

INVISIBLE BOY SERIES

The
Ballad
of the
Invisible Boy

A Story by dollylux

· One ·

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A Supernatural Fanfic

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Summary

This is a story of adolescence. This is a love letter for the slow burn, for Led Zeppelin, for the 90s. This is the first of two sets of stories about how Sam and Dean didn't fall in love. They never had to. It was always there, this desperation between them, like a real, breathing thing. When they came together, it was inevitable. As sure as continents colliding, as the phases of the moon and the life and death of stars. This isn't a love story, but it's a story of love.



1994

Sam realizes when he's about eleven that he's not like every other kid he's known. And it's not in the surface ways. Not in the ways that most kids he's met have neighbors who've watched them grow up. Or how they have a somewhat stable home life. Haven't been to 15 schools in their short academic careers. Most kids play baseball or skip rope or go to church and don't really know how to handle a double barrel shotgun very well at all. And good for them.

It's not those things. He's known he was very different in all those ways for a long time.

It's a random day when he realizes the one, very distinct thing that will forever set him apart from most everyone he'll ever meet. The thing that defines him, that is just part of his makeup.

It's a Saturday in August in Winchester, Indiana.

He's outside of his friend Wesley's house, sitting in the driveway, throwing water balloons at some of the neighborhood girls every time they ride by on their bicycles, just to hear them shriek

and watch their pretty curls go limp under the onslaught of sun-warmed water. There are Capri Suns in a mini-cooler and a small radio playing Ace of Base and Lisa Loeb and Boyz II Men.

They've been living here in Winchester for nearly two months, and he gets asked just about every single day if he's lived here all his life. He never knows how to tell people that he's never lived anywhere, really.

Wesley Fullerton is Sam's first best friend, and they quickly became inseparable. Wes spends more time at the rundown little house the Winchesters are renting on the laughably tame "bad" side of town than he does at his own home.

Sam's having more nightmares here, now, than he ever has before. He's always a little tense, braced, waiting for all this good and happy to end. He's never had consistency like this before. He just looks at his dad every morning he's home for breakfast, shoulders tense, waiting for the other shoe to drop. Waiting for Dad to tell Dean to pack up the car, they're leaving. He hates how much power his dad has over their lives. Hates that his dad can just take this all away from him in an afternoon.

Sam sighs, pulling himself from his thoughts and laying back on the driveway, feeling the pavement heat him to his bones on this scorching July day. He lets his eyes close as he takes a bite of strawberry Twizzler, a worldly, satisfied sigh leaving his lips. He didn't even know before that days like this existed.

"Hey, Wes. Can I stay over tonight?" Sam doesn't look over when he asks because he knows that Wesley's laying just like he is, that he has a thick stripe of white sunblock over his nose to protect his already sunburned skin and that he's drained his third Capri Sun.

"Yeah, prolly. Mom and Dad are over in Chicago tonight, but Dayton is home. I don't think he'll mind."

Sam shifts uncomfortably, his momentary euphoria gone. Dayton is sixteen, just a year older than Dean, but he's nothing like Dean. He's a jerk, a real jerk, and a bully. He's mean to Wesley just because he can be, though Sam only knows about it second hand. He avoids Dayton as much as he can because Sam knows he's not very good at hiding his distaste from assholes like him.

As if on cue, Sam hears the roaring engine of Dayton's brand

new truck coming up the street and heading toward the cul-du-sac where Dayton and Wesley live. He sits up, body tensed and on-guard, feeling just like he does when he's waiting to argue with his dad. He already knows this isn't going to go well.

Dayton pulls right up to where Sam and Wesley are trying to move their little camp out of the way, pulls right up nearly to Sam's face and Sam wonders indulgently what Dean would do if he'd just seen that. He jumps to his feet when Dayton gets out, frowning but not saying a word. He'd been playing Metallica in his truck. He has no right to listen to Metallica.

"Hey, Dayton!" Wes sounds cheerful enough for the both of them and he reaches down for a dripping cold Capri Sun pack and offers it to his brother. Dayton just scowls at it and then at Wes and finally lets his eyes land on Sam who is leaning back against the brick of the house, arms folded over his chest.

"What's he doin' here?" Dayton doesn't take his eyes off of Sam even though he's addressing Wes. Wes drops the pack back into the cooler and wipes his hands off on his jean shorts. He lowers his head a little, long bowl cut sliding into his eyes and Sam is furious immediately. Wes is such a nice guy, such a good kid, and it all goes into hiding whenever Dayton comes around.

"We're just hangin' out. He might stay over tonight, okay? Mom left us money for pizza and I thought we could just--"

"No. Mom left *me* money. I'm taking Ashley out tonight and you're staying right here. And *he*--" Dayton gifts Sam with a glare--"is *not* staying in our house. Mom and Dad might feel sorry for him, but I fuckin' don't. I'm not letting trash stay anywhere near me."

Sam lets the insult slide off his back because. Well. As a Winchester, he's heard worse. And Dayton doesn't have any idea who he is, not really. He snorts at the insult, giving a defiant roll of his eyes but he keeps his mouth closed. Dayton's eyes burn into his own but Sam doesn't back down.

"Dayton, don't say that." Wes laughs, a faint, weak sound and steps up to his brother to shove playfully at his arm. Dayton catches Wesley's wrist and twists it, fast and painful behind Wesley's back and draws his brother up close to him.

“Don't you fuckin' touch me, Wes. That kid's a little freak and a piece of shit trash. I know his brother. Kid thinks he's tough shit and that he's fuckin' better than me. Nobody that lives in that shitty house is better than me, you hear me?” Dayton is talking to Sam now, eyebrows raised in a challenge. He's still got Wesley twisted up and pinned to the garage door and Wesley, a scrawny civilian eleven-year-old, doesn't stand a chance of getting away, no matter how much it hurts.

But Sam Winchester is not a civilian.

“Say something about my brother one more time.” Sam's tone is even, calm. He doesn't care what Dayton says about him. Hell, he'd let him get away with a few jabs at their dad if he even knew anything about the man. But not Dean. Never Dean.

Sam pushes away from the house and walks toward Dayton, his body relaxed and head tilted to the side, squinting in the sun. He's a good head and a half shorter than Dayton but Sam knows how to fucking fight and Dayton is a spoiled rich brat who thinks he's a badass.

Dayton shoves Wesley away and into the garage door so hard that Wesley cries out and slumps to the ground, his hurt arm cradled in his lap, helpless tears in his eyes. Sam knows this is just how it is here when their parents aren't home. Sam knows that the bruises on Wesley's body and the limp he sometimes has and the shadows in his eyes are all because of this boy. But Sam's here today. And he's not just going to run away. His dad might have taught him how to fight, but his brother taught him what to fight for. And he's gonna stand up for his friend.

Dayton closes in on Sam but Sam doesn't back down. He shoves Sam back and Sam, being a good fifty pounds lighter, has no choice but to fall back under the power of the push. He just steps forward, making up the ground he's lost. Doesn't break eye contact.

“Dayton, stop!” Wesley sobs and it's an embarrassing sound, a desperate sound and Sam feels so bad for him. He takes a second to glance over at his friend and he knows that he's hurt his elbow, that it's more than likely dislocated. “Leave Sam alone! He's my friend!”

Dayton heads for Wesley again and Wesley curls up on himself, trying to protect his arm but Dayton ignores it, just lifts Wesley up by the collar of his shirt and slams him into the garage door again, and again, the vibration of the metal loud and echoing through the neighborhood on a perfect summer day. Sam charges at them then, forcing his small body in between the two brothers and he steels himself, gathering all of his strength and just shoving at Dayton, detaching him from Wesley and he shoulders Wesley back. "Wes, go! Just leave. Go to Tim's house, okay? Just go!"

Sam doesn't watch Wesley leave, just comforts himself with the fact that he does and he looks back up at Dayton in just enough time to see the curled fist before it connects with his cheekbone with a sick crack. Sam steps back, stunned but not out for the count. He shoves at Dayton, defiant, not caring that he's about to get his ass kicked.

"How can you treat him like that? He's your *brother*. He's your little brother. He looks up to you! He needs you! How can you treat him like that? Why are you such a freakin' *jerk*?"

"He's a little fucking pussy and he needs to learn to act like a man. No brother of mine is gonna be a pussy, you hear me?" Sam feels his stomach drop and his face heat. He knows the sound of a boy who echoes his father's words. He knows without a doubt those exact words have been said in that house over and over again. He wants to feel sorry for Dayton, for their whole family but he doesn't have a second more to think about it because Dayton is shoving him so hard that Sam slips, falls on the driveway, his knees catching him but getting skinned as they break his fall. He jumps back to his feet, pained tears in his eyes, his voice wavering but clear.

"You don't deserve him. You don't deserve to have a brother. And you aren't a man because you hit him." Sam curls his fist, wants so badly to stand on the tips of his toes and just punch the ever-loving shit out of Dayton but he knows he'd lose the fight before it started. He knows and so he just reaches down for his shoes and takes off running down the driveway and the street, away from that house. He hears Dayton yelling after him, saying things about Dean, about him, but he can't hear any of the words clear

enough to absorb them. He just grips his shoes in his hand and focuses all his energy on getting home.

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He knows his eye is quickly swelling shut and his knees burn like a bitch where sweat is getting into the ripped-open skin, but he's here, he's finally home. His bare feet burn from the hot roads he had to run to get here, they're rubbed raw from the movement so he stops running the second he hits their driveway. He steps gingerly over the broken pavement up onto the steps and opens the screen door to step inside. He's hit with the overwhelming heat from not having an air conditioner and hears the pawn shop fan Dean got with the money he's made mowing lawns blowing full-blast on the kitchen table where Dean's cleaning his gun. The radio's on the in the background, Pure Prairie League barely heard over the fan.

Sam stops just on the threshold of the kitchen, where stained carpet turns into linoleum and he stares at his brother and it all hits him then. What just happened, what it made him think of, what it's made him feel. He sees Dean and it all comes full circle and he loves his brother so completely in that moment, so fiercely and overwhelmingly that he just sobs, his arms wrapping around himself, head tucking against his chest.

"Sammy?"

Dean is suddenly *here*, right here and hovering worriedly, hands lifted in the need to touch everywhere to make sure Sam's okay but they're not sure where to land first. Sam looks up and watches Dean sink to his knees in front of him, his eyes taking in Sam's bare feet, his bleeding knees and his expression changes from worry to icy cold murderous when he sees Sam's swollen eye.

"Who did this to you? Tell me."

Sam doesn't have the breath to speak just yet and so he wraps his arms around Dean's neck, curling down right against him, tucking his face in against his neck and sniffing there where it's safe. "Dean," he says softly, so small but it means everything.

"Sammy." Dean is begging now, voice shaking with anger but

he sounds terrified to his very core. Sam closes his eyes when he feels Dean's hands run over his body, checking him over for any further, worse injuries. He relaxes against Dean, letting himself calm down and catch his breath from running for twenty minutes in 95-degree weather, feeling safe in his brother's care. "Alright, c'mon, then. Let's at least get you cleaned up, okay? Hold on."

Sam tightens his arms around Dean's neck and lets Dean carry him, foregoing any embarrassment he'd normally feel for being such a baby. He's been hurt worse than this, though not often. And he's never been just flat-out beaten up by someone so much older than him. His feelings are hurt, his heart hurts, and he can't shut this desperate, Dean-centered feeling he has blooming and heating in his chest.

Dean sets Sam down on top of the closed toilet seat and starts running warm water in the bath before he leaves again to retrieve the overstocked first-aid kit from the kitchen. He returns quickly and sits down on the side of the tub, pulling Sam's dirty feet into his lap. Sam just watches him, his heart still hammering around in his chest, entire body still jittery with leftover adrenaline and fear. Dean runs his thumbs over the bottoms of Sam's feet, head tilted to take in the sight of them. He seems satisfied that they're not badly hurt and he grabs a washcloth draped around the faucet and wets it, scrubbing it over the bar of soap in the holder and he starts to clean Sam's feet as gently as he can. Tired tears streak down Sam's face as he watches his brother and he lets himself just be filled with calm by this, with love for Dean. So much love.

