not be feeling very talkative. Reaching out to him when the Winchesters will be back in less than six hours isn't worth the literal headache of texting.

Besides, talking to her father about what name she wants to be called is one of those things to do in person.

So is talking about how much she misses Daddy. Well, no. Daddy wasn't real. She misses a character that Crowley played.

She wonders if she'd be happier with that fake life, though. If she'd done things differently, she could have saved her parents' lives and still lived with Crowley, and Crowley would have kept pretending to care about her, without demanding sex almost every day.

It seems like the right thing for the demon to be gone and her to be with people that really, truly love her, but the right thing hurts a lot. The longest Mia has gone without crying since it happened is about two and a half days. That streak broke the night before last, her first night alone in the bunker.

She needs to keep busy, she thinks. Dean didn't think it was good for her to be left alone, and Mia is wondering if she was right. It's lonely and kind of boring without Sam and Dean, even after being
left with a Netflix-watching assignment of the first six Star Trek movies.

Or maybe things just seem boring compared to what's going to happen when Sam and Dean come back: the truth. Dean said she'd finally tell Sam about the baby when they came back from this hunt. She's nervous about it, but won't let herself even think about why near Mia.

It doesn't make much sense to be nervous about Sam's reaction. He's filled with joy and pride every time he hears "Dad," so why wouldn't he be happy about this?

* *

In the war room, Mia senses her parents a couple seconds before the heavy door opens above her.

Neither of them are in good moods. Dean is just plain down, and Sam is... bitter more than anything else, but it's swirled with hurt, jealousy, betrayal, anger, and wistfulness.

If Mia had to guess what happened, she'd say the pregnancy reveal was premature (Dean would like that one) and Sam is extremely displeased about being kept in the dark for so long.

"Welcome back!" she greets as soon as they're through the door. She abandons the laptop she'd been using and meets them at the bottom of the stairs.

Seeing her makes them both smile, but Sam blocks her out once the joy of her greeting is over. She's taken aback, though it doesn't stop her from hugging him.

Her mother, feeling insecure, secretly wants a hug too, though pretends to be grumpy about it when she gets one. The support Dean is used to having isn't there—the support of her brother.

"I'm glad you're both okay," Mia tells them when she pulls away.

"Actually, Dean's arm is in pretty bad shape," Sam gestures. "Think you can help?"

"Sure, what's the injury exactly?"

"Couldn't you just show us those sigils from that healing spell Sam used before?" her mother cuts in.

"...You mean the one I made up?"

"Hang on, you made up that spell? The one where he healed me with his dick?"

"Yes, uh, sort of." It's a lot more awkward discussing sex magic when the two of them are standing there, Dean openly longing for the man standing next to her. And mentioning specific body parts. Mia feels her face going red.

Sam protests:

"I'm tired, Dean. It'll be a lot faster for Tophet to heal your arm right now."

He walks away with the duffle bag, Dean's eyes following him.

"He's right, I can just heal your arm right now. I have my powers back now, so..."

Mia waits for Dean to realize that means she should stop thinking about her brother the way she is currently thinking about him.

"Nah, just gimme that spell. He really needs to get laid."
The witch stares at her mother.

"I'm pretty sure that isn't why he's upset."

"Yeah, well, he'll be less upset after I give him a good time."

With a sigh, Mia gets her notebook and tears out a fresh page.

"So what happened?" she asks as she finds a pen and starts drawing the rough outline of a body.

"Ghoul bit my arm."

"You know that's not what I meant."

"...I told Sam the truth."

"And?"

"He says he's fine with it. Doesn't seem too happy, though."

"Maybe I should talk to him."

"You don't need to do that," Dean tells her a little too quickly. What she actually means, Mia senses, is something closer to "please do not talk to Sam about it because you'll learn something I don't want you to know."

Instead of arguing, Mia finishes drawing the sigils and then writes the spell itself on the back of the page. Sam will remember the rest of what they need to do to work the spell.

"Good luck," she tells her mother as she hands her the paper.

"Thanks, we're gonna need it to read your handwriting," Dean says, squinting at the messy Latin.
"Good morning."

"...Morning." Sam greets his daughter.

It's early, just hours since Sam and Dean came back. Mia isn't sure why she took an alternate route to the kitchen this morning, but maybe it had to do with Sam.

She glances at her father as she accompanies him through the bunker. His mind is open—there's not a whole lot to sense right now other than "wants coffee"—but she can't tell if Dean was successful in... whatever she tried to do. Wait, Sam had a scratch on his face last night. It's gone now.

He looks back at her, having picked up that she's wondering about it.

"Dean guilted me into it, since you didn't heal her arm."

"She didn't want me to, and she didn't make you do anything."

Although Sam agrees—he's glad he slept with her—he feels manipulated.

"So you're like a mother-daughter tag team now?"

Mia guesses that he also found out about her helping Dean for the past two weeks.

"...We have a couple things in common."

They really do, Sam thinks, then he's disgusted with himself for letting his mind go wherever it went.

Mia ignores it. Neither of them know what to do with the information that Sam absolutely did notice whether she was any good at kissing, other than try to forget it.

Uncomfortable, he clears his throat before continuing the conversation:

"So, how did you find out Dean was pregnant?"

This is a test. Her father already knows the answer, or has an answer. He just wants to hear it from her. So she stops in the corridor and faces him.

"Well, remember when she got pushed down the stairs?"

He nods.

"She was worried about... something very precious inside her. The only thing that made sense was a baby, so after I put you to sleep with that spell, I asked."

Apparently that's what Dean told him, since the answer satisfies Sam. He then states:

"And you've been helping her hide the fact that she's pregnant ever since." Surprisingly, he doesn't seem angry about that. Instead he is in quiet despair. The idea of Dean having a baby gives him almost the same feeling people get when they watch a natural disaster destroy a building.

"She seemed to think you would want her to have an abortion," Mia says. "Against her will."

Sam thinks that would make sense if it was his.
"Wait, what?!" Mia exclaims.

He blocks her from sensing his mind, but the damage is done. Dean was horrifically right to be afraid, meanwhile Sam clearly believes that the child is not his.

Which is so absurd, Mia laughs a little.

"How can it not be yours?"

Giving her a pained look, Sam lets Mia sense his emotions again. For the first time, he's choosing not to use words even though there's no reason to keep their conversation silent.

Something that used to be his and only his has been given to someone else.

Mia doesn't think before responding:

"Sam, when you're an empath, you can pick out potential cheaters. Dean is not one. Whatever you are to each other, she takes it seriously, and if she's trying to tell you she went and slept with someone else, she's lying."

"Dean isn't lying about what she did," Sam informs her. He adds awkwardly, "But you're right. It wasn't... like that."

It dawns on Mia then that if Dean is lying about something, anything, it might be to protect the baby. She should focus on Sam, lead his thoughts away from the pregnancy. Don't undo her mother's work.

"I'm a little confused, Sam. If it wasn't 'like that,' why do you feel like she cheated on you?"

"I don't know," he says, which is a complete lie. He just doesn't want to talk about it. "I've forgiven her for what she did. It's my fault she did it, anyway."

"It can't possibly be your fault if she did something of her own free will. It was her choice, and whoever she was with."

Sam absolutely hates whoever that person is. They... mishandled his sister. It's not that Dean belongs to him, but that she's sacred in his eyes.

Even if Dean did sleep around, Mia realizes, Sam wouldn't mind much as long as she was with people who respected her. His issues have nothing to do with her cheating on him and everything to do with his future niece. Or daughter. Having sensed how her mother feels about the baby, just a few times, Mia can't believe it isn't Sam's.

He picks up on her doubt.

"This is really none of your business, but if Dean's as far along as she says she is, I don't see how it could be mine," Sam says. "She's positive it isn't."

"But you're not sure."

"If there was a way I could find out without her knowing..." Sam has an idea. "What about a spell? There's gotta be some kind of magical paternity test out there."

"Why can't you just tell her you're not sure and get a real paternity test?"

"Because she won't agree to it. Besides, we don't need the trouble if the wrong person finds out I am
the dad and calls the cops. We liked being able to show our faces in a small town."

"Why? There's like 300 people in Lebanon. The road this bunker is on is literally called Aa Road!"

Sam resists the urge to correct her with the actual population. Instead he presses:

"What about some kind of... divination spell that tells me how many children I have?"

"It might not work on an unborn baby. You might get the wrong answer, like a..."

"False negative?"

"Yeah. Magic and pregnancy don't mix well," Mia informs her father. She won't repeat what her grandmother once told her about the Men of Letters being responsible for the loss of hundreds of spells relating to reproductive health.

"So I've heard." Apparently Sam has also learned why Mia insisted he use sex magic on his unconscious sister.

"I wanted to tell you. I'm sorry I had to keep you in the dark."

"Don't be," he says. "I would've made a choice for Dean that she couldn't forgive."

Mia looks at her father coldly.

"You really would have ended a pregnancy because you didn't want to get your hands dirty?"

"I didn't know Dean wanted to have a baby so badly."

There, Mia thinks. Cheating isn't what's making him bitter and jealous. It's what Dean is choosing to do now.

"If you don't like that it's someone else's, why don't you give her a baby?"

"I did. Then she gave you to a demon."

Mia narrows her eyes at him.

"You call what you did 'giving her a baby'?"

Stricken, Sam takes half a step back. They've never talked about this, not once, since Mia learned the truth. She didn't think they had to. They already knew how they felt about it and each other.