"Talk to me, Sammy. I'm gonna find out about this one way or another. I'd rather hear it from you so I don't have to waste time figuring out who I've gotta kill." Dean cups water in his hands to rinse Sam's feet and Sam spreads his toes, lets Dean get the soap from between them and lets him tender his feet as much as he wants.

"It. It was Dayton."

Sam watches Dean frown as he tries to figure out who that is but it only takes a few seconds and then Dean's eyes are cutting to him. The caretaker is gone and the protective big brother trained to kill is back, Dean's entire body practically vibrating with fury.

“Dayton Fullerton? Wes' brother? With the new Silverado?”

Sam nods and Dean nods, too, his jaw clenched tight as he drains the water from the tub and refills it again with slightly cooler water. Dean starts in cleaning Sam's skinned knees and it hurts like a bitch. Sam bites down on his bottom lip to keep in any stray sounds and he watches Dean's face carefully, just waits for him to process, to speak.

“You're telling me a sixteen-year-old just beat up my little brother? That redneck motherfucker? *He* did this?” Dean's hand is cupping his cheek now, damp but warm and Dean is peering at his eye. Sam holds his gaze and nods again, letting his hand come up and rest along the back of Dean's, right at his wrist.

“He was hurting Wes, and I told him to stop. And so he started in on me, I guess.” Sam doesn't mention Dayton talking about Dean, about their family, about him. Dayton's gonna regret it bad enough as it is. “His brother, Dean. He was hurting his *brother*. And he didn't even care.”

“Yeah, well.” Dean's voice is gruff, tight with anger. He finishes cleaning Sam's knees and dabs at them with some antibiotic ointment before covering them with big square band-aids that they hardly ever use. “‘Brother' doesn't mean to everybody else what it means to us.”

Sam mulls that over wordlessly while Dean disappears and comes back with a bag of frozen corn and presses it to Sam's cheek. He brings Sam's hand up to hold onto it and stays right there, crouched beside him in the dimly-lit bathroom, his hand carding through Sam's sweaty hair, tucking it behind his ears and soothing Sam beyond anything he's ever known before. He closes his eyes and just takes the comfort, just lets the moment settle soft between them while Dean pets him and he thinks about Dean's words, really thinks about them.

Brother means everything. Brother means Dean. Brother means the person who fixes your lunches and who gives you first pick of everything even if he doesn't want to and brother means hand-me-downs of Dean's very favorite clothes just because Sam might want them before Dean even really outgrows them completely. Brother means the boy who defends Sam to their dad

and who quizzes Sam for spelling bees and who reads him stories from whatever book Sam hands him. Brother means surprise ice cream sundaes after school on good days and means the boy Sam has to patch up after a hunt on the bad days. Brother means that, most of the time, words are practically useless. That they can look straight into each other's eyes and it's all right there, entire conversations and feelings without description and secrets never shared outside of blinks. Brother means body language discussions, means thousands of things communicated with nods and lifts of fingers and the set of shoulders. Means a pillow in the backseat, means the boy who tries to keep Christmas magic. When Sam says *brother*, he means the whole entire world.

He opens his eyes again and looks up at Dean who is still petting his hair and his good cheek, whose eyes have softened for the moment. "I'm glad you're my brother," Sam finally says, and it's quiet enough to fit inside of this room, in this space between them. "I'm glad it's you, Dean."

Sam can hear Dean's throat when he swallows hard and thick, can see his eyes get brighter with held-in emotion and he smiles because he knows what it means. He always knows what it means. "Hold on again, little brother. Gonna put you on the couch, okay?"

Sam knows he can walk just fine, that he's not really hurt, in the grand scheme of things. But Dean needs to do this and Sam wants him to. So he wraps his arm not holding the frozen corn-turned-ice pack to his cheek around his brother and lets himself be carried to the living room. Dean settles him down as careful as he can and Sam closes his eyes, sighing as he settles into the cushions. His eye is hurting more and more with every blink. Dean is gone for what only seems like a second but he's back with the coveted fan blasting cool air right at Sam and with two white pills and a big glass of ice water.

"Take these. It'll help with the swelling and the pain, alright?" Dean grabs the remote and flips through the channels, leaving it on a Bruce Lee movie and handing Sam the remote. "I'm gonna, uh. Go get some stuff to make for dinner. How does breakfast for dinner sound?"

"Good." Sam is so sleepy now and he doesn't know why. Earlier,

he'd been ready to climb on one of Wesley's bikes and pedal until they reached another town, but now he's here with Dean, he's bandaged up and he's full with Dean's attention all on him. He opens his eyes to savor the last bit of it and smiles when Dean's eyes are still locked to his face. "Get some orange juice, too?"

"Yeah, Sammy. No problem." Dean hovers near him for a few seconds, seeming to struggle over something in his mind for a breath of time and then he's crouching down next to Sam again, a wide palm pushing at his hair once more and Sam's heart rate picks up when he feels Dean drop a dry, quick kiss to the middle of his forehead. "I'm glad you're my brother, too."

The words are almost a whisper, a mumble, but Sam hears them, hears them and grabs at them greedily and tucks them away deep inside of his chest to keep forever, for him. Dean is back on his feet before Sam can even respond, can even open his eyes and he's halfway out the door by the time Sam opens his mouth.

"Dean?"

Dean pauses and turns to look back at Sam, eyebrows raised.

"Don't. Don't kill him, okay?"

If it was any other boy, any other family, any other brother than his own, it would have been a joke. But neither of them are smiling and after a long, loaded moment, Dean reaches for the back of his jeans and pulls his gun out, still holding Sam's gaze as he walks over and puts it down on the coffee table.

He's at the door again and they're buried deep in each other's eyes and Sam wants nothing more than for Dean to change his mind, to come back, to wrap himself around Sam so they can talk about martial arts and kung-fu movies but he knows better. He knows his brother and he understands why he has to do this. Dean is a protector and Sam is his and Dean has to keep him safe. It's that simple.

Dean nods, just a drop of his head and just once and the gaze is broken, door closing behind him. Sam closes his eyes, his last waking thought the ghost of Dean's mouth on his burning skin.

“Dean, I’m leavin’ in five minutes whether you’re out here or not. Sammy, stay out of trouble.”

Dean barks his customary ‘yessir’ and Sam rolls his eyes. He doesn’t respond to Dad, doesn’t do anything but stay where he is and stew. He listens to the front door slam shut and the rumble of the Impala being started.

“Bye to you, too,” Sam mumbles to himself.

He’s at that horrible age where he’s too young to go on hunts but he’s old enough, according to his father, to survive on his own. Still a shrimp, not old enough to take out a rawhead, but he’s plenty old enough to make his own dinner and get himself out of bed and to school and to head off any suspicious questions from all the “concerned” adults at school about his homelife. It makes no sense to him and he tells Dean and Dad that loudly and often.

It’s not that he *needs* his Dad and Dean there twenty-four-seven to take care of him. Of course he doesn’t. It’s just that he hates being alone, he hates being left out. He hates waiting. He hates the thought of Dean being in danger somewhere that Sam can’t get to him.

He’s sitting on the kitchen counter, watching Dean bustle back and forth, shoving things in his bag and sidestepping Sam’s swinging feet each pass. Sam knows he should help, shouldn’t be such a pain in the ass, but he’s starting to feel it: that nauseating worry settling low in his stomach, the one he gets whenever Dean leaves for a destination unknown to Sam.

He watches Dean carefully pack up the four sandwiches Sam had made him and Dad--sliced turkey and swiss on cheap white bread, lots of mustard and tomatoes and even cut in half, all of them--watches his eyes dart around, going through his mental checklist to make sure he hasn’t forgotten anything. They both jump a little when they hear the car horn blast from the driveway.

Sam starts breathing a little faster, has to grip the edge of the formica counter to keep from reaching out to grab his brother.

“Dean, what if I need you here?” He knows it’s a low-blow, that it’s vastly unfair to Dean but he uses it. “What if something happens?”

It’s that one, that open-ended question that makes Dean’s hack-

les rise, makes him turn to face Sam with a pained expression that Sam recognizes as unique to Dean: guilt, fear, resentment, and grasping love.

"Sammy, don't. Don't say shit like that. Nothing's gonna happen to you. We're in Buttfuck, Indiana. Me'n'Dad are running *towards* the bad thing. All you gotta do is stay here'n make sure you don't catch yourself on fire or something." His carefree grin is back, a mask, and he wears it until he walks away from Sam again.

"No, I mean." Sam hops down off the counter to follow him but he stops, his feet too heavy to bring him to Dean. He just stares at his back as Dean tugs on his jacket, strong back muscles disappearing under worn leather. His chest aches. "What if something happens to *you*?"

Dean turns to face him and there's fear again but now there's a healthy dose of irreverence because. Well, so what if something happens to him? As long as Sam's okay, right?

"*Don't*, Dean. *Don't*. Don't say something stupid or I'll punch you, I swear to god." Sam fists the sleeves of his own flannel shirt, angry tears burning in his eyes. He grits his teeth and meets his brother's eyes, feeling the challenge here between them.

"Sammy, what the fuck are you talking about? Are you PMSing or something? I wasn't going to *say* anything. Stop being so clingy." And there's Dean's low-blow. He doesn't mean it and regrets it the second he says it, but it gets the job done. He only has to glance over at Sam to see that he's hurt, that he feels stupid and alone in his emotions. Dean has made him feel alone. He bites so hard into the soft flesh inside his cheek that he draws blood. He makes sure Sam see him roll his eyes as he hefts his duffel onto his shoulder. "We'll be back tonight. It's just outside of town. Money for food on the counter. Just fucking *enjoy* a Saturday off, man. God knows I would."

The last bit is under his breath and he spares another look at Sam, hoping to meet his eyes so that Sam could know that it's just a front, all of it. He wants nothing more than to stay here with his little brother, than to play video games on the Nintendo that Dean got them back in Nevada last month, than to eat pizza or lo mein and wrestle around on the ground until they're too sweaty

and then settle in to watch *Baywatch* reruns. Something. Anything. Nothing felt right unless Sam was there.

He walks out the front door anyway, letting the creaky screen door smack back against the frame and he keeps his eyes straight ahead as he takes the steps in twos to the car where Dad's already waiting. The clouds roll fast overhead as they peel out.

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Sam hates playing video games alone and so he cleans the kitchen for lack of anything else to do, and also because it gives him a bit of focus in something that doesn't involve weapons. He scrubs the counters until they smell clean and lemony and look shiny and he feels stupidly proud, like Dean's gonna come home and see how clean it all looks and give Sam a smile like it matters, like Sam's good at making places a home. Ugh.

He jerks off next, in the bathroom with the door open just 'cause he can. He moans and carries on and makes all the noise he wants, half just to hear what he'd sound like during sex and half in the delicious fear of being heard. He comes into his cupped palm and lifts it to his face as he pants, his dick twitching and spent. He squints at the little mostly clear puddle in his hand and thinks about tasting it, about drinking it all down like the girls in porn but he gets too grossed out at the last minute, on the edges of a sex haze where it's suddenly not hot anymore and is just gross, slimy.

He washes his hands in the sink with extra soap and falls into Dean's bed naked. Just 'cause he can. He falls asleep with his face pressed into the pillow and doesn't dream.

When he wakes up, the sun is setting and he's starving. He pockets the money Dad left and eats bologna and crackers and drinks the last bit of Dean's orange Sunkist in the fridge. He gets out the book he hasn't started from the summer reading list and pulls out a notebook to take notes in. He opens the book and settles back on the couch, glancing at his watch. 8:34pm.

It's going to be a long night.

At ten-thirty, the sky opens up, rain pouring in from all angles,

it seems, making it impossible to see outside. Sam sits at the window and rips into his fingernails with his teeth.

At midnight, he moves his vigil outside. He buttons his flannel and brings his book out but doesn't turn on the porch light so he can see it. He just watches the road, the dark street out here on the edges of Winchester and listens to the highway sounds very nearby. He sucks on his now raw fingertips and indulgently lets every single bad thing that could happen play through his mind, lets every horrible result run full and unbidden because he likes to hurt himself in these moments, when Dean could be going through so much worse.

By 12:45, he's panicking. They'd left at two o'clock, when the sun was still high overhead. The sun is history and the moon is hiding behind rainclouds and it's still pouring out with no signs of letting up. He hasn't seen or heard a car in half an hour. He moves to the steps, lets himself get wet on the tips of his Converse and his knees where they're poking out from the awning. He keeps his hands balled into fists in his pockets so they don't shake.

At 1:13, he hears the Impala. Distant and nearly impossible to make out in the rain but Sam hears it. Would hear it in a goddamn tornado. He forgets every single bit of pride and shoots to his feet when he sees the headlights making their way toward him. He rushes to the car, a relieved grin bursting onto his face as he dashes to the passenger's side, unable to see inside but he waits for Dean to get out.

Dad's door opens first and Sam looks up at him immediately, terrified by the grim set of his mouth, the hard line of his jaw. Sam's heart leaps into his mouth.

"...Dad?"

His dad barely spares him a glance, just slams the car door and starts toward the house. Sam looks back down and he swears he feels his heart stop when he realizes that the passenger seat is empty.

"Dad!" Sam dashes at his father, grabbing hard at the arm of his jacket, his voice reaching embarrassingly high pitches. "Dad, where's." His stomach lurches and he suddenly can't breathe. "Where's Dean?"

"Decided to be a damn smartass on the way back, so I made him get out. Made him walk home." The words are passionless, said through gritted teeth, and they're so dismissive that it makes Sam fall back from his father, makes him gasp.

"He's out there? In this? You made him walk in *this*?"

"It's just rain, Sam. Ain't gonna kill him. Give him time to cool off and think about treating his father with a little more respect." Dad's up the steps now, screen door open, one foot inside the warmly lit house. "Get in here, Sammy. You'll catch a cold."

It's a throwaway comment, something Dad says all the time. But it's the stark, naked difference in how he treats the two of them, the almost cruel dismissal of Dean that makes Sam run. He just takes off, down the driveway and hard down the street. The highway is just two streets up and then it's easy, a straight-shot. He can hear his father's voice but it's drowning in the rain and Sam likes the sound of that.

There's hardly anyone driving on Highway 32 this time of night, and so Sam's alone in his journey. He's a good runner and he makes use of it now, soaked-through shoes meeting the soft earth, slick and muddy from the sudden onslaught. He's completely drenched in rain but he doesn't notice, doesn't pay any attention. He keeps his eyes straight ahead, looking for a lone figure heading toward him, looking for the set of Dean's shoulders and his wide walk and his jacket, his beautiful fucking jacket that Sam loves so much it physically hurts sometimes.

He feels like he's been running for hours but he's realistic, he's watched mile markers and he knows it's not true. What if Dean had been hurt? Not badly, not in any way that their Dad would have immediately seen, but. What if he was bleeding? What if he fell? The side of this road falls away sometimes to treacherous slides of land, down into woods. What if a car had swerved off the road and hit him? What if he hitched a ride from someone and he's already home? What if he just left? What if he's finally had enough of Dad's disregard for him and Sam's clinginess and he just left? Just left town. What if the last thing ever said between them was an argument? What if Dean never knew.

Sam stops where he is, a stray car rushing by and he leans over

and vomits in the grass, splattering his shoes but the rain washes it away almost immediately. He coughs, blinks, stares down at the mess he made. He has to find Dean. He has to.

Every step he takes makes him more frantic, more desperate for his brother. He has to find him. What if he never gets to see Dean again? What if he never hears his voice, what if he never feels Dean wrap his arm around him in the backseat as they tear down the spine of America, Dad awake and always silent behind the wheel? What if he never sees Sam grow into the man he so desperately wants to be for Dean? What if Dean is never proud of Sam, really, truly proud? What if he never gets the chance to show Dean what he can be?

It's faint at first, but he sees something moving through the sheets of rain. He stops where he is and just stares, squints and tries to make Dean appear with his want alone. He opens his mouth but nothing comes out. It's then and only then that he realizes that he's been crying this whole time. His voice is shot when it finally makes it out of his throat. "Dean!"

The moving shadow stops and Sam gasps, takes off like a shot, digging his foot in to give himself a good start. He slips right there, falls half in the road and half in the grass, mud splattering up into his face. He forces himself up, driven by the thought of Dean alone and takes off at a run again, his entire front covered in gravel and mud and grass but he can see him now, see his hair dark and matted to his head, see his jacket, the jacket. Sees his beautiful face and Sam sobs now, nearly collapsing with relief.

"Dean." The word always carries so much with it, so many different silent words and when he hears Dean's voice, the returned call of "Sammy?", Sam runs even faster, so close to him now and he hurts now all through his body, his heart pounding his chest that is so tight, his legs aching from running and from falling and from heartsick *worry*.

"Sammy, what the fuck!?! What--" But Sam is right there now, right *here* and he throws himself at Dean, his body tiny and light but he's a force tonight. Dean nearly falls over from the velocity but he catches Sam, buries his face in his soaked hair and wraps his arms around him. Sam tries to climb Dean, sobbing uncon-

trollably now, keeping his face tucked under his neck, nose just beneath his ear, his favorite place to be. He's shaking all over, trembling and he whines when he feels Dean lift him up onto his body.

"Dean ohmygod I'm so sorry. I'm sorry, please. Please, I was so scared. Dean, I was so *scared*." He can't stop crying now and he's a dead weight in Dean's arms, legs linked at the small of his back, arms wrapped suffocatingly tight around Dean's neck. He feels Dean's arms around him, one low and one high to support him and Dean rocks him as best as he can, trying to calm him down, to make him stop crying because it's *killing him*.

"Sammy, shh. It's alright. Hey, kiddo, it's alright. I'm okay. Shh, Sammy, it's alright, I'm okay. See? See?" He nudges Sam's face with his own until Sam lifts up and meets his eyes. And Dean's telling the truth. He's got a busted lip and the side of his face is pink and will definitely have a hellacious bruise in the morning but his eyes are bright, so, so bright and shining with tears and exhaustion but not pain. His expression softens when he sees Sam's face, snotty and covered in mud and clean streaks of tear-tracks, bottom lip worried fat and red. Dean sighs, his hand coming up to the back of Sam's head and pulling him back down to rest against his shoulder, face tucked into his neck. "It's okay, little brother. I'm okay. We're okay. Aren't we? We're just fine."

Sam just nods, sniffing to himself and wiping his face off on Dean's wet jacket. He has his fingers tangled together at the nape of Dean's neck and they're playing absently with the short, watery strands of hair there. He closes his eyes and lets the relief flood through him. Dean's okay. He's alive and he's right here and he's okay.

Dean sits down on the guardrail right where they'd been standing and Sam stays attached to him, way too big to be acting like this but Dean doesn't seem to mind and Sam sure as hell isn't going to stop on his own. Dean's petting Sam's hair, not caring that it's just getting wetter and wetter, that it's thick and caked with mud in places. He tucks his nose against Sam's temple and just indulges, just breathes him in, just feels every bit of him solid and alive and *alright* in his arms. "I'm sorry, Sam. 'Bout what I said ear-

lier. I didn't mean it. You know that, right? I didn't mean it."

Sam nods again, still not really wanting to talk, to try and give voice to anything warring in his body. He relaxes against Dean, so comfortable here in the pouring rain on the side of the highway in the middle of the night that he could fall asleep right here. He talks only because it will make Dean feel better, because Dean needs his forgiveness.

"I know, Dean. It's okay. I'm sorry, too."

Dean opens his mouth to reply but the car driving toward them on the other side of the road makes a sudden U-turn and pulls up right beside them, tires screeching as Dad slams on the breaks. The passenger door opens and his voice sounds far-away from the driver's side in the rain. "Get in. Now."

Dean sighs, tense all over again but he pushes it aside, for Sam. He stands up and Sam loosens against him, slides down his body in the dark, hoping Dad hadn't seen him, seen them. Dean smiles down at him, a small, encouraging thing and swipes a hand through the front of Sam's hair where it's plastered against his forehead. "Come on, kid. Let's go home."

They tuck back together in the backseat, stripped down to their underwear and under the beach towels Dad had miraculously thought to bring from the house. The apology from Dad is silent like they always are, but Dean can feel it. He strokes Sam's hair back into place on the way home, his eyes closed and he feels stupidly, inexplicably happy.

Sam wakes the next morning to the always pleasant sensation of being smacked on the feet.

"Up'n at'em, kiddo. Come on. You're the one who wanted to go to the mall, so don't you make me drag you outta bed."

Sam pulls the covers up over his head and whines, barely coherent and grouchy. "What time is it?"

"Fuckin' ten in the morning! Dude, come on. I don't wanna be at the mall all day with some snot-nosed little suburban kids, okay? Take some pity on me."

Dean sounds just put-out enough that it wakes Sam up completely. He sighs, making it good and loud, as he shoves the blankets away from his body. He squints up at Dean, giving him his very best pout as he looks him over. Half of Dean's face is bruised from whatever hunt he'd gone on with Dad last night and his lip is split and strangely twisted because of it.

Sam doesn't take his eyes off his brother as he sits up in bed and crawls over to him. Dean just watches him, lets him. Sam cups Dean's cheeks in the gentlest hands he's learned to have and he examines him, the ache of it all settling into Sam's wrists. The previous night comes flooding back to him, the rain, his own palms raw from falling, the terror of losing Dean, the unimaginable loneliness of searching a dark road for the one person who makes you feel more than everyone else combined.

He closes his eyes as he wraps his arms around Dean and hugs up close to him. Dean goes tense for a beat before he sighs and returns the hug, arms going around Sam's skinny body. They stay just like that, Sam kneeling on the bed and Dean bent over to hold him until the strain gets to be too much for Dean. He gives Sam a final squeeze and pulls back slowly, letting Sam get used to not being wrapped up before he takes it from him completely.

"I'm okay, man. Promise. Go get in the shower, okay? There ain't nothin' but Corn Flakes for breakfast, but you need to eat something before we go."

Sam nods, his eyes soft as he smiles at Dean. Sometimes he just gets these feelings, these moments where he looks at Dean and he can't breathe and he doesn't understand how someone could be so perfect. Dean's hilarious, he's a smartass, he's always looking out for Sam, with every single breath he takes. He knows exactly how to say things to Sam to make him calm down, to make him listen, really listen. Not to mention he's so pretty to look at that Sam feels it like a living thing right down into his bones.

He's never tried to talk to anyone else about it, doesn't want to know if he's alone in these feelings about his own brother or if everyone feels this way about their brother. He doesn't really want either one to be true.

Dean snorts at the lovey-dovey way Sam's looking at him,

reaching up to swat at the side of his head playfully. "Stop sleep-walkin' and get your ass in the shower. We're leaving in fifteen."

Sam feels himself smiling stupidly all through scrubbing rain-water from his body, all through stale cornflakes, and all the way to the mall. He's secretly sure that nobody else has a Dean to feel this way about.

--

"So, what's so great about that CD?" Dean glances down at the little bag that Sam is happily swinging along beside him as they shuffle through the mall. It's Sunday, so it's mostly families out today instead of just teenagers, which Sam is quietly grateful for. He doesn't think he could stomach watching Dean hit on a group of girls today.

"It's Nirvana." To Sam, that's all the answer required but Dean just looks over at him, eyebrows raised, waiting for an explanation. Sam just stops where he is and stares at Dean.

"Dude. Seriously?" His eyes widen when Dean's expression just doesn't change, when he just keeps walking, forcing Sam to jog a little to catch up. "They're just amazing. Really. Just awesome. This is the CD that came out last fall."

"So why are you just now gettin' it, then, music boy?" Dean leads them down another section of the mall, one the opposite way of where the car's parked, but it's still raining outside and Dad's passed out at home. They have nowhere to be and that suits Dean just fine.

"Just heard it for the first time a couple of months ago. Wes played it for me and I really liked it." Sam rubs the tip of his Converse with his other foot, shrugging a little as he tosses his hair out of his eyes. He's trying to downplay how excited he is because he knows Dean won't approve of the music anyway. "I've been saving up some money to get it. Just got enough on Friday. Savin' a little lunch money."