"No, that's not-" He can't defend himself, but finally he explains, "The last couple months Dean was pregnant, we agreed not to care about how it happened. We just loved you. It's surprising to Mia how helpless Sam feels about it. He loves his daughter the same way his body breathes air.

"I shouldn't have brought it up," she apologizes. "...Dad."

"No, we had to talk about it sooner or later. I thought it would happen the day Dean told you her side of it."

"Is your side different?"

Sam thinks it's way too early to be having this conversation, but he finds an answer for her anyway.

"You know how much I love you, right?"
She nods.

"The person who hurt Dean wasn't capable of love. But don't make the mistake of thinking I'm not him."

Mia looks up at her father. She's seen him in his most vulnerable state, but she's also watched him kill monsters, seen him resolved to commit evil, and even been hurt by his anger.

"I won't," she says.

§§§

Dean wakes up alone, but too satisfied to care. She convinced Sam to use the sex magic-based healing spell last night and afterwards he was in a much better mood. She admitted why Tophet made him use that spell in the first place, and he at least pretended to take it well.

When she drags herself from the nice warm bed, she decides to steal one of her brother's shirts for the morning. She has to roll up the sleeves a couple times, but the flannel is cozy and it smells like Sam.

As she approaches the kitchen, she reminds herself not to have coffee. There was no way to avoid drinking it before without Sam getting suspicious, but now she can openly cut down. They have tea somewhere in the kitchen; she'll try that instead.

She hears Sam and Tophet talking in the kitchen as she approaches. She also smells coffee, which completely erases all of her resolve.

"Hey," is how Sam usually says good morning, so Dean is relieved to hear it now. He might be open to showering together later...

Wait, she thinks, Tophet has her powers back. That means... oh well, she doesn't care. It's been way too long for her and Sam. Tophet is just going to have to accept that her parents have a love life.

Dean stares at the coffee pot, and carefully fills a mug exactly halfway.

"Cutting down?" Sam asks after watching her put distance between herself and the coffee machine.

"The baby doesn't have to come out with a caffeine dependency," Dean answers. It's depressing to see how little coffee there is after two sips.

Tophet looks at Sam with some concern, as if she heard him say something unsettling.

He pauses what he was doing, and seems to be concentrating.

They're talking, Dean thinks, with their minds. It's creepy to think that they can just beam thoughts into each other's heads.

"Something you two want to share with the class?" she asks.

"No," Sam answers, sounding grumpy.

Dean wonders if Tophet is going to switch sides when she finds out that Dean cheated. Sam said he'd tell her, which means she'll hear the more sympathetic version of the truth, but there's no changing what Dean did.
"Where's Sam?"

"Dunno, haven't seen him," Dean tells her daughter. She was hoping to seduce him again this afternoon, since the shower plans didn't work out.

"I need to ask you something," Tophet says.

"Yeah?"

"The baby. Who's the father?"

"...Sam told you, huh?"

"Is it true?"

"I fucked up, Tophet. And believe me, until I found out I was pregnant it wasn't worth it."

"...If that baby isn't Sam's, why do you feel the way you do about her?"

Dean stares at her daughter coldly.

"You, the psychic girl, have to ask? When you know exactly how I feel about you, and why?"

Rebuked, Tophet accepts that answer. She knows that Dean loves her because she just does. Being Sam's is just a bonus.

"Look," Dean continues, "I might have to lie to Sam about this baby, and then I might have to lie again later, and I can't have him getting the truth from you, even accidentally. If you want to help me, don't ask who the father is."

"You can't play with his emotions like that."

"If I have to, I will."

"You don't have to. He can't make you do anything."

No, he can't, Dean thinks, but all Sam has to do is ask.

§§§

It isn't until evening that the teen gets a chance to talk to both Sam and Dean about her new name.

She stands in front of them in the library and opens plainly:

"I've decided I don't want to be called Tophet anymore."

Both of her parents are pleased, though they also feel bad for her. They know why she's rejecting it.

"Do you have another name in mind?" Dean asks.

"If it's alright with you," she says, looking at both of them in turn but focusing on Sam, "I'm going to try out Mia, first."

Sam just wordlessly gets up and gives her a hug. He's too overwhelmed to speak. The name was his idea, and he's just so happy to think of calling her that all the time.

She hugs him back, but she can sense Dean still sitting at the table, upset. That's someone else's name
in her mother's mind, someone Dean has mourned.

But she doesn't say anything. When Sam pulls away and looks at his sister, Dean just nods. She won't ruin this for him.

"Mia," she agrees.

Well, if it makes Sam happy while reminding Dean of what she gave up, it might be the perfect name, the girl thinks. She thought maybe Sam wouldn't want anyone else calling her Mia, but he doesn't mind sharing it. It didn't occur to her that Dean thinks of "Mia" as her lost baby girl and Tophet as someone else.

Well, she is that lost baby girl. Dean has to accept that.

* 

The days roll by. Things are uneasy, but stable.

Mia watches her parents expertly pretend that things are fine while Sam is unhappy and Dean knows it. In actions and words he supports her, but in thoughts he's resentful.

She even catches him wondering if he's going to make it another six months. She isn't sure what that means but she keeps an eye on him, hoping she'll notice him approaching whatever breaking point he's worried about.

Mia still grieves for the things she thought she had. She misses the things she was familiar with, even though she realizes how shallow it all was. She's started to miss things and people from her childhood, like Leatherdale, a demon who disappeared when she was little. She remembers how fun he was to be around.

She doesn't go into those details with Sam. He can sympathize over losing a father she loved, but she senses how much he hates that she grew up surrounded by demons.

Sam starts to check in on her every night. He must remember Mia telling him that's what Crowley did. It's just like when she was a kid, when her supposed father would ask how her day was, even if they'd spent hours together already, and she had a chance to talk about anything she needed or wanted to. The difference is that now she can sense her father's emotions. He means every word he says to her, even when he isn't sure if they're the right ones. When she cries because sometimes everything hurts again, he holds her.

And Sam never asks for anything in return. Being trusted and given the chance to comfort her is enough. Being called "Dad" every once in a while is enough. Calling her Mia—*mine*—is enough.

* 

There is one bittersweet moment that makes Mia feel like she's home, for a few minutes.

She senses Sam and Dean together in Sam's room—it's just the TV room, actually, but she still thinks of it as his bedroom. They're focused on whatever movie or show is playing, but they're so relaxed and close, Mia wonders if they're about to make love.

No, she realizes, it's that Dean is feeling vulnerable and taking comfort in her brother's presence, and Sam is feeling like a protector. It's not at all sexual.

He senses her, and sends a dim acknowledgement before turning his attention back to the television.
Mia pokes her head into the room and sees roughly what she pictured—Dean snuggling up against Sam, his arm around her shoulders. She's never done that in front of Mia before.

Dean is embarrassed to be seen in what she considers a compromising position, but she decides there's no point in pretending she wasn't doing it. She accepts that Mia knows she sometimes wants to be the smaller, weaker one.

Sam is a little concerned about how Dean will feel, but he's not bothered by Mia's presence.

"...Mind if I join you?"

Sam looks down at his sister to check with her.

Dean is good with it, so Mia sits on the other side of Sam.

Her parents are happy to have her there. Sam thinks it's one of the nicest feelings in the world to have Dean cuddling with him and Mia leaning against his shoulder.

Dean feels fulfilled, like this combination of relaxing in front of the TV with her brother, daughter, and unborn child is everything she wants. She wouldn't change a thing about this.

Mia realizes then that she would. She doesn't know what she would change, but in this moment where her parents are perfectly happy, she is not.

§§§

Sighing in contentment, Sam lets his eyes wander over Dean's body. It's been one of those mornings where he cannot believe how lucky he is to wake up next to his favorite person in the world, who is desperately hormonal and eager for sex these days.

When her mouth is on him, or when she's screaming his name in pleasure, Sam likes that his sister is in the second trimester. Once it's over, and she's relaxing in his arms or lying there looking perfect, the anger creeps back again. He hates what Dean is doing, he hates the baby, and he hates himself for having such negative feelings towards something that doesn't even qualify as a baby yet.

Part of him wonders if this is anger he didn't let himself have about Mia. He can barely remember what it was like not to love her, but there was a time he didn't. There was a time that Dean asked for his support, after he knew the truth, and he told her no. There was a time that the one thing stopping him from begging her to get an abortion was the fact that she was a rape victim. When he fell irrevocably in love with his daughter, the pain of seeing his sister pregnant and remembering what happened didn't just vanish. Maybe it's been waiting all these years for a chance to be acknowledged.

He can't express it. He can't let it out. All he can do is acknowledge it to himself.

It makes him feel a little better to say it to himself, that yes he's upset but he isn't going to act on it. All he has to do is pretend he's happy for Dean for the next five months or so.

It's a daunting task, but he's taking it one day at a time.

It's pretty easy when they're together like this. Sam can tug her close and run his hand over her skin, let it rest over her belly as if he treasures the baby.

He does it now, but to his surprise, Dean nudges his hand away. She normally likes it when he does that.
He doesn't put much thought into it, but then he remembers that he didn't put much thought into other little things Dean was doing differently, things that he should have realized meant she was hiding a pregnancy.

So what does it mean that she doesn't want his hand there? If the baby was kicking, she would want him to feel it.