Sam's eyes light up when he sees a pet shop and he grabs hold of Dean's flannel and tugs him toward it. Dean scowls just because it's expected and lets out a sigh.

“Sammy, we ain't gettin' a dog, so don't even start. Plus, dude.” He grabs Sam by his shrimpy arm and pulls him to a stop. “Hey. Next time you want something that bad, just ask, okay? I don't have a lot or anything, but I can loan you fifteen bucks for a CD if it means that much to you.”

Sam has that gooey look in his eyes again and Dean's shoulders tense, waiting for Sam to melt against him, for some reason. He glances around to make sure there aren't any girls around them and relaxes a little when he doesn't see any.

“Will you listen to it with me?”

Sam's voice is so quiet that Dean almost doesn't hear him over the background noise of puppy yaps and little kid squeals. He takes a deep breath when the words process and chews on the inside of his cheek.

“Maybe. Yeah, maybe. If you aren't a pain in my ass for the rest of the afternoon, got it?”

Sam beams like sunshine at him and Dean can't help but laugh. He hooks an arm around Sam's shoulders and tugs him into the pet store.

“You're so easy, kid.”

They bypass all the pet supplies and start on one end of the glass cages lining the walls, filled with expensive puppies. Cocker Spaniels and Pomeranians and Beagles and Yorkies and Scottish Terriers and Golden Retrievers and Sam has to stop and gasp at every one of them, has to scritch his fingers soft against the glass, has to make little sounds at each puppy. Dean follows behind, hands in his pockets, lips pursed so he doesn't smile.

“Dean! Look! Look how cute, ohmygod.” It's a Weimaraner puppy, a little grey velvet-looking thing with big sad eyes that Sam is doing his very best to imitate to his brother right now. Dean leans down behind him to peer in at the puppy whose paws are up on the glass, scratching and his tail is docked and wagging excitedly. “Dean.”

Sam frowns now, pointing at the puppy's tail as he looks back at his brother.

“Why do they do that? Why do they cut their tails like that?”

Dean shrugs, looking at the little ruined puppy tail and it makes

his chest ache. Sam watches Dean and sees how he schools his face, forces his voice to stay neutral.

"Because people are vain assholes who think that they have to control everything. Including mutilating a puppy's tail just because they want it to look that way." He doesn't speak softly, doesn't mince his words and Sam watches as a couple who had been cooing at a puppy beside them glares at Dean before moving away. Sam smiles up at his brother before he leans back against Dean a little, back to his chest.

"I would never do that. Never."

Dean doesn't reply, just stares at the puppy for a minute more before he's tugging them along away from the puppies and past the snakes and fish and--

"Oh."

Sam looks up from the cage in front of him housing two guinea pigs to look at Dean, to see what he's making that sound over. Dean's eyes are on the tall kennels in the middle of the shop, the ones containing about ten kittens of varying colors. Sam's face hurts he's grinning so hard and he practically runs across the shop and stops in front of the cages, making little kissy noises at the kittens and wiggling a finger in where a little grey one can sniff and bat at it.

He feels Dean standing behind him and he turns to smile at him before he kneels down, peering in at the kittens on the lowest level so that Dean can get closer to see the ones higher up. Sam's quiet so he can hear any noise Dean makes at the kittens, desperate for it, almost. When he doesn't hear anything, he stands up next to his brother, watching him watch a particular kitten, a little scrappy thing with all different colors of fur, with a big splotch of black right over one side of its nose. Dean is rapt, his finger crooked past the little bars to try and entice the kitten over so he can pet it.

Sam feels his face heat, feels a warmth flood his chest and he wants suddenly to wrap his arms around his brother, to give him this kitten, to curl up with the both of them and listen to Nirvana and never deal with anything or anyone else ever again.

"We can ask to pet it," Sam suggests in a quiet voice, not want-

ing to break Dean's trance. Dean glances down at him, his face still open, unguarded and full of wonder but it hardens just a tiny bit when he realizes that he's being watched. He clears his throat gently.

"No, it's." Dean steps back, hands going back into his pockets. "We should go."

Sam is already standing at the counter where the registers are and he works up his courage to talk to the pretty girl refilling receipt paper. "Excuse me, miss? My brother and I would like to see one of the kittens, please."

The girl turns to look at Sam and smiles at him, at his politeness and his sweet little boy cheeks and eager face. "Sure, hon. Which one?"

Sam returns to Dean and the kitten cages with the girl and Sam can see the struggle in Dean, the need to run, to act like this isn't a big deal, to get away from how awkward it is that he wants to pet a kitten. Sam points to Dean's kitten, to the little patchwork-colored one. "That one."

"Ah. That's Mabel. She was the runt of the litter." The girl opens the cage with her key and makes soft clicking sounds at Mabel while she pulls her out, cradling her to her chest and turning to look at Sam and Dean. "We have rooms, if you guys wanna go into one with her? That way she can walk around and not get loose."

"Sure!" Sam is this-close to grabbing Dean's hand and pulling him but he knows it will make Dean lose all of his nerve so he just grins up at him, playing up his excitement so that Dean can at least pretend this is all for Sam.

The girl closes the door behind the three of them and sets Mabel down on the little bench, keeping a hand on her until Sam crouches down next to her and starts petting her. "Take as long as you want. There are some toys in here and some paper towels right there in case she makes a mess. But it's usually puppies that do that, so I think you'll be okay."

She smiles up at Dean, bright and a little shy and Dean flushes deep across his cheeks and down the back of his neck. Sam's looking up at them from where he's sitting on the floor, Mabel now in his lap, and he prays silently that the girl just leaves. Please just

leave. Just let us have this.

"Let me know if you need anything else."

"We will," Sam replies for Dean before Dean can even open his mouth, his smile big and young. "Thanks!"

The girl keeps her eyes on Dean until she's out of the little room and the door is closed behind her. Sam lets out the breath he'd been holding and he reaches down to pick up the kitten, holding her up so that Dean can take her. Dean sits down on the bench and Sam can see him struggling not to grin at the little ball of fluff and tiny mews Sam is offering him.

"She's sweet, Dean. She'd be a cuddlebutt." Sam watches Dean take the kitten into his arms and hold her carefully against his chest. Sam moves into a crouch so he can keep petting her back while Dean scratches at her head and her cheeks. Dean's eyes are light, cautiously happy and he glances up at Sam.

"That means she'd get along with you just fine." He's picking on Sam just because it's what they do. But the words are harmless so Sam just beams at him, scooting a little closer and resting his forearm across Dean's thigh so he can reach to kiss the top of Mabel's head right between Dean's forefinger and thumb.

"She's so soft, isn't she?" He rubs his face against Mabel's fur and as a result, against Dean's hand, reveling in the feel of both, if he's being honest with himself. He pulls back to watch Dean with her again, watch how gentle his face is, how open when he scratches under her chin and wiggles his fingers so that she'll grab at them with her tiny paws.

Sam feels tears prickle in his eyes and he leans even more against Dean. He rests his cheek against Dean's chest, cuddled right up against him next to Mabel, just like Dean said. He feels so good right now, so good it hurts, and it's a feeling that he's only ever associated with Dean. No girls have ever made him feel like this, no boys either. Not their dad, nobody. Just Dean.

He looks up to watch the kitten nose at Dean's bruised face and it occurs to him that he wants to do the very same thing. He wants to climb up into Dean's lap and rub their faces together and feel Dean's arms sure and strong and forever right around him. He wants it and he doesn't know how long he's wanted it and he can't

recall a time when he hasn't wanted it.

"We should go, Sammy," Dean says after a good ten minutes of pure, honest cuddling with the two of them and the kitten. "Dad's gonna be movin' around and he'll be pissed if I have the car out too long." He lifts Mabel to meet her eyes and he presses a kiss right on her little pink nose. Sam has to wrap his arms around himself to keep his hands off of Dean at the sight. It breaks him, somehow, to see Dean like this. So tender-handed and affectionate and unguarded. He wants to keep this Dean all to himself, wants to bury himself against him and feel all of that affection wash all over his own body.

"Say bye to cuddlebutt." Dean holds Mabel up to Sam and Sam kisses at her face, at her nose until she squirms. Dean laughs and stands up, kitten curled in one arm and he uses the other to help Sam up. "I was talking to the kitten about *you*," Dean teases, arm draping around Sam again when they open the door to step back out into the shop.

Sam doesn't think he'll ever stop smiling again.

--

The summer rain is falling in sheets by the time they make it home and Sam darts from the car and runs up to the porch, his hand just barely lighting on the wood railing before his feet slip out from under him and he goes sprawling on the front walk. Dean is there before he can even register what happened, arms under Sam's pits to lift him up to standing again.

"Careful, kid. It's slick as hell out here right now. You okay?" He wipes at Sam's face to get a couple of stray pieces of grass Sam collected in the fall. Sam blushes and wipes at his face, wiping his hands on his jeans before turning to walk into the house a little more carefully this time.

Dean tosses Sam a towel when they get into the house and Sam wipes his face off, wipes the front of his now-dirty grey shirt. There's chili warming on the stove and the house smells amazing with it.

"Ooh, Dad made five-alarm chili. Hell, yeah." Dean opens the

cabinet and pulls down a couple of bowls. "How about you go get changed and get the CD ready and we'll eat in my room?"

Sam looks over at Dean like he just won the damn lottery, eyes brimming with giddiness.

"For real?"

Dean snorts, shaking his head at Sam before he starts scooping chili into the bowls. "Yeah, Sammy, for real. You better hurry though. I'm starved."

They meet in Dean's room five minutes later, Sam dressed in a mostly clean t-shirt and sweats and the CD is ready in Dean's boombox on the nightstand. Sam is sitting on Dean's bed with the biggest grin he possesses when Dean comes in with two steaming bowls of chili, topped with cheese and two cans of Coke in both pockets of his flannel shirt.

"Scoot over, small fry. Make some room." Sam shoves over and reaches back to make sure the pillow is propped up so Dean can lean back. He takes one of the bowls from Dean and digs in immediately. He's on his fourth bite before Dean even starts on his first and he looks up, cheeks full of food, spicy chili on his lips and he finds Dean's eyes on him, eyebrow quirked.

"Wha?" Sam swallows as much as he can, licking his lips to get them at least a little clean.

"You gonna start the CD?"

"Oh. Yeah. Totally. But, um. Before I do, I just. I mean, you might not care, but." Sam stares at his chili, using his spoon to scrape all of it down to the same level on the sides of the bowl. "The lead singer, Kurt Cobain. He died a couple of months ago. Back in April."

Dean looks over at him for that, pausing mid-chew before he swallows what's in his mouth. He's quiet until Sam looks over at him and Sam can tell Dean is studying him, making sure he's okay about it before he responds.

"I heard about that actually. A couple of the guys I met here are big into them. They talk about it a lot. Suicide, right?"

Sam nods, doesn't really know what to say to make this a conversation. He thinks about it a lot, too. It upsets him more than it probably should, considering the fact that he never knew the guy.

But he likes their music, a lot. A whole lot. He looks over to find Dean still watching him and he gives him a faint smile. Dean nods just once, understanding that Sam doesn't really want to talk about it and Sam is quietly grateful.

He reaches over Dean and hits the play button, making sure it's turned up pretty loud so the first guitar sounds are heard clearly. He sits back against the pillow, his arm warm where it's touching Dean's and he eats more slowly now, nervous about what Dean thinks of the music.

They listen to the first song silently, both nearly done with their chili by the time it's over. The drums on the next song start up and Dean is bobbing his head along a little, head down to listen and to eat. Sam watches him, so anxious now that he's lost his appetite. He puts the bowl down on the floor beside him and comes back up in time for Kurt Cobain to start screeching and his eyes shoot to Dean, wide and worried.

Dean looks over at him and grins when he sees the look on Sam's face, shaking his head as he eats the last of his chili. His bowl goes on the floor too and he drains the last of his soda. They push even closer together, heads resting together on the pillow and they stare up at the ceiling, listening.

"Like the guitar," Dean concedes as quietly as he can, and it makes Sam's heart race. He turns on his side a little and tucks right up against Dean, eyes closing when Dean's arm wraps around his shoulders.