Of course, if he did feel the baby kicking now, at sixteen weeks, that would be very noteworthy considering he couldn't feel Mia at all when she was sixteen weeks.

Suspicious, he moves his hand back to the gentle curve of Dean's womb. What if...?

He closes his eyes and waits. His sister seems tense, like she knows what going through his head.

There's nothing. He's just paranoid, Sam tells himself. Somehow, he's both absolutely terrified at the thought of Dean being pregnant with his child, and obsessed with the idea. If he wasn't so afraid, didn't have so many misgivings, he would love to give his sister a child that they chose to create, together. He thinks about it more with every day that passes, but he always talks himself out of saying anything. They can't have a child together.

"I need to mail something today," Mia says as a greeting one morning when she walks into the kitchen.

"One of us can drive you into town in a bit," Sam replies. "What is it?"

"I've decided to start making good luck charms and talismans and selling them online to make a little money. I can't just freeload off you guys forever," she shrugs.

"You're only freeload off the credit card companies and drunk guys who got hustled," Dean puts in. "Besides, after all the money we saved not buying you baby clothes and a thousand dollar prom dress, you can stay here forever rent-free."

Mia cackles, but Sam wonders if there's more she isn't telling them.

"Can you check that I copied the address right?" Mia asks, giving Sam the parcel and her phone.

She did copy it correctly, though with not the best penmanship. What Sam notices however is the return address. The name paired with their P.O. box in Lebanon isn't Mia Winchester. It's Mia MacLeod.

If Sam had any doubts about why Mia really wants to have her own income, they're gone now. Sooner or later, she's going to leave and have her own life, away from them.

Safe from them, he tells himself.
So it's been a while, and I'll be honest, my interest in a story that I've been working on for 3 years is petering out. I'm just gonna wrap up the story within a couple chapters and get 'er done. Better a rushed ending than no ending, eh?

Content warning for a lot of abortion discussion.

If there's one thing Sam wishes would stop happening, it's working a job with Dean that gets complicated and somehow ends up being painfully relevant to their own personal conflicts, or worse, exacerbates them.

Right now, it's the latter.

* *

At first the job seemed suspiciously similar to the string of suicides they ran into back when some girl summoned Veritas, the Goddess of Truth, but Sam tested it by asking aloud for the truth and Dean was still able to lie to him, so they ruled that particular deity out.

Every job is different, but there is a formula to most of them, even the ones that get personal. This one has gone off-book—it was only after the witch indirectly responsible for the suicides was dead that the trouble started.

Sam didn't know that he'd been cursed to tell only the truth when he answered the phone. He didn't mean to tell the local police chief that he and his sister were impersonating FBI, or that they just killed a witch, or where they were currently located.

The ensuing mad dash out of town included Dean interrogating him to determine exactly what the magic was doing to him. The exchange wasn't too serious, until the subject changed to the intimate aspects of their relationship. Although Sam never considered it a secret, he certainly didn't mean to tell Dean outright that her being pregnant is a huge turn-on. Even if the baby probably isn't his.

* *

Dean slams the brakes on the banter when she hears that.

"'Probably' isn't yours? There's no probably or maybe here, Sam. It isn't."

"I don't think you know for sure. You're telling me it's not mine so I won't interfere, but you don't really know."

"Why didn't you say anything?"

"Because as much as I hate this, knowing the truth would probably be worse."

"You hate this?"
"You're carrying another man's child, Dean. Of course I hate it."

"She's still your niece."

"I know. Why do you think I've been pretending to be happy for you? Why do you think I've been hiding how angry this makes me?"

"...Sam, is there something you wanna say?"

"No, there's nothing I want to say."

"Okay, what-"

"Whatever you're about to ask, Dean, you'll wish you didn't," Sam warns.

That keeps her quiet for almost three whole minutes that feel like an eternity.

"Look, you're my brother, but you're also..." She gives up on finding the right word. "What we are, what we do, I love it. Waking up next to you, doing the work... We're partners. Having a kid isn't the kind of thing you let me do because I'm a big girl who can make her own choices. I should've told you right away, we should've talked about it."

"Yeah, you should've told me!"

"We're talking now.""

"I don't want to have this conversation now."

"Because you have to be honest?"

"...Yes."

"Oh, we're having this conversation now, Sammy."

"Okay. You're pregnant, you say it's not mine. In what universe am I supposed to not be jealous and hurt?"

"Jealous?"

"Every part of you belongs to me. You don't need my permission to sleep around as long as you're safe, but having a baby is nine months of giving yourself to another living thing, nine months of sacrifice to give another human being life. You cannot devote yourself to another man's child when you haven't even apologizing for fucking up our daughter's entire life. You don't get to give a complete stranger what you failed to give me."

He watches Dean's face. She's blinking away tears as she concentrates on the road ahead of them. Sam continues:

"I never wanted you or anyone else to know I felt that way. It's just, I see what you're doing, and I don't understand why. You had Mia because you'd been hurt and needed to make a choice with your life, but more than that, you had her- well, I thought-" He can't continue, between strong emotions and an inability to express them in words. The hex forces him to use shallow, inadequate language: "I thought you had Mia because you loved me."

He can feel his face turning red. His sister looks slightly uncomfortable. They're in their thirties and still don't know how to say things like that to each other.
"Sam, say that first thing again. About belonging to you."

"Every part of you belongs to me."

Although Sam identifies it as a dark, possessive sentiment, an unhealthy concept that normal people shouldn't feel, his sister's expression relaxes, as if it's reassuring for her to hear that. She nods to herself a little.

They're really, really messed up, Sam thinks. But every part of him belongs to Dean, too, and he wouldn't have it any other way.

"Okay, then," she says, "let's agree on what to do about this baby."

"How can we agree? You want it, I don't. Not if it isn't mine."

"What if it was yours?"

"Then I would want it, but you know we can't have a kid together."

"What if it was healthy?"

"What if it's not, and we have to terminate it, or worse, you have to carry a doomed baby that won't live to see its first birthday?"

"Geeze, Sam, pessimistic, much?"

"I'd love to have a kid with you, Dean. I just couldn't stand having all that hope and excitement only to lose him or her because of what we are. I can't let myself think for even one day that I could have what Crowley took from us, because losing it will kill me this time."

"So, I can't have your kid even though you want me to, and I can't have someone else's kid because you're jealous?"

"Pretty much, yeah."

"...Sam, what do you want?"

"I want you to not be pregnant."

It is painfully quiet in the car. If that witch was trying to get revenge by creating a rift between them, it's working.

"Okay, look," he says. "I can't make you do anything. Whoever the dad is, this is your kid, and right now I'm still ready to defend it with my life if you ask me to. If you want it that badly, I'll give you some space until it's adopted out, because if it's not mine, I'm too jealous, and if it is mine, I am too damn scared to know."

"Give me some space?"

"I'll stay with Bobby until it's over."

"With Bobby? Sam, I need you. I can't do this alone."

"You have Mia."

"No, you have Mia. If you leave, she'll go, too."
"Then move in with Jody and the girls, and I'll stay at the bunker."

"This isn't fair, Sam. If it's you or the kid, it's gonna be you."

"I know it's not fair, Dean! But neither was lying about being pregnant. Neither was making me give up on Mia. You know that almost killed me."

Dean is pulling the car over before he's even finished his last sentence. She turns off the engine and stares out the driver's side window for a few seconds, hiding her face.

"Dean, the cops-"

"You drive." She gets out of the car, and Sam slides over. She goes around the back of the car and takes his place.

As he gets back on the road, he glances at her. She is shaking, doing everything in her power not to burst into sobs.

Sam focuses on the road. If he thinks about what he's doing to his sister, and how wrong it is, he won't be able to drive either.


Hours of driving and backtracking later, Dean directs Sam to park outside a shady-looking building in a creepy neighborhood. She gets out and disappears inside for twenty minutes. She comes back with some pills.

"What are those?" Sam asks as she retakes the driver's seat.

"Safer than a coat hanger."

He feels sick to his stomach. She's going to do it, terminate a pregnancy she wants because of him.

This is wrong, but it's wrong for her, as one half of the couple they are, to have someone else's kid, and it's wrong for them as siblings to create a child on purpose.

What's the least wrong out of those, he wonders, and will he figure it out before Dean does anything irreversible?
Once Dean gets her hands on the pills, she pretends everything is fine.

Which it definitely isn't. When they pull off the interstate to settle down for the night and Dean checks into the motel, Sam honestly expects their room to have two beds instead of one. He doesn't deserve the comfort of his sister's presence.

Yet there it is, one bed for them to share just as there has been for the past five years.

His sister is acting like it's all good, as if Sam's feelings about the pregnancy are so reasonable that of course she should act on them.

They are reasonable, he reminds himself. It's not wrong to be upset that his... mate, partner, whatever Dean is, conceived a child with someone else. He just shouldn't have lied for months and said it was okay when really, it's stung from the moment she said "It's not yours."

He was trying to be a good brother by supporting her choice, and now he just feels like a bad person all around for what his sister is going to do.

That emotional turmoil makes it especially shocking to Sam when Dean kisses him after they're both in bed. She's pressing close, hinting at more if he's interested.

"You're horny? After today?" he asks.

"We're not gonna want to do this after I take the pills."

When her meaning sinks in, Sam feels sick to his stomach. She wants to be with him now because of what will be happening to her body in the next day or two. She's waiting until they get back to the bunker.