The next song, "Heart-Shaped Box," comes on and Sam wiggles excitedly. "This is my favorite," he whispers close to Dean's ear and Sam can feel Dean listening more closely.

He lets his hand spread on Dean's chest casually, his heart beating right in the center of Sam's palm. He looks up at Dean very, very slowly, careful not to disturb him and he can see the full pout of his busted mouth and the fan of his lashes across faintly freckled cheeks. A strangely beautiful palette of varying shades of purple cover the right side of his face. Dean's eyes are closed and he's listening to Sam's favorite song. Sam wants to crane up and attach his lips to the point of Dean's jaw and suck until Dean makes a sound. He tucks his head back against Dean's chest again to avoid

the temptation and lets his own eyes close.

"Mabel woulda hated that song," Dean declares when it's over. They both snort and giggle and Sam smacks Dean on the chest. "Rape Me" starts up and Dean's eyes open and meet Sam's, eyebrows raised. Sam tenses for the impending lecture but the drums and guitar break through and Dean relaxes again, faint smile on his face. "Nice."

Sam curls his fingers the tiniest bit, letting them rub at Dean's chest and he hisses a little when he feels a sharp pain on the pad of his middle finger where it catches on Dean's shirt. Dean cracks an eye and looks down at Sam.

"What's wrong?"

"Got a splinter, I guess. Falling out there." Sam reluctantly moves his hand from Dean's chest and squints at it in the near darkness of Dean's unlit room when he feels Dean's hand close around his wrist. He watches Dean look at his finger, wondering when he's going to start poking and prodding at it and he gasps, actually gasps, when Dean slides Sam's finger into his mouth, straight past his lips and right across his soft, wet tongue.

Sam sits up a little and stares down at Dean with desperately wide eyes, the tip of his finger tucked into Dean's mouth and he feels himself go painfully hard when Dean starts to suck on it. He pulls his hips back from Dean's side, his heart going crazy in the trap of his chest. He swallows hard, gradually relaxing back against Dean, cheek on his shoulder. The rest of his hand curls against Dean's cheek while Dean continues to tender the splinter in his mouth, stroking at it with his tongue, easing the ache with the gentle sucking of his hot mouth.

"Feel better?"

Sam barely understands the words mumbled around his finger but he nods at the tone, his cheeks burning so hot he's worried he has a fever. Dean keeps sucking on his finger for the rest of the album, until it's soaked through with his spit and pruned with it and Sam is so unbelievably hard that he's about to cry. Dean falls asleep before the last song is over, Sam's finger slipping out of his now slack mouth, his arm tight around Sam's body.

Sam stays right where he is while it falls dark outside, trying to

calm his heart and his dick down, trying not to move a single inch because he knows if he does, he's going to come, bright and shattering right against his brother's long body. It's a revelation, a new secret he has to keep all to himself: that he wants every single part of his brother that he can possibly get his hands and mouth and heart on. It's an important moment in his life, maybe the most important, and *In Utero* will forever be its soundtrack.

When school starts back up, they are miraculously still in Winchester. Sam doesn't ask questions, doesn't bring it up, not even to Dean. He just gets Dean to buy him a few pencils and a pack of college-ruled paper. He reuses all his stuff from fifth grade: folders and binders and dividers. He has a small group of friends and a girl he has a crush on, Sarah Dickens. She has perfectly curled bangs and pink bands on her braces and a big beautiful smile and she makes Sam's knees feel a little wobbly.

Dean even has friends. Two entire friends, to be exact. Sam is so giddy over it that it's almost sad. *Dean* has *friends*. Dean doesn't really do friends, or he hasn't up 'til this point. They simply haven't had the time before, Sam guesses. But he has friends now, Landon and Ethan, two guys who watch way too much *Beavis and Butt-head* and smoke too much and who listen to grunge music. They're nothing like Dean except that they hate popular kids, they like annoying the hell out of people, and they like heavy guitar sounds.

It probably doesn't hurt that they think Dean is a bit of a demi-god.

It's a Friday afternoon and Sam is strolling into the house after hanging out at the park next to the school with his friends, playing basketball and watching the girls track team practice. He's sweaty and his muscles are tired and he's still grinning all stupid from laughing with his dorky friends for hours. He tosses his bag onto the couch and stops when he hears two low, eerily Butt-head-like laughs along with Dean's own, his beautiful, clear as a bell laugh.

Sam hesitates, not sure whether or not he should go into the

kitchen but he's dying of thirst. He takes a deep breath and walks in casually, catching Dean's eyes immediately and giving him a tiny smile that says "it's cool, I promise I'll be out of here soon."

"Heya, Sammy." Dean grins over at his brother, a gooey slice of pepperoni pizza halfway to his mouth that he chomps into, over half the slice gone in one bite. The other two guys fall quiet as soon as they spot Sam, busying themselves with pizza and cans of Pepsi.

"Hey, guys." Sam nods over at Landon and Ethan, giving them an awkward smile. He feels pathetically young around them, he feels decidedly left-out and uncool because these are Dean's friends. He hates that he feels jealous of them, knows he doesn't have a reason to. But nobody's ever accused Sam of being reasonable when it comes to his brother.

They both give Sam a nod and glance over at Dean, trying to figure out how to follow his lead here. Sam knows that they know how protective Dean is over Sam and knows they'll never outwardly make fun of him. But Sam also knows how scrawny he is, knows how small he looks in his faded flannel shirt and Dean's old Zeppelin t-shirt. He knows he's not cool enough to even be in the room with them, so he just gives them a half-hearted smile and ducks his head and goes about getting his glass of water, drinking it down at the sink and refilling it.

He hears the three boys behind him shift, can feel them waiting for him to leave. They're being obviously quiet, so he clearly walked in on an Important Conversation. Landon, who Sam has marked as the dumber one, opens his mouth after just a few seconds.

"Keep goin', Dean. So you got her bra off and--"

Dean clears his throat, loud and warningly and Sam's heart is in his throat. He knows Dean makes out with girls. He knows Dean gets a lot of girlfriends, but he's never heard a story like this. Never heard about the naked parts. He turns around with his glass of water, his eyes wide and a little nervous and he skirts around the table on his way to his room. He jumps when he feels Dean's hand circle around his wrist and he turns to meet his eyes, pleading with Dean not to pick on him, not here in front of these guys.

Dean's smile is soft and just for him.

"We still on for sneaking into *Pulp Fiction* tomorrow, Sammy?"

Sam nods, doesn't look away from Dean, doesn't dare glance at the boys he can feel watching him. His heart is racing in his chest and he doesn't know why, doesn't know why he needs to get away from here and now. He tries to muster up a smile for Dean but it doesn't quite reach his eyes. He ducks his head again, hair falling in his eyes and he tugs away from Dean's hold on him when in all actuality, it's the very last thing he wants to do.

He leaves the door to his room cracked so Dean doesn't have to worry that Sam's upset at him and wants to be left alone. He doesn't want to be left alone. He wants Dean to make those boys leave so that this is their place again, their broken-down sanctuary from the outside world. He sits down on his bed, pulling the stack of comic books from under it. He shucks his flannel shirt and his shoes and opens up an X-Men comic, trying to get caught up in the story he practically knows by heart and trying his very best to ignore the conversation that he can still hear very clearly from the kitchen.

He doesn't try hard enough.

"So, anyway, I get her bra off and she thinks it's hot I can get it off so fast, right?" Dean is in his element, telling stories about girls, about himself, to a rapt audience. Sam can practically see him, see the fire in his eyes, the way he cocks his hips with his feet propped on the table, the fullness of his mouth that forms each word.

"How'd you do it?"

Sam doesn't know which one asks it, but if he has to put money on it, he'd guess Landon again.

"...How'd I do what?"

"Get the bra off so fast? How do you do it?"

"Land, shut the fuck up. One of us finally got laid, and you're gonna keep interrupting the story to ask about shit that doesn't matter? Shut it." That's definitely Ethan. And one part keeps rolling around and around in Sam's mind as Landon and Ethan argue back and forth. *One of us finally got laid.* Dean got laid. Dean had sex. Real, actual sex. Not just kissing, not just second base. Dean put his. His.

Sam's cheeks burn and all he can hear for a minute is his heart beating in his chest, slamming so loud that it's in his ears. He scrambles up from the bed and sinks down the wall next to the cracked door, his head tipped so he can hear better even though he doesn't really want to hear any of it ever, ever again.

--and I've got my mouth on her tits, you know. Just working my hand down into her panties and she's bare, totally bare. Smooth and she's so wet. God. She was soaking wet and burning up and she made this sound when I put my fingers in her, this sound like it *hurt* and she just grabbed me and pulled me down on top of her more and started grindin' up against me and tellin' me how bad she wanted it, wanted my dick inside her."

"And she's *nineteen*?" Ethan's voice is soft, reverent but totally believing. No one would deny that a woman of any age would want such a thing from Dean. Sam has his knees drawn up to his chest, his arms wrapped around them, nails from both hands digging into the meaty softness of his forearms.

"Yeah, man, fucking nineteen. Sophomore in college. She spins around and sits right down on my face and starts suckin' my dick and I can't breathe, really, you know? I've just got my face buried in her cunt and I just suck and kiss at it and let her ride me until she's gushing all over me and--"

"Wow."

--then she's spinning around and she's about to sit on my dick and I have to remind her to put on a condom because. I don't want no babies. I don't care how good it feels. So she gets one and puts it on me and she puts me inside her and--"

"*Fuck*." It's both boys this time and their voices are gruff, deep with obvious arousal. Dean can certainly weave a picture. Sam shifts where he's sitting, a low throb starting up in his dick that he's doing his best to ignore.

--She starts working my dick like I'm just a toy, right? Just riding me and then she does the damndest thing. She reaches over and turns on her CD player and starts playin' this song." Dean pauses this time, a loaded, expectant pause.

"What song?" Ethan and Landon both again and Sam is practically hanging out the door, straining to hear every single word.

“That stupid fuckin' Jeremy Jordan song, from a couple years back? ‘Right Kind of Love’ or some shit?”

There is a pause of about two seconds, a perfect, comedic pause and then Ethan and Landon are cracking up, slapping the table and Sam can hear Dean's laugh, small but genuine right along with them.

“Exactly! That was exactly my reaction. So I say ‘you're fuckin' kidding me, right? You expect me to fuck you to this song?’ and she's all ‘I've always wanted to come when this song is playing!’ and I just hold onto her hips to slow her down and I'm like ‘alright, well, how long is the song?’, right? Because I just need to know what I'm working with here. And she says ‘about four minutes.’ So I say alright and just flip her over and grab her legs to put ‘em on my shoulders and I just start workin' her.”

Another pause.

“Did you make her come?”

“Twice.” Dean's voice is deep with pride and memory and Sam can picture him perfectly. His Dean, his beautiful, charming brother, soaking up all the attention. He can't get the image out of his head of Dean with some girl wrapped around his body, of Dean's hips working hard and fast and with that perfect curl like the guys in porn to make girls scream. Sam pushes a hand down against his dick, heel digging in to take the edge off.

“Your first time having sex, and you made her come twice?” Landon sounds dubious now and there's a sound of a new can of soda being opened.

“Made her come three times, actually. But twice during the song, like she wanted.”

“What happened then?”

“We fucked. I held on as long as I could and then, you know. I got off and she wanted to cuddle so we did that for a little bit. Then she wanted to take a shower with me, so we did that. She let me fuck her in the shower, too. Got her from behind that time. Then I came home and here I am.”

Today. This happened today. While Sam was at the park, squirming over girls' track shorts and getting hot over seeing the strap of Sarah's bra under her tank top. Dean was making some

girl come *four times* on his first try. Dean was getting kissed and taken care of by somebody that Sam's never seen before. Somebody who doesn't even *know* Dean, doesn't know what a good brother he is, doesn't know what he does to protect people, doesn't know what Dean's been through. Dean had his mouth on that girl, between her legs and on her boobs and.

Sam feels blood pooling under his nails where he's digging into his forearms now, skin broken and hurting. She took his virginity. Some girl who doesn't know what she had. She got to hold him while he was broken apart after he came, like Sam gets after the few times he's jerked off. She got to touch the skin at the back of Dean's neck just under his hair and she knows what he smells like when he's sweaty and how good it feels to be tucked just under Dean's neck, right up against his shoulder. She knows how strong his arms are. She got to have him for a little while.

The boys are still talking but Sam doesn't care. Doesn't want to hear anymore. He gets up as quietly as he can and goes back to the bed, knocking the comics on the floor and curling up on his side. He reaches down into his jeans and holds his whole dick in his hand and squeezes it, feeling the pleasure shock of it burn up from his belly. He closes his eyes and pictures Dean fucking her from behind in the shower, that faceless girl with a pretty round butt and long dark hair and Dean's perfect body slamming right up against her, into her, his smooth belly burying against her butt that's bouncing from Dean's thrusts and she knows what he feels like inside her. She can probably still feel him, right now. Sam wonders what Dean feels like. Wonders where he could fit Dean inside himself so that he'd know just like she knows. Wonders what he could do to make Dean feel so good he has to tell people about it. He wonders if Dean could make him come that many times without even trying.

Sam's off just like that, just at the thought of Dean's attention all on him, laser-focused on making Sam feel good, on making him come. Sam bites into his lips, breath rushing hot out of his nose as he rubs and rubs at his dick, his entire hand sticky now and the moon-shaped cuts on his arm burning as they slide against the waist of his jeans. He comes down slowly, so dazed with orgasm

that he can barely open his eyes.

He peels his shirt off blindly, sliding his jeans off and rubbing under his boxers with the shirt to clean himself off. He wipes his hand off last and tosses the shirt under the bed to worry about later. He falls asleep to the low rumble of Dean's voice and he feels it like a caress at the very smallest part of his back.

--

"Sammy?"

Sam opens his eyes slowly, completely disoriented to the point that he doesn't know how old he is, where he is, and who is saying his name. He feels a warm body snug up against his back and a heavy arm draped around his bare waist and he figures it can't be bad, wherever and whoever he is.

"Sammy, you awake? C'mon, it's almost eight-thirty. I know you're hungry."

Dean. That's Dean right up behind him, pressed so tight to his body. Dean, who's newly not-a-virgin and who has had the hand that's now spread across his tummy on a girl today, in a girl today. Sam feels his dick harden even as his chest tightens and he is about twenty-five different kinds of fucked up.

"Yeah, Dean," is all he can manage and his voice sounds like sandpaper got to it. "They gone?"

"Yeah, they left about half an hour ago. Went to go skate at the park. But I wanted to hang out with you a little. That okay?"

Dean's voice is quiet to fit the dark of the room, it's apologetic and that hand rubbing Sam's stomach should never, ever, ever leave again. Sam wants nothing more than to press backwards into Dean's body, to see if he can feel Dean hard, to see if Dean will respond, to see what will happen. If Sam can make Dean forget about that girl.

He turns instead to face his brother, meeting his eyes in the light from the street outside and giving Dean a smile. Dean's arm is around his back now and the other is curled above Sam's head on the pillow, fingers playing lazily in the longest parts of Sam's hair. They're getting too old for this and Sam knows it, can feel it

in his bones. These are the last few days they'll do this and it will still be considered okay. He soaks it all up, soaks up Dean's eyes on him and the lullaby that is everything about this moment.

He wants so badly to kiss him, his beautiful brother, to feel Dean's mouth, to know its texture, to taste soda and the spice of pepperoni on his lips. He won't. He knows he won't. But it's such a perfect thought.

"Is there any pizza left?"

Dean smiles at him, knowing he's forgiven of whatever it is that Sam had been carrying around and Sam gives it right back to him.

"You think I only got one pizza when I live in a house with you? Please. C'mon. I'll heat it up. You see what's on TV." Dean scratches at his back just once and then he's gone, out of the bed and leaving Sam in the dark except for the door wide open, revealing the comforting glow of light from the kitchen.

Sam puts on pajamas and joins Dean in the main part of the house, the smiles between them soft, full of a shared feeling that they could never explain to anyone, even each other.



1995

They'd gotten into Rolling Prairie, Indiana late. Or very, very early. Sam had slept the whole way from Monticello, Iowa, exhausted from the two days he'd spent waiting for Dad and Dean to come back home from a hunt. The one time he'd actually fallen asleep for more than an hour, he'd woken up to the sight of Dad sewing through Dean's thigh with a curved suture needle. Dean was shaking, covered in sweat and blood and staring hard at the ceiling to try and ignore the pain.

Dad had barely washed Dean's blood from his hands before he'd turned his haunted eyes on Sam and said exactly two words.

"Let's go."

The snow had started in Illinois, falling pretty and steady in the dead of night where they'd set out, heading east. Dean had stretched out in the backseat alone, thigh hurriedly bandaged, sleeping the sleep of the heavily medicated. Sam had sat in the front seat with Dad in tense silence, Sam's from seeing Dean like this and Dad's from whatever horrors he'd witnessed that night.

Sam had slept and not dreamed.

The snow is heavy in Rolling Prairie, and the car skids a little as they make the trek up the hill to the cabin Dad had managed to get them into. Sam blinks himself awake as they slip and slide up the hill, the car gritting and growling stubbornly the whole way. All romantic notions Sam had of a cabin in the snow are dashed when he sees how small the place is, how abandoned. He rubs his eyes hard and turns to look at Dean who is awake, has been for who knows how long. They give each other a tight, fleeting smile as Dad parks and immediately climbs out.

"Gotta piss. Just get the duffels. We'll figure everything else out in the morning, boys."

Dad disappears up the steps and into the house and Sam knows that's the last they'll see of him until tomorrow afternoon.

He stands up, stretching his legs that feel like they're full of sand. He slips a little on the icy ground, reaching out to grab the car door to steady himself. He looks back at Dean in dread.

"Dean, it's slick. Really slick."

"It'll be fine, Sammy. Just c'mere and help me."

Sam closes his own door and opens the one to the back seat, standing uncertainly next to it while Dean hoists himself up, trying not to jostle his leg too much. Sam takes a step back when Dean goes to stand up but he's tense, ready to dive for his brother, to grab him and hold him up. Sam exhales in relief when Dean wraps an arm around his shoulders and they very, very slowly make their way to the steps.

"Grab the rail, Dean."

Dean obeys silently, grunting as he pulls himself up to the tiny porch.

"We'll get the shit in the morning. Don't worry about it," Dean gruffs as he opens the front door. It's dark inside, pitch black and freezing. Sam's insides tense, his mind racing to try and figure out a way to make both the darkness and the dangerous cold go away so his brother can sleep. He leaves the front door open so they at least have moonlight. They bump into a chair and Sam helps Dean to lower himself down into it.

"Here. Just stay right here. I'm gonna clean your stitches and

change the bandages. I think I saw a woodpile around the side of the house and it looks like there's a fireplace. We'll get a fire going. Just, um." Sam blushes, hands rubbing at his butt as he tries to find his back pockets. "Take your pants off, okay?"

"You don't waste time, do ya, Sammy? Know what you want and just go for it." Dean grins, still a little doped up on pain pills and sweaty with exertion but he's still got his tried-and-true of humor. Sam lets out a nervous bark of laughter, too loud for the tiny space and he turns and hightails it back out into the cold.

Twenty minutes later, he's got a respectable sized fire going in the ancient fireplace, one that gives them enough light and plenty of warmth in no time. Sam can see now that there is a small bedroom off to one side just past the world's tiniest kitchen and beside a batcave of a bathroom.

"Dad probably pissed all over the seat. You can't see shit in there," Dean mumbles as he peers over at the bathroom.

"I could piss straight into a snake hole in the dark if I needed to, smartass," Dad shoots back from the dark little bedroom with the door cracked. Sam and Dean snort and snicker and Dad just grumbles threats back, obviously too tired to fight for his reputation.

Dean watches Sam prepare a bowl of warm water with a clean cloth he'd found in the first aid bag. Sam gives him a shy smile as he lowers down to his knees in front of his brother who has unlayered down to a t-shirt and a pair of black briefs that look older than he is. His thigh is huge from the wrapping Dad put around it, but Sam is relieved to find that it's not bleeding much as he unwraps it.

"How you feelin'?" Sam looks up at Dean from under his lashes as he peels the bandage away slowly, revealing a mean, heavy gash from the top of Dean's thigh and down, almost to his kneecap. Dad's stitches are impeccable though, properly spaced and neat. Sam wrings out the cloth and bites into his lower lip hard as he touches it to the wound, empathetic pain shooting all down his body when Dean hisses.

"Like I almost got my leg ripped off by a poltergeist. Jesus Christ." Dean groans and sinks down deeper into the chair, his legs

falling open even more. Sam tries to be good, objective, a professional. But he looks away from the gash for a minute and sees the tiny gold hairs of Dean's legs from the glow from the fire, the shadow of the bulge of his dick in those underwear and he realizes he can smell Dean, a little tangy, musky, sweaty. A man, his brain supplies helpfully. A gorgeous man with heaven between his legs.

"Sammy? You fall asleep?"

Sam looks up to find his brother looking at him through slitted eyes, a tired smile on his face. Sam pulls the cloth away and sinks it back into the warm water, wringing it out and reapplying it.

"Sorry. Long car ride, I guess. Do you, um." His pinky strokes over Dean's knee, bumps over the little knob of his kneecap. "Do you have more of those pills?"

Dean grunts in the affirmative, his eyes closed completely now. "Dad's got 'em in his pocket. Just put a light bandage on it, okay? I'm gonna take it all off tomorrow, let the air get to it a little."

Sam nods and makes quick work of drying it as gently as he can and bandaging Dean back up, the medical tape sticking to the tiny hairs on Dean's leg. He stands up, rinses the bowl out in the sink.

"I grabbed you some, um. Clean underwear and a shirt, right there next to you. I'll be right back." Sam practically scampers into what is apparently their dad's room, blushing for talking to Dean about his underwear.

"...Dad?"

"Grgn."

That's Dadspeak for what-do-you-want-leave-me-alone-I'm-sleeping, Sam knows.

"Dean said you have those pills--"

"Front left pocket. Pants on the floor." Dad grunts and gruffs loudly as he turns over in bed, letting out a sigh when he resettles. Sam feels around in the dark until he finds the pants and then the pills, cupping them carefully in his sweaty palm.

"Um, where are we sup--"

"Couch in the livingroom folds out into a full-sized bed. Blankets in the closet beside the bathroom. Leave me alone."

Sam smiles and shakes his head to himself. Sometimes his Dad is like a god, untouchable and mysterious and unknowable. And

other times he's like a big brother, annoying and annoyed and almost bratty. Like right now.

"Night, Dad."

"Brrf."

Sam pulls the door closed when he leaves and ventures back over to Dean who has gotten his shirt off but is sitting back in the chair, half asleep and panting softly. Sam aches all over.

"Hold on, Dean. Lemme get the bed pulled out. You don't need pajamas anyway. The fire's making it crazy hot in here."

Sam grabs a plastic cup from the one cabinet that he really, really hopes is clean and fills it with water from the tiny sink before he goes about pulling the cushions off and dragging the heavy-ass bed out from the couch. He's sweating like crazy when he's done, he's panting and frustrated and it takes every single ounce of patience in him to put a sheet and a blanket on the bed and throw two pillows from the closet on it.

He returns to Dean who is dozing in the chair and he helps him up, guides him the few steps it takes to get to the bed and it squeaks warningly when he just sort of falls down onto it. His bare chest is glistening with sweat and he's a little breathless and Sam can only stand beside him and stare at him.

"Got hot as balls in here, didn't it?" Dean shoves the thick wool blanket down and punches his pillow until it's something besides a pancake in a pillowcase. "Think you can crack a window, Sammy?"

Sam spends the next ten minutes fighting with the window, with the lock and finally just with its inability to fucking work but he gets it open enough, just a few inches and the icy breeze it lets in is a welcome one.

He strips off his own clothes and leaves them in a lump on the floor. By the time he stumbles back over to the bed and basically just falls down onto it, he's trembling with exhaustion and exertion and heat.