He can't. Even if he was in the mood, he can't make love to Dean knowing the pain he's causing her. That's too much, even for the dysfunctional, codependent mess they are.

He holds her, letting her head nestle under his chin.

"Dean, why are you acting like this is okay?"

"It is."

"No, it isn't, because I love you more than I can ever find the words to say, but I'm hurting you." For the millionth time, Sam is embarrassed by the hex forcing him to be honest, but Dean ignores it now.

"You're not hurting me, Sam," she tells him. "I had it coming. I traded your daughter to a demon, lied about it, and then made you stop looking for her. Now I'm paying for it."

"That's why you're doing it? Penance, punishment?"

"Tell me I don't deserve it."

"I can't do that," he responds, which makes him feel like he just slapped her across the face. "But
Dean, no amount of pain or sacrifice on your part will fix what you did, or the fact that you'd do it again. This won't make anyone feel better. It will just hurt us all."

She pulls away, her expression hardening. This is how she used to deal with things, shutting down emotionally when things were too much.

"You said you wanted me to not be pregnant. That's what's going to happen, Sam."

"Yeah, but if you take those pills..." he realizes slowly, "I'll never forgive myself."

"What?"

Sam sits up, thinking hard.

"I can't do this to you, Dean. We have to- I don't know, start over, reframe this." When his sister sits up next to him, he turns to face her. "Tell me the truth. All of it."

Dean takes a few seconds to answer, but she holds his gaze steadily once she does.

"Sam," she tells him, "I'm pregnant, it's a girl, every test or screen they've run says she's perfect, and I never would've kept her if there wasn't a chance she was yours."

Stunned at the influx of information, Sam blinks.

This changes everything. All the bitterness and jealousy in his heart is meaningless. His unkind thoughts and selfish feelings are obsolete.

"And you were gonna take those pills without saying anything? Why didn't you tell me you weren't sure?"

"Sam, everything I've lied about was to give her the best chance for life. I told you what I thought you needed to hear, and some of it I was wrong about, but all of it was because I wanted to give you a kid and do it right this time."

Again, she did it for him, Sam reflects.

"What if she isn't mine?"

"What are the chances I'd know that for sure by the time I gave her up? I would've told you she was yours once she was born. ...I want her to be yours."

For a minute or two, Sam contemplates the new knowledge, weighs his feelings, and asks himself how he and Dean can do right by each other.

"Dean, how am I supposed to believe anything you tell me about your pregnancy when you admit you lied to get me to go along with it?"

"Because now I've got nothing to lose by telling the truth. Mia can prove it. I'll tell her, and she'll prove it to you with whatever psychic thing you've got going on. Kiss her if you have to. I won't tell any more lies."

Sam takes another few moments to consider the facts and whether he believes Dean. Finally, he comes to a conclusion. It's stupidly simple, and he wishes he'd thought of it the night Dean told him she was pregnant.

"Dean." He holds her face in his hands. "I don't care whose it is, technically. The biological father
isn't important if we agree that I'm the dad in all the ways that matter."

"Is that what you want?"

"Yeah, it is."

"That's not what you said before."

"That's because you swore this baby wasn't mine. I was jealous. Now you're telling me that it's mine if I want it to be."

"Then it's yours, and we can talk about this like any other couple of hunters who didn't pull out in time."

Sam scoffs before he grows serious again.

"Are you willing to carry our child? Even though doing it will probably suck again?"

"Obviously."

"What are we gonna do once she's born?"

"What do you mean?"

"Dean, we both wanted to raise Mia, but we knew we couldn't. I didn't know how back then, I still don't, and I'm just as scared thinking about it as I was then, but this is our chance. If you think we can do it... I want to."

"I know we can. Dad kept the two of us alive. We can handle one kid."

"So... we're gonna do this?"

"Hell, yes," his sister answers, smiling.

He kisses her, every bad feeling forgotten, every fear and worry erased for the time being. All that matters is that she's going to have his baby and he doesn't care if it comes out a different color from him; this baby will be his daughter. Their daughter. There are risks at every turn, but Dean says they can do this, so they can. They will. Their child will grow up and lead the life she wants to lead.

Dean pulls him closer, hands squeezing him suggestively.

"So... me being pregnant is a turn-on?"

The hex forces out the truth:

"Yes. We spend our lives killing things. You're creating life. To me... that's a miracle."

"Is it a bigger turn-on now that the baby is yours?"

"Yes." Sam physically picks Dean up and pulls her into his lap, her legs spread. This body, so alive, not betraying him at all but growing a child for him—of course he wants to make love to it. There's probably some evolutionary drive having to do with bonding or fertility, but he isn't interested in analyzing his kinks. He just wants to be close, be inside her. She presses her body against his and he thrusts up against it.

"I can feel how much bigger," she tells him, breathing hot and heavy against his neck. "You gonna
"fuck me?"

"No, I'm gonna make love with you."

Dean actually blushes.

"I'm giving you a pass tonight because you're hexed," she tells him, "but you cannot just say things like that."

"Then you're gonna want to keep my mouth busy, or you're gonna hear a lot worse."

His sister dives right back into kissing, which is good because there's so much on the tip of Sam's tongue, flowery praise and sappy compliments from his heart that Dean won't want to hear.

She won't want to hear him say she's like a goddess. She's given life to his unworthy seed as only the divine could. No mere human being could do that, take part of him and make something as lovable as Mia.

She won't want to hear him liken her body to a temple to the goddess Dean, a temple that only he is allowed to enter to worship. She'd have no patience for poetic metaphors about anointing the temple with caresses and touches.

She won't want to hear how Sam loves every curve and crease of her body, how she's some otherworldly combination of strength and beauty. He can imagine the incredulous look on her face if he voiced his opinion.

Neither of them have to use words as they shed their clothes and melt together. Sam gently pushes his sister onto her back and lets her guide his cock into her body.

This is wonderful and awesome in the archaic, literal senses. He belongs to Dean; she belongs to him; and this baby belongs to both of them.

He rocks in and out of her, touching her in every way she likes to be touched, and takes her to the edge.

"You're mine, Dean," he tells her.

"Yours," she agrees in a sigh. "Sammy..."

She's very, very close.

"All mine," Sam whispers. "Forever."

She whimpers as her hips roll, orgasm forcing her body to move of its own accord. Sam loves every moment of it. It's one of his favorite things in the world, his sister at the very peak of physical euphoria.

He's mindlessly thrusting into her, watching her face as her climax ends. She's panting and ecstatic, sighing and moaning. It's too much for him, and he comes inside her, eyes shutting tight for a moment before he looks down at his sister again.

He feels the magic compelling him to speak; he can't stop the words:

"I love you so much."

Dean smiles up at him.
"I know." After a couple seconds, she swallows hard and adds, "I love you, too, Sam."

*

For about two months, life is good. Sam and Dean are optimistic, and Mia is cheerful.

There's a lot to be afraid of, Sam knows that, but Dean is so sure that everything will turn out right. His sister's confidence assuages his fears.

The question of whether the baby is biologically his ceases to matter. She's his daughter now, because they agreed. As long as she's healthy and has a decent chance at life, he's happy.

His only concern is that Dean won't tell him when she goes to see the doctor. At best she tells him after she comes home, but he doesn't know how many times she's actually gone, nor why she seems to be excluding him. Surely she's not still hiding something from him?

*

Finally, Dean gives Sam some notice before she leaves for a routine checkup—five minutes. He jumps at the chance to join her, hear from a medical professional that their baby is healthy.

Dean is about twenty-five weeks, which seems like an odd time for a prenatal visit to Sam but he dismisses it as a result of their shared aversion to medical settings. His sister is walking a fine line between staying off the radar and taking advantage of modern medicine to give their daughter the best possible start.

He doesn't need to ask questions; the doctor lays everything out optimistically. Dean is going into the third trimester without any concerns. Things really do look as good as she's been telling him.

It's around then that Sam realizes both Dean and the doctor seem to think that she's twenty-eight weeks pregnant.

That erases any doubt, then, doesn't it?

He keeps his mouth shut until they're out of the office and almost to the car.

"So this was the best way you could think of to tell me you're about three weeks further along than you swore you were?" he asks, folding his hands on the roof of the Impala.

Dean waits with a calm "okay, lemme hear it" expression on her face.

"I get why you lied," Sam tells her. "I'm tired of getting angry at you, so I'm not gonna. We're still having a baby. She's good, we're good. I just want to know how long you knew she was mine."

"...I knew the night Mia went back to Crowley."

"The night you...?"

She nods. Yes, she knew even before she slept with a stranger.

The whole damn time.

"I threw up in front of you, remember?" she says.

"Right..." He sighs and gets into the car. What's done is done.
Dean gets in behind the wheel. She closes her door and exhales sharply.

"There's something else."

"...What?"

"I didn't tell you before because you'd start asking questions, and you would've figured out the truth, but... this baby... she had a twin."

"Had a twin?"

"It didn't make it past the first trimester."

"...Oh." The rest of Sam's cheerfulness vanishes. That could have been their child. It was their child.

"Are you alright?"

"There's no danger to me or this baby. It's not even in me anymore. Got... reabsorbed or something."

"...You wanna talk about it?"

Dean looks at him.

"I didn't even know until after. What is there to talk about?"

"Dean, I just found out now and I'm not okay."

She nods.