The sharp cold air cuts through from the open window and it feels so good that he moans. He turns on his side and slips an arm under his pillow to support his head and gazes over expanse of Dean's chest and his tight stomach, at his nipples that are hard from the cool bite of air. Dean's already dead to the world, softly

snoring.

Sam sneaks a hand down his own body, pushing between his legs to squeeze his dick to give it some relief and he just holds himself, his eyes growing heavier and heavier but he doesn't look away from his sleeping brother until they close.

--

He doesn't stir again until the sky is pale, soft with dawn. Sam stays where he is for a few minutes, freezing cold now because the fire is out and the window is open but either he or Dean dragged the blanket over them in the night so he can deal with it. He looks over at Dean who has turned on his side, who is facing Sam and sleeping gracelessly, pink mouth open and wet and drooling the slightest bit, the sound of him snoring audible probably in every corner of the cabin. He's so beautiful that Sam feels it into the marrow of his bones.

His eyelashes are lighter at the ends and Sam wants to run his thumb along them, to see if they feel as soft as they look, like feathers. His skin is fair with winter, and it just makes his freckles stand out even more where they're dusting over his nose and across his cheeks.

Sam steals a single moment, leaning forward and pressing his nose to Dean's hair, breathing in the sweat and earth of him. He lets his lips brush over Dean's forehead, fleeting and scared of discovery. Dean makes a soft sound in his sleep, pushes a little bit closer to Sam. Sam just smiles, runs his thumb over one of Dean's eyebrows before he gets out of bed, making sure the blankets are up over Dean's shoulders and covering his feet.

He tugs on his clothes from the night before and shoves his feet into Dean's boots before he braves the cold morning waiting for him outside. It's still snowing but it's lighter now. There's a good three feet of snow all the way down the hill to the road that is invisible, buried in white. The car is covered by several inches and it doesn't look like it's going to be stopping anytime soon.

He wades his way over to the wood that is covered by a blue tarp, dry for the most part, but there isn't much more left. He

squints into the backyard, spying a little woodshed towards the back of the property and silently prays that it contains an entire arsenal of wood. He gathers as much as he can before returning to the house, spending a good half hour cleaning and sifting through ash and getting a new, smaller fire going.

He goes out to the car and grabs a can of rock salt and covers all the windowsills and doorways with it. He kicks off his brother's boots and looks around and doesn't hear anything but the crackle of the fire and the melodious sounds of two Winchester men sleeping.

He changes clothes after wiping himself clean with lukewarm water and pulls on his winter jacket again before stepping back outside. The porch looks different when he realizes he doesn't have anything more to do. When he can just sit here for a little bit, alone with his thoughts, nothing at all required of him.

The sun is just now starting to rise, gold invading the pale blue. Sam tucks against the wooden wall of the cabin, his feet hidden in two pairs of wool socks but bare otherwise. His cheeks are already pink with cold, the tip of his nose. He watches the sun rise from his vantage point on a hill, looking out over a flat valley. The sky is thick with snowclouds, the colors of dawn pushing up into the ghostly white of them, making them soft pink and orange and honey gold. The sun glows faintly through it all, brightening up the entire world even as the snow starts to fall again in earnest.

It's beautiful. It's quiet and isolated and almost sacred-feeling. He feels soft, vulnerable here and he secretly never, ever wants to leave. If it could be like this, just like this, forever. Dean safe inside, sleeping and nowhere to go. No plans, no one to run from, to hide from. Just them and Dad, trapped inside by winter. He itches for a notebook, a camera, a bit of charcoal, an ounce of artistic ability to capture this feeling somehow. He doesn't have any of those things, but he's blessed with an expansive and vivid memory and so he pulls in every single thing around him, all these feelings and sounds and colors and folds them up deep in his mind, keeping it all safe.

He stands up with the sun is higher in the sky, when his butt is numb from the cold and just from sitting for so long. He makes

his way back into the warm house and smiles when he sees that Dean has barely moved at all. He strips and climbs back into bed with him, turning on his side, his back to Dean so he can nestle in close to him, be Dean's little spoon. Dean grunts softly, hand spreading across Sam's chest to pull him back close. Sam falls asleep again and dreams of flying.

By the time Sam crawls out of bed again, it's closer to noon than dawn. He shoves himself back into his clothes, unnerved by the silent cabin. One glance around tells him that Dad and Dean both aren't in here. He laces up his boots quickly and opens the door to the outside world, relieved to see two things: that the snow has stopped for the moment, and Dean slowly walking up the porch steps with an armful of dry wood. He's pink cheeked and a little sweaty, his eyes bright in the pale backdrop. He looks so frighteningly pretty that Sam leans against the doorframe, stunned into stillness.

Sometimes just seeing Dean has a way of emotionally knocking Sam flat on his ass.

"Well, hey there, Sleeping Beauty. Welcome back to the real world." Dean shoulders past Sam into the house and Sam is left staring out into the white, dazed and flustered and a little annoyed. He shoves away from the door and steps back into the cabin after Dean, closing the door after them.

"Hey, I was up before dawn. I built another fire while you were still drooling on your arm." He rushes over to take the wood from Dean before he can even think about crouching down and stretching his stitches. Dean grumbles but lets Sam do it, taking the opportunity to peel his coat and gloves from his body.

"Well, anyway. Dad's in town, I guess. This place belongs to some friend of his, but the guy stays mostly in town unless he's out here hunting." Sam glances back at Dean for that and Dean gives him a knowing smile.

"Like. Bambi hunting," Dean clarifies.

"Oh."

"Yeah. Hell, I don't know how Dad knows the guy. You know how Dad is. Anyway. He's working on getting the electricity up and running in here. There's not really much to power, but it'll be nice not to have to use kerosene lamps and candles every day."

"Yeah," Sam grunts helpfully, arranging the last of the wood and reaching back wordlessly for Dean's lighter which is placed in his upturned palm within seconds. It takes several minutes but the fire catches and Sam sits back on his butt on the ground with a sigh. "We need to get some newspaper or something. It'll make this so much easier."

"We can pick up a couple. We've gotta go to the grocery store. Apparently there's a Wal-Mart a couple of miles up the road."

"I thought we were in the middle of nowhere." Sam turns to Dean, his eyebrows raised incredulously. He forces himself to stand up and Dean reaches out to swipe at Sam's sleep-styled hair.

"We are. But this is the fuckin' America, Sammy. Wal-Marts are *everywhere*."

--

An hour later and they're stepping into Wal-Mart, panting from the walk that Sam all but begged Dean not to take, not with his leg. But Dean is somehow more stubborn than Sam is when it comes to injuries and getting shit done, so he'd won by sitting on his ass and basically sliding down the hill to the road.

"I'da been a fucking *awesome* boy scout," he'd mumbled to himself while Sam ran and slipped after him.

They grab a cart and step into civilization, both of them looking around warily at all the bustling shoppers, every single one of them looking like they have an immediate purpose for being here.

"There an apocalypse I didn't hear about?" Dean shucks his coat and stuffs it into the baby compartment thing of the cart, waiting while Sam does the same.

"Probably just more snow coming. Why the hell did we have to come here? There's probably no snow in Panama City." Sam sighs once he's rid of his layers and they set off, first into the produce department.

"Alright, Sammy, we need to get a few essentials. Enough to tide us over for a week but sensible stuff. Not. No, man, not oranges." Dean takes the orange from Sam's hand and sighs when Sam's face falls.

"Jesus, *fine*. Get some oranges. But I was thinkin' more along the lines of soups and meats and beans and stuff. Some dry goods and some things we can keep cold in the snow until we get the power on. Bottled water. You got me?"

Sam nods, fumbling around with one of those annoying plastic bags that you practically have to wish open. Dean takes it and opens it for him, waiting as Sam drops his three oranges in before he twists it up and ties a knot at the top.

"We'll split up. You take refrigerated and I'll take dry goods. Meet up right back here in half an hour. Got it?"

Sam blinks up at Dean guiltily, taking his eyes off of the pomegranates.

"Yessir."

Dean's face softens and he reaches up to squeeze Sam's shoulder.

"Don't call me that. Ever. Okay?" He runs his hand down along Sam's shoulder to his arm and lets it fall away before he gets to his hand. "Just. Be smart, alright? I don't have a ton of money and who knows how long we're gonna be stuck here."

The fact that Dean's birthday is next week goes unsaid.

--

True to their word, they meet up again half an hour later, right in front of the oranges. Dean has confiscated another cart and filled it with cans of beans and vegetables and Spam and tuna and three loaves of bread and crackers and peanut butter and beef bouillion and Pop Tarts. He smiles at Sam who has gotten a few packages of boneless chicken breasts, bologna, bacon, frozen concentrated orange juice, and, amazingly, a can opener.

Dean laughs, beaming at his little brother.

"That's my boy."

"You broke ours two towns ago." Sam is grinning to himself,

flushed for the praise, no matter how stupid a reason it's for.

Dean wraps an arm around Sam's shoulders, letting it drape heavy there while they survey their load.

"We need anything else? You need anything?"

"I think I need another pack of socks. 'Specially if we're gonna be here for awhile." He looks up at Dean almost shyly, hating to ask for anything. But socks always disappear and he's down to the two pairs that he's currently wearing, and he's wearing both of them because they both have holes in them.

"Yeah, okay. Go ahead. I just thought of something, too. Meet back here in five."

"Okay!" Sam takes off like a shot, only getting as far as the pre-packaged lettuce before Dean is calling after him.

"Hey, Sammy! Get me a pack of underwear, will ya? Mediums, Hanes, black. Got it?"

Sam glances around at the people around him, between him and Dean, his cheeks burning hot. They get a few looks, a few smiles, a couple of women turning their eyes on Dean, appraising and pleased. Sam just ducks his head, nodding down to his shoes before he takes off again, a little slower this time.

Underwear. He's shopping for Dean's *underwear*.

He grabs a pack of socks distractedly, not really giving a shit if they're too big or too short or too thin because he's got his eyes on the underwear. He's picking out underwear for Dean. He's picking out something that's going to be covering Dean's dick. He locates the Hanes and peers at the different styles: boxers, briefs and boxer briefs.

He reaches with slightly trembling fingers for a pack of the boxer briefs, eyeing the man on the cover carefully, his very helpful imagination putting Dean right there in front of him, boxer briefs on his otherwise naked body. Sam swallows hard.

He turns the package over, ignoring the sizing stuff for now because his eyes zero in on the picture of the man from behind, the way the underwear doesn't have a seam right up the crack of the butt but has seams on either side of it, framing it, highlighting it. His mouth drops open to audibly pant and he nearly drops the package. These. Dean needs *these*.

“Medium, medium,” he mumbles, sifting through the out of order packages before he finds a medium one in Dean's preferred black. God.

He's practically touching Dean's dick right now. Or. Where Dean's dick will be. It feels so intimate, getting to do this. Dean trusting him like this. He lifts his happy gaze to the whole display of underwear, letting his mind wander for a minute.

This is almost what couples do. Let the other pick out his underwear. Right? Who else would you trust to do that?

Not that Sam has any amount of experience with relationships, except the ones he has with Dean and Dad.

He glances around himself at the empty aisle and puffs up proudly.

No other brothers here shopping for each other's underwear.

He practically skips back to the produce department, coming to a stop in front of the oranges. There's an empty cart where Dean had apparently combined their stuff into one. He hugs his two squishy, cottony packages to his chest and takes a walking tour of the apples while he waits for Dean.

It's been at least fifteen minutes because he's looked at all the apples, all the bananas, and all the citrus. He bites his lips and looks around, holding the packages and his newly acquired bananas to his chest.

He ventures uncertainly out of the produce department, going against the Winchester's number one rule: if you say you're gonna meet up somewhere, don't leave that spot.

Well, maybe not number one, but it's up there. Top ten, probably. Dad has a lot of rules.

Sam searches the aisles with deliberate thoroughness, from the bread all the way back to the frozen stuff. He glances at the baby department and more intently at the shoes. No Dean. He wanders over to the men's department, looking around the flannel twice even.

He looks through the bras and panties section, just in case. It wouldn't be the first time he's found Dean there. He feels a knot in his throat when he hurries through the women's stuff into the stationary and office stuff, the crafts. He's practically running when

he gets to the body care section. Toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo, razors. No Dean.