"I don't know what's wrong with me. Feels pretty stupid getting upset over something I didn't even know about," she admits.

"It's not. That could have been another daughter, or a son. We would've loved them just as much as we love this baby, and we haven't even met her yet."

*

"When do you think it happened?" Sam asks after they return to the bunker.

"When what happened?"

"Like, when did you get pregnant? Which time?"

Dean stops and holds up a finger.

"I've got this theory, actually. Remember the kitsune hunt we took Mia on, I got my neck slashed open, and she healed me with a spell she said reset everything?"

Sam thinks it over.

"You think that spell messed up your birth control?"

"Yeah. Few years back, when they put the implant in, they told me it wouldn't be effective for a few days, maybe a week. We, uh, roleplayed a couple days after the hunt, right? In the car."

That makes sense, Sam decides.

"Or..." he muses, thinking back, "Dad was right."
"What?"

"Maybe there is something about that backseat."

§§§

It's May 2nd, Sam's birthday. He and Dean have gone to the doctor's—the baby is due in just one week—which is Mia's chance to attempt to bake something for him. She's never had a reason to bake a birthday cake before and it's exciting.

She's just finished frosting it when she hears the door to the bunker open, so she heads for the war room.

She knows something is wrong when she only senses Dean, who's deeply afraid but trying to stay calm for her brother's sake, and the baby who is dimly aware of her host's distress. Mia stays out of sight as her parents come down the stairs.

"They don't know it's anything," Dean insists like she's been repeating herself. "He said it could be nothing."

"You know it is, though. It has to be."

"Says who?"

"Says our lives. We roll the dice, we don't win. It's not nothing, it's a heart defect, and it's going to kill her."

Mia almost gasps. Her sister?

Sam's words have pierced Dean's emotional armor, but she's stubborn. She's still in denial.

"We don't know that," she tells Sam.

"Stop it."

"What?"

"Stop being my big sister who tells me everything is gonna be okay. You don't know that, and if you're wrong—"

"Whatever happens, we'll have each other."

Sam's emotions break through his mental barrier. He's frightened and doesn't know how to cope, doesn't want Dean to see him so weak, so he tries to push her away with false anger:

"This is exactly why I didn't want to have kids with you. I am your brother."

"Sam—"

"Don't. You knew from the day I- That day. The day you were cursed, you knew that I would never support you having my kid. You knew enough to try to drink your way out of having Mia. You knew enough to lie to me. You knew better, but you did it anyway. Twice."

It's almost impressive how well Sam divides his feelings. He loves Mia unconditionally, couldn't stand it if anything happened to her, and he loves his unborn daughter, too. But he opposes their existence. He never wanted either of them.
That should probably hurt more than it does. It's just a weird feeling, that someone who loves her so much would never have chosen to make her.

Dean is hurt, even though she's guessed why Sam is lashing out at her and that he doesn't really mean it.

"You know why I did it."

"I don't care. I never asked you to have my children."

"You asked me to have this baby."

Sam hates himself for that now. He hates himself for wanting something he should have known was impossible.

That's when he notices Mia, realizes he's been heard both physically and psychically, and falls apart. He was already broken inside but the shame of his own daughter hearing what he just said overwhelms him.

*I'm sorry,* he thinks at her, and then ignores her. He's too wrapped up in fear and pain to care what else she hears. He can't say anything worse than what she just heard.

Dean is alarmed to see her brother breaking down. There's a series of gasps and sobs, and Mia realizes Sam is crying harder than she has ever heard an adult man cry in her life.

It's terrifying, actually, to hear the display of ragged emotion, to hear the wails of a man who normally speaks with a deep voice, exudes masculinity. He didn't even cry like this when he was holding Dean's body thinking she was dead. This is a terrible raw dread of pain to come.

She looks around the corner and sees Sam curled up on the floor against a bookcase. Dean sits down next to him and holds him. She's scared, too, but she has to be strong for her little brother.

"Sammy," she begins, but doesn't know what to say.

"I can't do it again," Sam sobs. "I can't live through losing another child."

"You can. We'll have each other."

He struggles to compose himself enough to answer.

"I can't do it, Dean. If she dies, I'm going to kill myself. You forced me to live through that pain once, giving up on Mia. You can't do that to me again."

"Don't say that."

"I can't lose her."

"Then we won't. If there's something wrong, we'll find a way to fix it. We've got spells, we've got... deals." Dean was hesitant to bring it up, but deep down she's already accepted that she will trade her soul for the baby if they don't find another way.

Sam looks up slowly.

"Dean, promise me right now that if we can't save her, you'll let me make a demon deal."

"No, I'll do it."
"There's no point in saving her if I lose you. It has to be me."

The Winchesters pause for a moment. They see it, Mia thinks. How broken they are, that they love and need each other so much that a child they'd each go to hell for wouldn't be enough if they lost each other.

"Sam, I won't let you sell your soul for her."

"Do you wanna fix what you broke when you traded Mia to save my life and made me stop looking for her?"

Dean doesn't answer. Sam isn't proud of himself for playing that card, but he really does feel that it would be justice if he died to save this baby.

"I need to know, right now, that I'm not going to have to go through that again. Promise me that you'll let me do whatever it takes to save our child."

Dean's mind is just a huge wall of NO.

"Sam, I don't want her if it means I lose you."

"I don't want to live if it means I lose my daughter again."

They're quiet again. Dean feels trapped, guilty, afraid. She does want the baby, but Sam comes first. Losing her daughter would be like losing an arm or leg, but losing Sam would be like tearing out her heart.

"...It could be nothing," Dean reminds him.

He scoffs bitterly, then gets to his feet. He helps Dean up and watches her walk away.

Sensing his mind is like sticking her hand into broken glass. It's just pure pain.

_Dad?_

That was the wrong thing to call him, apparently. There's another stab of emotional pain.

Sam descends the steps into the war room. He has a lot on his mind that he doesn't want to burden Mia with, he just takes her into his arms and rests his chin on her head.

She is precious to him, loved, and he hates himself for every mistake he's made with her.

He probably doesn't mean for her to sense it, but Sam starts to think maybe it's better this way, maybe he would be a failure to his second child, too. Maybe dying young is better than what would happen to her if she lives.

"Sam, I can save her," Mia says, pulling away to look up at him. "I can find a spell. Just tell me what's wrong."

He has to steel himself to tell her.

"There's something... off about her heartbeat. It might be nothing, but it might mean there's something wrong with her heart. Like, really wrong. She'll need a transplant or-" He sucks in his breath and tries to stay calm. He can't say it or he'll break down again.

"We'll find a spell," Mia says. "I promise."
As Sam and Mia dig into the spellbooks, dark thoughts settle in the young witch's head.

Of course she wants to save her sister's life if it's within her power. Of course she'll help Sam.

But she still resents Dean, and it hurts knowing that this baby will get the life Mia should have had.

Some healing spells are simple, but magic to fix a defect someone was born with is heavy stuff. Whatever spell they use is going to cost something. Sam is obviously ready to lay down his life—that would be a relatively easy fix, using another human life to save the baby—but Dean won't let that happen. They have to find a spell that doesn't mean someone dies. That could mean Mia, as the spellcaster, has to pay the price.

So, how far is Mia willing to go to give her mother the last thing she deserves?

Chapter End Notes

*panting* Just... one... more... chapter...
"Sammy, wake up!"

"What?" Sam was fast asleep, but Dean is shaking him.

"My water broke."

"Oh my God." He jumps out of bed and starts rushing around the room. Get dressed, grab the bag Dean packed, help her to the car, *holy shit the baby is coming!*

Dean insists she can get to the car herself, and that Sam should stop by Mia's room to tell her what's going on. He's surprised she didn't come running just from all the nervous and excited emotions he's experiencing.

He gets to her bedroom door just as she reaches out to him with her mind.

*Headache,* she expresses.

She cast her demon blood substitute spell the other day, Sam remembers. She's having a migraine. Psychic communication with him hurts her more than sound when she's like this, so he blocks off his mind and speaks through the door:

"Dean is in labor, we're going to the hospital. Call me when you're up to it." Sam adds before jogging away, "We love you."

He hopes, he prays that if anything goes wrong in the hospital, it will be something there's a medical treatment for. As it is, Dean's doctor said there's no reason to expect problems. The C-section Dean had to deliver Mia six years ago does add some risk of complications, but even Sam's paranoid research didn't give him any reason to believe there's serious danger.

They still don't know if the baby has a heart defect, but Sam has been assured by Mia that she can fix it. Everything will be fine, he tells himself.

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Dean is in labor for hours, and Sam is going crazy. How can he be bored, terrified, and excited all at once? He's supposed to act calm to help put Dean at ease, but he can't.

"Hey," his sister says, grabbing his wrist as he paces by the bed. "Sit down. Let's talk about names."

"I thought we were waiting until we met her."

"We are, but we've been throwing around names for months and haven't made an actual list."
Sheepishly Sam takes out his phone and opens the notes app, then the note that contains a list of about twenty names that he, Dean, or Mia have thought of. He hands the device to Dean.

"You're such a girl," she laughs, though it's cut off by a grunt as she has another contraction.

"You okay?"

"I'm about to push your full-term spawn through a hole that on any other day can't take your dick without some dirty talk, so yeah, Sam, I'm fantastic."

He accepts the rebuke and returns to the topic at hand.

"Did I miss any names?"

"We are not naming her Grace. Too angel-y."

"Erase it, then." Sam looks over Dean's shoulder at the list. Maybe they'll meet their daughter and none of the names will fit. "We could always make up a name."

"Yeah, I've got one." Dean types MickChenzeighleechevrolaidan Treelynn Dahcohdah Winchester and returns the phone to Sam.

He scoffs, amused.

"'Leech'?"

"It's 'leesh,' Sam. Like Chevrolet- Fuck!"

"What?"

"Uh, I'm in labor, and it hurts," she snaps at him.

"Was that another contraction? Are they getting closer together?"

"No..." She tries to smile at him to keep him calm. "It's fine, Sam. I'm good. You'll get to meet her soon."

*

Suddenly, things start to happen. Dean is grunting in pain, swearing under her breath, and Sam hates hearing it. She refuses to have her hand held, preferring to grip his forearm. He's obliged to face the bed, body bowed and arm bent so she can hold on to him.

"You can do this, Dean," he tells her.

She nods at him, squeezing her eyes shut as she whimper.

He's never seen her like this, never seen her fighting so hard to hide the pain she's in, and he knows it's partly for his sake that she's biting her lip instead of crying out. She doesn't want to look weak in front of him, doesn't want him to worry. She wants to carry all three of them through this—herself, Sam, and the baby.

He doesn't have words, even in his own head, to express how much he loves her for that. For being the same Dean he's known his whole life.

Then there's the breathing, the pushing, the stifled grunts of pain that tear at his heart, and his sister
being stronger than anyone who's ever lived.

All he can do is stay at her side. He can't help her, not the way he wants to. Nine months of Dean carrying their baby and now it culminates in her enduring what might be the worst pain she's experienced on Earth and Sam can't take it from her, can't share the burden. All he can offer is his presence and his touch.

"There's the head," someone says, and Sam snaps to attention.

"You're almost there, Dean," he says.

She cries out again as she gives one more push, and then Sam hears a new sound, a new person in the room.

That's their daughter crying, with her first lungful of air.

He's fought monsters most people don't know exist, gone up against witches, spoken to and slain gods, seen people come back to life, been to Heaven and Hell and back from both, but none of it is as magical as seeing this tiny baby that Dean nourished and grew with her body. This human that came from them, covered in blood but so very much alive.

"Dean," he whispers. He can't take his eyes off the child. Their child. His child. Life in its purest form.

In his peripheral vision, Dean tries to raise her head to look, but can't. She can only lie there panting, until she swallows and tugs on Sam's hand to get his attention.

"How does she look?"

Sam can't think of any words other than perfect, beautiful, awe-inspiring, but even if he could he can't say them.

"She's-" He forces his eyes to Dean's face. "Dean."

His sister smiles up at him, the kind of smile he's seen when she's almost gotten herself killed but when the two of them are more alive than ever.

"You're welcome, Sammy."

The elation and optimism of the moment come to a screeching halt when someone else says, in a low, serious voice:

"She's bleeding heavily."

"The baby?" they ask in alarmed unison.

"No, you," the nurse tells Dean.

She blinks like she doesn't get it. Sam sees the blood soaking into the bedding under Dean's hips. It's not the worst he's seen, but that's a lot of blood.

"Just stitch me up and gimme my kid," she insists, reaching for their daughter.

"Ma'am, we need to get you to the OR," the doctor informs her, handing the newborn off, umbilical cord clamped and cut. "You have a uterine rupture."
"Who's gonna take the kid?" Dean seems strangely fixated on the subject. "She needs me. I gotta feed her."

Around then is when Sam notices his sister is getting strangely pale. He's seen too many people dead from blood loss not to recognize the look, but he remains calm. They're in a hospital; that's the best place to be bleeding heavily.

"I'll stay here and hold her, Dean."

She nods, and Sam can pinpoint the moment she realizes how bad it is. She tugs his hand to her chest, holding it in a fist over her heart like she's thanking him, which is absurd when she's the one who did all the work.

Before Sam knows it, they're wheeling her away.

She'll be fine, he tells himself. She's lost a lot of blood before and she's come back from it. She's strong and healthy enough; the doctors and surgeons know what they're doing. They can give her more blood if she loses too much.

"Would you like to hold your daughter?" a nurse verifies.

Sam blinks. Seven years, he's wanted this, and now he's taken by surprise when it's time. If he's honest with himself, he'd rather be with Dean right now. The baby is fine.

"Yes. Definitely."

"Skin-to-skin contact is best for newborns," she informs him. "If the mother is unable to do it, the father is the next best option."

He takes the hint and removes his shirt, then sits in the chair indicated by the nurse. The other nurse, the one actually holding his daughter, finishes cleaning up the baby—as if Dean's blood is something to wash away—and then turns to him.

He allows her to place the baby on his chest and show him exactly where to put his hands before getting a blanket to put over them.

The rest of the room, the rest of the world disappears as Sam looks at his new daughter's face, framed by wisps of dark hair. She's so tiny, yet she looks so familiar. Like Dean and like him. Her blue eyes are open though unfocused.

"Hey, sweetheart," he says, "Recognize my voice out here?"

She's calmed down from the initial terror of being born and now seems content, which is a miracle in itself, that she could be so new to the world and already have chosen to trust him.

He wonders if he'll share any kind of psychic link with her, if there's enough demon blood still in him for her to be sensitive in some way or even have powers like Mia. It doesn't matter much either way; it's a question in the same vein as what color will her eyes be when she's older. It doesn't affect anything in Sam's mind; she will be herself and whatever that entails is good enough for him.

She used to be a single cell, he reflects. She was one little cell in Dean and one little cell in him, and somehow everything came together and she became this. The right things happened at the right time, accidents and choices, the physical expression of love, and now, miraculously, Sam is holding his daughter.
It's overwhelming to think of how completely defenseless she is, that she depends on him and Dean for everything right now. It's a heavy responsibility, but he knows he can do it with his sister.

"Dean'll be back soon," he tells the baby. "Then you can have your first meal and we'll figure out what to name you."

He can already tell she's not a Charlotte, Cheyenne, Avery, Vanessa, or most of the other names on the list. He could imagine calling her Serena, though Dean wasn't keen on that name. Maybe Irene. Dean gets the final say, at any rate. He named Mia; she should name this baby.

"I love you," he whispers to his daughter.

He wonders when they'll know if her heart is alright. She's breathing fine right now, her heartbeat steady, but that could change.

If it does, this might be all the time he has with her. If Mia doesn't find another way, then they're going to have to use dark magic, the kind of spell that takes a living soul to save the life of another person. Sam will be that living soul; he has no issue with that. Mia does, and Dean will, and he hopes to God that they'll find another way because he wants to see his daughter grow up, but he's ready.

He'd do anything to protect this little thing in his arms. She's helpless and she's family and he's never held anything more precious in his hands.

About thirty minutes later, something happens.

Sam doesn't know what it is but a terrible feeling creeps up on him. Something is wrong.

His new daughter is fine. She's moving around a little, probably ready to nurse. When Sam looks around the room, he doesn't see or hear anything amiss.

Then he notices the doctor approaching, the same one that went off to the operating room with Dean. He calls a nurse over and speaks to her briefly.

Although the nurse's face is hidden and the doctor's expression unreadable, Sam can tell it's bad news.

So the surgery didn't go so well. Dean will pull through. She has to.

The nurse comes over to him and gestures to the baby.

"Let's get her vitals and give her a real bath, alright?"

"What about Dean?"

The doctor joins them, clearly waiting for Sam to hand the baby over.

"Doctor? How is she?"

Then it sinks in. Sam has seen that look of sympathy on the faces of a handful of physicians over his life. He knows what it means, and it makes his blood run cold.

"No," he says before the man can answer. "No."
"I'm sorry, the internal bleeding was worse than we realized and she lost too much blood too quickly."

"But-" This can't be happening. Dean is supposed to be here. She's supposed to be the one holding their new child. This was supposed to be the beginning of a life, not the end.

*Wake up, Sam,* he tells himself. Wake up, because this has to be a nightmare. He has to wake up next to Dean and their unborn child.

He looks down at his daughter.

This is real. It's the last thing he wanted but he is alone with his daughter, and she is alone with just one parent.

He's all she has. He's the only thing this baby knows, in the entire world, which means he has to be strong for her right now the way Dean spent her life being strong for him.

"What happens now?" he asks.

*There are "arrangements" to make, and things to learn about taking care of a baby who's lost her mother.

Sam waits until his new daughter is taking her first nap before calling Mia.

She picks up immediately:

"*Did she have the baby?!*"

He can't speak. Mia sounds so excited, happy.

"*...Sam?*"

How does he just say this over the phone?

"*Dad,*" she tries.

"*You need to come to the hospital.*"

"*What's happening?*

"*Just get yourself here. Room 108.*" He hangs up before he breaks down. Now that he's not holding the baby, he doesn't know how to keep it together.

*He's standing there, looking down at the sleeping baby when he senses Mia's presence.

He goes out into the hall and sees her approaching. He makes eye contact.

She senses his emotions and stops in her tracks, knowing that only one thing could leave him as devastated as he is right now.

He goes back into the room and waits. When she finally comes in, Mia looks physically uncomfortable.
"You alright?" he asks her.

"Yeah," she answers, setting her purse down on a chair. "I knew a maternity ward would have a lot of people experiencing strong emotions, but this is..." She closes the door, a slight grimace on her face.

Sam tries to block his mind from her. One less set of feelings to deal with.

"Thank you," Mia says, sounding relieved. "I can sense the baby sleeping over there, so... Dean?"

He shakes his head and accepts the hug Mia offers him.

"I'm sorry," she whispers.

He pulls away.

"Don't say that. Don't say you're sorry. We can bring her back."

"...You want to bring her back? How?"

"Can't you? You're a witch."

"Probably not, and even if I could, it would need more power than I have, or a life, and I'm not taking anyone's life to bring Dean back."

"You can take mine. Find a way."

Mia gives him a hard look.

"No."

"What?"

"I'm not killing you to bring back the person who handed me to a demon."

"Are you saying I deserve to live more than she does?"

"I'm saying I want my father alive. Besides, what do you think Dean will do once she finds out? She'll point a gun at my head until I reverse the spell."

Sam stares at her coldly.

"You think I wouldn't do the same if I knew you could bring her back?"

"I think you have a daughter who needs you. Two, actually. But her especially."

He looks between Mia and the baby. With so much of his heart cold and dead, how can he be a parent to either of them? He'll be an even bigger failure than his own father.

Suddenly everything his dad ever did makes sense. Every messed up thing that used to make Sam ask how a father could do or say something like that to children he loved seems totally reasonable, justifiable even. He thought he understood when he lost Jessica, but Jess didn't leave him with children to take care of.

"I need my sister," he informs her. "I can't do this without her. I'm not strong enough to raise a baby by myself."
"You won't be by yourself. I'll help you with... what did you name her?"

"Didn't name her yet." Sam reaches down and touches her hand with his finger. "Dean should pick the name. After we get her back."

Mia doesn't respond, and when he glances at her he sees doubt and worry in her eyes.

She doesn't know. She doesn't know the pathetic, rigid, calcified shadow of a human Sam becomes without his sister. She doesn't understand that history will repeat itself. Losing Dean means Sam becomes someone else, a man who neglects children he loves, a father constantly making misguided choices. His daughters won't understand why he treats them the way he does. Well, Mia might, but his younger daughter will grow up never knowing another version of him. He'll be distant and angry, obsessed with keeping them safe but also afraid to get closer to them. Mia will be obliged to act as both mother and father to her sister while Sam loses himself in hunting and drinking.

Dean kept him human. If he doesn't get her back, he doesn't know how to do this on his own. He won't be the same person. He won't be able to be a father to anyone.

They have to bring her back.

§§§

Mia talks Sam into naming the baby before they leave the hospital. He goes with Violet, a name Dean suggested a few months ago.

As soon as they get home, Mia brings her new sister to her own bedroom and takes out her Tarot deck.

"We had to leave before the doctors could take a look at your heart," she explains to Violet, "So we're going with magic."

The newborn likes hearing Mia's voice in this strange new place. She prefers Sam's voice, since he's more familiar, but Mia is a good substitute while he's bringing Dean's body to the infirmary. Babies don't have much in the way of emotions, but there's familiar and unfamiliar, comfort and discomfort.

Although Violet isn't conscious of it, she misses Dean, and Mia already does, too.

She shuffles the cards, focusing on the matter in question. Violet's heart, her health, her future as it currently is.

When she deals the appropriate number of cards and starts to flip them over, her heart sinks.

It might not be what it seems. Cards sometimes have a deeper meaning than Mia can see at first—she doesn't usually have the patience to sit and consider every possible interpretation of the Ten of Swords.

She gathers up the cards and shuffles again. Violet. What is in Violet's future?

She deals the exact same cards in the exact same order.

"What are you doing?" Sam asks from the doorway. He's blocked his mind from Mia for some reason.

"A Tarot reading for Violet. If you hadn't insisted on taking your sister's body from the hospital morgue, we could've stuck around so they could give Violet an ECG and tell us if there's anything
wrong with her heart," she says coldly.

"What do the cards say?"

She gathers them up once again, shuffles while concentrating on Violet's cardiac health, and deals.

"Flip them over," she instructs her father.

He comes over to the bed and does so.

"Same cards as before," he remarks. "What do they mean?"

"That if we don't find another way, I'm going to have to use that spell I told you about."

Her father picks up Violet. The baby is somewhat confused about being lifted up but recognizes who's holding her and feels at home in his hands. Her undeveloped mind has no concept of a more pleasant existence than being held by one of The Familiar Beings.

"I don't want to find another way, Mia," Sam says quietly. "Not unless we can bring Dean back. I just don't know who's gonna take care of her if I'm gone, too."

Mia wonders that, too. It will fall to her to make sure Violet has a parent or parents who will take care of her.

"We'd better get to work, then."

* *

The miracle comes when one morning, as Mia trudges through a book on obscure hoodoo spells, she finds one that can heal birth defects, even ones that are normally fatal, without killing another human or sacrificing a soul. The only drawback is that they need an expert practitioner and one of the ingredients can only be found in Louisiana. They have to head down there as soon as possible.

Excited, Mia goes looking for Sam and finds him in the kitchen. He's giving Violet a bottle while reading a book open on the table.

"I might've found a way to bring back Dean," he greets.

"I found a way to help Violet."

His expression relaxes into the closest thing to a smile Mia has seen on his face in days.

"That's great. What is it?"

"We're going to have to go to Louisiana and find an expert in hoodoo. The rest will be easy. What did you find?"

"I'm not sure. This book, there's a lot of dark magic in it, but there's a spell for bringing someone back from the dead here that... I dunno, it's not clear about one ingredient."

"Which is?"

"The spell gets its power from 'the blood of a newborn babe, shed under the light of its first full moon," he reads aloud.

"How is that unclear?"
"It doesn't say to kill the newborn. It doesn't say the lifeblood. It doesn't say how much it needs."

Mia starts to get a horrible feeling in her gut. Sam can't be suggesting...

"Sam..."

"Tonight's the full moon, Mia. If the spell-"

"You can't use Violet's blood."

He allows her to sense his mind again so he can plead on a psychic level as well.

"What if it only needs a couple drops?"

"What if it needs more?"

"The hospital drew blood when she was born and she was fine."

"And that justifies you cutting her open and making her bleed? She's four days old!"

"Mia, if all you had to do to to bring Dean back was bleed a little, you'd do it, wouldn't you?"

"If you asked me to. But I'm old enough to consent to it and I can spare a lot more blood than a baby can. You can't do that to her."

He feels guilty over it, but it's not enough. He needs his sister back; there is no price too high to pay.

"Sam, what if it does need enough blood to take a life?" Mia presses. "What if the spell needs you to kill?"

"Then obviously we can't cast the spell," is what Sam says, but what he thinks without meaning to is, Violet's dying anyway.

She stares at him, letting him know she sensed the thought.

He would do it, wouldn't he? If it was as easy as handing Violet to a demon, if he knew it would work, he'd give her up to bring Dean back. Actually hurting her, though, causing her death, Mia isn't so sure about, but if the guilt wouldn't kill him he'd do it.

"A week ago, the thought of losing her was the worst thing you could imagine. And now you don't even care," she remarks. "You'd trade her for Dean's life in an instant."

He's ashamed of himself, but it isn't enough to change his mind.

"We have to try the spell, Mia. A few drops of blood might be enough."

"To bring someone back from the dead?"

"The younger someone is, the stronger their life force, right? That's why shtriga feed on children. Her blood must be incredibly powerful."

"You're going to need more blood than you think, Sam. I won't let you hurt her."

"If you're so worried about me going too far, help me with the spell."

"No. We need to take her to Louisiana. Rowena once mentioned a witch named Clea who lives there, maybe she can help us."
"We'll go as soon as we cast the spell tonight." Sam's mind is completely made up. He's doing this.

Mia is disturbed by her father's insistence on trying the spell, and the uncertainty surrounding it. After reading the spell for herself, she can only agree that the wording is unclear, but coming from a book of such dark magic, she doesn't have a lot of faith that the spell will work with the amount of blood her baby sister can spare.

Even if they knew a couple drops would be enough, Mia doesn't like the idea. In just a few days she's started to feel like Violet's parent, and the idea of using her for a spell, in any way, seems so wrong. How could Sam even consider this an option?

As she packs for the trip to Louisiana, she wonders how she's supposed to trust either Sam or Dean to take care of Violet, given their history. Are they even capable of raising a child? The second they have to choose between each other or their kid, they won't have a kid anymore.

Someone has to put Violet first, Mia thinks, and maybe it should be her. It's not like she has anyone else.

If Dean could practically raise her baby brother when she was four, Mia can handle her baby sister at nineteen. She can at least do a better job than she trusts Sam and Dean to do.

§§§

When the last traces of the sunset are gone and the moon is bright in the night sky, Sam slings a bag of ingredients over his shoulder and brings Dean's stiff body outside to a clearing in the woods near the bunker.

Mia is entirely opposed, so much so that Sam isn't sure if she's going to try to stop him from casting the spell. She knows that he has no choice; if there is a chance he can bring Dean back, he has to take it. It's not in him to let go of his sister.

He finds her waiting in the war room, packed and ready to go to Louisiana. She's holding Violet.

"Mia, it's time."

"Dad, listen to me. If you cast this spell, I'm taking Violet and we're not coming back."

"What?"

"If you're willing to shed your daughter's blood to get Dean back, you can't be trusted as a parent."

"Mia-"

"It's not too late for you to put Violet first. Forget about this spell, and I'll come back."

She puts the baby in Sam's arms and waits for him to think it over.

He looks at his young daughter's face. He can't lose her now.

"I'm serious, Sam," Mia continues. "I don't care whether the spell works, and I don't think it will with the amount of blood you're going to use, but if you hurt my sister, you're not going to see her for a long, long time."

"You're asking me to choose between Violet and Dean."
"No. If you find a better way, I'll help you bring Dean back, but you have to put Violet first right now."

Shaking his head, Sam turns and takes Violet outside. He brings her to the clearing, half-heartedly fighting himself. It's wrong. She's a defenseless baby.

He just can't envision a future without Dean. He'll survive losing Mia and Violet if he knows they'll be safe, but not his sister.

Mia follows him to the clearing.

"You could stop me," he points out.

"It wouldn't change anything. If you don't choose to put Violet first, I have to take her away to keep her safe from you."

If this doesn't work, Sam reflects, he will have no one. No Dean, no Mia, no Violet. Bobby or Jody might take pity on him, but he'll know he doesn't deserve it. He'll be alone and it will be his own doing.

Yet, even with the certainty that he will never see either of his daughters again after tonight, he can't give up the chance to bring Dean back.

He sits on the ground in front of the bowl, cradling Violet in one arm while adding the ingredients one by one.

Finally, there's just one left.

"It's gonna be okay, Violet," he whispers as he takes out a sharp knife. After a moment's thought, he removes her tiny shoe and sock, then holds her foot over the bowl.

He feels sick. This tiny person trusts him, needs him for everything, and he's going to use her blood in a magic spell just like that baby goat he once killed for its liver. She isn't an animal; she's a human being.

It's just a few drops of blood, he reminds himself. That's all he'll take, and Violet won't remember this when she's older anyway.

"Dad..." Mia pleads.

He uses the tip of the knife to prick his daughter's heel.

She cries out, and Sam's heart is frozen dead because he is responsible for that; he just harmed her. On purpose.

"I'm sorry," he whispers to her as he sets down the knife. He gently squeezes Violet's foot until two drops of blood fall into the bowl of ingredients. He says it again as he kisses her forehead: "I'm sorry."

Mia crouches down and takes Violet from him. She picks up the discarded sock and shoe and backs away.

Focusing on the task before him, Sam blinks away the tears in his eyes, the tears of self-loathing and fear, and lights a match. He begins the incantation, then drops the match into the bowl.

It flares up as he finishes the spell, and he holds his breath, waiting.
"Please..." he whispers. "Please, Dean."

Nothing's happening.

"Goodbye, Dad," Mia says, turning away.

"Mia, just wait until--"

"You made your choice."

She starts to walk away, and Sam lets her. He did make his choice, the one Mia knew he would make. It will always be his sister first.

"Dean?" he tries, feeling for a pulse. There is none. "Wake up. Wake up, Dean!"

Still, nothing is happening.

He thinks he can sense Mia's concern for him. She's still moving away, but there's no way she can miss the deep fear in his heart.

Maybe Mia was right, maybe it needed more blood.

Maybe he just threw away the two living people most precious to him for nothing.

"Come on," Sam whispers, shaking his sister's body. "I can't do this without you."

He's staring at her face in the moonlight. She is as completely inanimate as she was ten minutes ago.

All his will to live drains away, and he lowers his head to rest on her chest. No warmth, no softness, no heartbeat. Dean is still dead, and Sam has pushed away the last people that meant something to him. He had two daughters he loved, but he hurt both of them.

So it's not like he deserves to get his sister back. Or live, for that matter. He violated the most basic human tenet, that parents protect their children from harm—he's proven himself a monster.

He should build a pyre, he thinks. Big enough for two. That's a calming idea. He can see Dean again in however much time it takes to procure wood and accelerant.

Sam doesn't move yet. He finds peace also in the thought of never moving again, simply wasting away with his arms around his sister.

He threw away the thing that mattered most to get her back. Now he has nothing.

Although Sam's eyes are closed, he can sense a slight change in the light through his eyelids. Something is happening.

He opens his eyes to see a purple glow threading through Dean's body, tracing veins and muscles.

"Dean?"

The spell is working. Maybe it did want more blood, and that's why it took so long.

It occurs to Sam also that if the key ingredient was insufficient in some way, what he brings back might not be his sister. He might have just made a zombie.

At least it will probably kill him immediately.
He sits up, touching his sister's face.

"Dean?" he tries.

Her eyes open, flashing the same hue of purple, and then she gasps in a lungful of air.

"Dean!" He pulls her into his arms, holding her close. There's her pulse, her breath, the heat of her body. She's alive. "Oh, God..."

"Sammy?"

"Yeah, it's me." He buries his face in her neck. There's still a chance it isn't really his sister, but it doesn't matter. He got to hear her voice one more time, feel her in his arms one more time.

She holds on to him, disoriented.

"Sam, was I dead?" she asks after a few seconds.

He can only whimper in response. He can't think about that. He can't acknowledge that because it's too horrible to conceive even though it was reality for the past few days. It was reality one minute ago.

"Where are we? What happened to the baby?" she asks.

His stomach drops. How does he tell her?

"Sam?"

"We're near the bunker. Violet's okay," he finally tells her, looking her in the eye. "I named her Violet."

"How long's it been?"

"A few days."

Dean sounds relieved:

"So I didn't miss too much, right? ...Sam? Where is she now?"

"Violet is with Mia." He takes a deep breath. "Dean, bringing you back... it cost something. It cost us something."

"What did it cost?"

He holds her face in his hands.

"You told me once that all that mattered was that we were together. So please... tell me that's still true."

"Course it is. Sammy, what did you do?"

He gathers his courage, fighting his deep-seated fear of garnering Dean's hatred or disgust.

"I guess you could say I made a deal."
Epilogue

April 30, 2019

Sitting on a table in the library, Sam's phone starts ringing. Unfamiliar number with a South Dakota area code. He picks up.

"Hello?"

"Hi!" says what sounds like a very small child.

"...Who's this?" he tries. Dean, seated across from him, watches curiously.

He hears a very faint "Oh, crap," in the background, then some fumbling.

"Hello?" he tries again.

"Uh, hello! Sorry, whoever this is," a familiar female voice apologizes frantically, "My little sister got her hands on my phone and must've called you by ac-"

"Mia?!"

There's a long silence on the other end. Dean gestures to put it on speakerphone, which he does.

When Sam replays the words in his head, it hits him.

"...Mia, was that Violet?"

"Uh, yeah, she was playing with my phone and she must've opened my contact list or something."

Sam smiles, though his eyes are tearing up. He hasn't heard from Mia since the night she left. He didn't even know for sure whether Violet was alive. In an effort to hide her reaction, Dean has her head bowed like she's found something very interesting to stare at.

"Could you put her back on?"

"...Maybe another time."

"Well, how is she? How are you?"

"We're good, Sam. I'm taking care of her and we have a pretty normal life."

A normal life. Sam is almost afraid to look at his sister; he might break down and cry. He wonders if he should keep humoring Mia with small talk or beg to see them with the desperation that's pounding in his chest.

"How about you?" Mia asks.

"Me? I'm fine."

"And Dean?"
"Right here," Dean answers for him.

"The spell worked?"

"Yep."

"Wow... It's good to hear your voice, Dean."

"You, too. Any chance of you and Violet coming to visit?"

"That's up to Violet, when she's older," Mia says firmly. "I, uh, have to take care of some stuff, but I'll call you back."

Sam and Dean exchange looks. She definitely won't. She'll change her number; it might be another two years before they talk to her again, or more.

But they accepted that a long time ago.

"We love you," Sam says, "Tell Violet we love her, too."

"I will. Promise."

If Mia promises, then she means it.

"...Thank you."

"Goodbye, Sam."

The call ends. Sam and his sister sit staring at the phone for minutes.

Finally, Dean gets up and pours each of them a glass of whiskey, then returns to the table. Sam accepts the drink and takes a sip.

He thinks about his daughters every single day, and now when he thinks of them, instead of merely hoping that their baby is alive and happy, he knows she is. Instead of being haunted by the sharp cry of pain he caused during their last interaction, he can remember Violet cheerfully saying "Hi!"

And he can think of Mia telling Violet that their father and mother love her, even if they're so flawed they can't be trusted with a child.

His sister finishes off her whiskey and clears her throat.

"So, uh, this haunted apartment we're looking at..."

Chapter End Notes

IT'S FINALLY DONE.

Thank you for reading this thing that started out as a fic exploring the darkest aspects of the epic codependent love story of Sam and Dean but kinda turned into me dealing with some personal issues regarding my emotionally absent dad who passed away three years ago. *awkward cough*
I profusely thank my beta reader, Damien, and everyone who commented and/or left kudos. I hope this ending was satisfactory after how long it took to get here. When I started writing the earliest, earliest draft of What We Carry Inside, canonical Dean still had the Mark of Cain. That's how long I've been working on this.

Lastly, although I am very done writing in this particular fanfiction universe, I have a number of "deleted scenes" that include alternate first times for WWCI, a whole lot of explicit Sam/Dean that I cut from various chapters in this fic, alternate versions of Sam killing Crowley, some Sam/Tophet because I couldn't decide if I shipped it, and alternate versions of Mia finding out who her father is, any or all of which I'll post upon request.

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