No Dean.

He goes back to the automotive, to the guns. Surely he's there. He's. Where else would he be? Sam stops right in front of the bicycles, panting quickly now, feeling panic bubble up in his chest, burning hot in his throat.

Something's wrong. Something's happened.

What kind of creatures hunts in Wal-Marts in broad daylight?

Sam runs through the list while he sprints through the aisles. He shoves the socks and underwear and bananas onto a display of pillows and keeps going.

Werewolf? Ghost? Cursed object, maybe? In the Wal-Mart though? How--

Shapeshifter.

He flies past the bicycles and toward toys, darting past people, eyes everywhere, ignoring the annoyed voices he leaves in his wake. Silver. He needs to find silver.

He runs smack into someone and he nearly falls down in the insane amount of adrenaline he has built up.

"Sammy?"

Sam is gasping for air, eyes wild with terror but the voice registers, it pushes through all that fear and he looks up and actually whimpers when he sees Dean.

"Dean," he pants, falling back to lean against a display of Barbie dolls. Dean grabs his shoulders, shaking him urgently.

"Sam, what is it? What happened? Is something following you?" He jerks Sam closer to him, pulls him flush up against his chest which makes Sam actually breathe for the first time since he'd started running. He leans heavy on Dean, feeling safe for the moment in the protective grasp of his arms, shapeshifter or not.

"No," he manages, forcing himself to calm down, to start acting like a normal human being and not a paranoid freak of a kid who can't be away from his brother for fifteen minutes. "S-sorry. I. You didn't come back to the oranges and I. I thought. I just."

"Man, I'm sorry. I got caught up back here." He lets go of Sam and leans down to pick up the things he'd dropped when Sam

bulldozed him. He hands Sam the board game he'd been holding, the pieces rattling around inside.

"I couldn't pick a damn game. I know we needed somethin' stuck up in that cabin for fuck knows how long. Got us a coupla decks of cards, but we needed a game, I thought. And last time we played Monopoly, it ended in blood, so."

Sam looks down at the game and laughs a little when he sees that it's Trouble. They haven't played it since he was ten, at Uncle Bobby's. He smiles up at Dean sheepishly, feeling like an absolute idiot.

"This looks good." He wraps his arms around the game and Dean raises an eyebrow at him.

"You get the socks and stuff?"

"Hm? Oh! Yeah. I." Sam glances away, back toward the home section in an effort not to meet Dean's eyes. "I set 'em down back there."

"...Why?"

"Cause I got scared when I couldn't find you and I just. I don't know."

He turns away and hurries back to the pillows and sheets, his face on fire. He hears Dean shuffle up beside him with the cart and feels that arm go around him again, always. He blushes even more, eyes straight ahead.

"Hey. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have just left you hanging. I know what it's like when." He doesn't finish his sentence but Sam knows what he means. He finds his forgotten pile and puts the game in the cart so he can gather it all back up, the bundle he's holding going into the cart, too. He glances up at Dean, meeting his eyes for a quick second and they smile.

"I thought a shapeshifter got you," he mumbles, walking very close to his brother as they slowly make their way up to the front.

Dean comes to a stop, the sharpness of his laughter cutting through all the other noises around them. Sam turns back around and smirks at his brother who is staring at him in amazement, shaking his head.

"Your imagination, Sammy. I love it."

Sam folds his arms over his chest, his lips pursed, looking every

inch the bratty little brother.

"Hey! It's not that rare!"

"In the middle of a Wal-Mart in Indiana in a snowstorm?"

"Shut up! You never know!"

Dean is out-and-out laughing now, head tipped back, hand on his stomach laughing. Sam marches back over to him and punches him on the arm, satisfied at the yowl Dean lets out.

"I bet the shapeshifter would be nicer to me."

"Shapeshifter!"

Sam takes the cart and continues back to the front, glaring until Dean can't see him anymore.

He smiles to himself, his chest warm as the sound of Dean's laughter echoes through the whole damn store.

--

It's nearly 4pm by the time Dad gets back. Sam and Dean have put the tiny cabin into a sort of working order, putting the things that needed refrigerating out under a few inches of snow. There's a fire going and a pot of chili heating over it. Sam is reading and Dean is cleaning his gun when the Impala rumbles up and Dad pushes into the cabin, grunting and breathless and armed with a few plastic bags.

Dean jumps up to help him, smiling when he sees some of the stuff he and Sam had already gotten at Wal-Mart, along with a few other things, including a Walkman, several packs of AA batteries, two packages of Oreos, and some beer.

"Dad, you planning on working out at the gym or somethin'?" Dean grins when he pulls out the Walkman brand-new in the package. He fishes around in his back pocket and pulls out his knife to cut it open.

"No, smartass. I was gonna leave it here with you two to make up for the fact that there's no TV or anything. I'm thinkin' I might take it back." Dad cuffs Dean lightly on the back of the head, shaking his head with a grin as he puts away the other stuff.

Dean does a little happy jig as he rips it open, his eyes bright.

"Can I bring in some of the tapes from the car?"

"That was the thought. I sure as hell'm not gonna buy you a bunch of new ones."

"Awesome." Dean beams over at Sam who is still reading his book, Kurt Vonnegut or something. His smile falters a little. "Thanks, Dad."

Dad grunts his reply but he's still smiling. "Talked to Aaron. The electricity won't be on until tomorrow. He's gotta go deal with the power company after work today. Looks like you boys already got dinner figured out, so it won't be so bad."

"You're leaving tomorrow, aren't you?"

They both look over at Sam who is looking right at Dad, his book lowered. It just takes Dean one glance at his father to know that Sam's right. He puts the Walkman down on the counter, the gift tainted now, somehow.

"Got a call from Bobby. He said there's--"

"It doesn't matter, Dad. Whatever."

Sam lifts the book back up to his face and Dad sighs. Dean shifts where he's standing between them, trying not to look at either of them, really.

"It won't be that long. A week, tops. Then--"

"You know that Dean's birthday is next week, right?"

"Yes, Sam. I'm aware. Thank you." Dad shuts the cabinet hard, making Dean jump a little. Dean walks back over to the fireplace, grabbing up the wooden spoon they'd unearthed from one of the drawers to stir the chili. He wishes they'd remembered to grab some onions.

"So, what? You're gonna be gone for Dean's birthday, and you're just okay with that? Like always? This is his *sixteenth* birthday, Dad. That's--"

"I *know* that, Sam! Jesus Christ, do you think I'm a fucking idiot?" Dad turns to look at Sam, his face bright with anger.

Dean takes a quick breath as his heart rate picks up. He hates this, hates them fighting, hates wanting to defend his father even though Sam is defending *him*. By the time Dean turns back around, Sam is on his feet, still standing in front of the chair but he looks ready to charge at Dad.

"You think knowing and going anyway makes you a better fa-

ther? Because it doesn't! Because then you're doing it on *purpose*! It'd be better if you just forgot!"

Dad takes a deep breath, probably to yell more but he lets it out in a huff. He reaches down to untie his boots, kicking them off next to the fridge before he looks over at Sam again.

"Sam, you know what? I'm going to go change. By the time I get back, this attitude of yours had better be fucking buried because if it's not, you're gonna be doing wind sprints out in three feet of snow, how's that sound?"

"Like you feel guilty for being an asshole to your son."

Dad marches over to Sam and lifts him up by the front of his shirt, pushing him toward the door.

"Outside. Twenty sprints from the bottom of the hill to the steps. Now."

Dean interferes then, hobbling over to stand between Sam and their dad, looking at his dad with his most imploring eyes.

"Dad, it's freezing out there. Sammy's just tired, he doesn't--"

"Oh, yes, I do." Sam is right at Dean's back, his voice venomous in Dean's ear. Dean turns to look at Sam, his eyes huge.

"Sam, god, just shut up, man. Or else you're--"

"I don't care! I don't fucking care. It's your *birthday*." Sam shoves past Dean with tears in his eyes. He stops right next to Dad, so much smaller than him but his fury makes Sam seem to almost hover over him.

"You don't deserve to be here for his birthday anyway. You'd just ruin it."

Sam rips the door open and steps out into the snow wearing just his long-sleeved t-shirt and his jeans. He stomps down the porch in his boots and out into the snow. Dean grabs Sam's coat from the chair and hurries after him.

"Sam, put your fucking coat on right now! Right now or I swear to god, I will kick your ass if you get sick."

Sam stops halfway down the hill and walks back up, his head down. He snatches the coat from Dean without even looking at him and turns to run back down the hill. Dean watches him until he reaches the bottom and is on his way back up, his cheeks red from cold and tears. Dean sighs, rubbing his hands over his face.

When he goes back into the cabin and shuts the door, Dad is nowhere to be seen, the door to his bedroom shut. Dean sinks down into the chair, letting his eyes fall closed, trying to ignore the sharp, throbbing ache of his thigh.

--

Sam comes inside twenty minutes later, sweat dripping from his face. Dean has taken the chili off the fire to let it cool and is engrossed in the second chapter of *Cat's Cradle* that Sam had thrown beside the chair. He tosses the book down and jumps up, his eyes traveling Sam's body worriedly.

"Hey," he says, testing out the waters. Sam just takes his coat off and tosses it on their bed, pulling his shirt off over his head and walking over to his duffel in the corner. Dean doesn't say anything else, knows when to leave Sam to his thoughts.

Dean grabs three bowls from the cabinet, only finding two regular sized spoons and one gigantic one that he figures he'll use. He pulls out a pack of saltines and clears his throat before yelling toward Dad's room.

"Dinner's ready!"

Dean looks back up at Sam and sees that he's shivering hard, teeth chattering. Dean shuffles over to the fireplace as fast as he can, ripping up some of the classified newspapers they'd picked up outside of Wal-Mart and tossing them in along with a couple of new logs, stoking the fire again before Sam dies of fucking pneumonia.

Dad emerges just in time to see Sam pull on one of Dean's old hoodies, to see his sweaty little face and the tremble of his entire body. Dean can tell by the tiny way Dad pauses, the hesitation on his face for a single second that he regrets telling Sam to go outside. Dean figures he probably hadn't even really meant it but he should have known. Sam is more fucking stubborn than anybody Dean has ever met.

"Hope you guys are hungry," he says in the most cheerful tone he can find but it falls a little flat. "It's not as spicy as normal, but it smells good."

"It does smell good," Dad echoes and Dean feels some of the tension leave his body. He knows the sound of a peace offering from Dad and that definitely counts as one. Dean hands Dad a bowl with a faint smile and he goes still when Sam approaches. Sam grabs another one of the bowls and the huge spoon, holding onto it tight when Dean reaches for it.

"I'll use it, Dean. It's okay." He meets Dean's eyes and it makes Dean annoyingly, stupidly emotional, just that single look in Sam's eyes. Apologetic, protective, a little hurt. He wants to take Sam's frozen hands and pull them under his own shirt, freeze himself to death just to warm him up again. Wants to rub his face all over Sam's just to feel the cold tip of his nose. Dean clears his throat, soft and nervous. He nods over to the big cast iron pot waiting on the countertop.

"Go get some food, kid. I made you some of your juice stuff. Don't forget some crackers."

Sam grabs a handful of crackers and plunks them down into his bowl before shuffling over to the pot, scooping out two big heaps of chili with the coffee mug they're using as a serving spoon. He turns around and almost bumps into Dad, two bowls of chili nearly lost.

Dad nods over at the fire, reaching out to squeeze Sam's arm gently.

"Sit down next to the fire to warm up, kiddo."

Sam, by some miracle, obeys. Dean hurries to fix his own bowl and grabs Sam's orange juice before joining him on the floor, Dad in the chair. They eat in silence, the sound of it so loud that Dean almost screams. There's no cars outside, no birds, no wind, no people. Nothing but the crackle of the fire, the sounds of spoons hitting ceramic, and three men eating chili.

Dad goes back for seconds of chili and so does Dean. Sam rinses his bowl in the sink, pausing and squinting at something Dean can't see.

"Dean," Sam says, his voice odd. Dean pauses mid-chew, sitting up a little straighter, his eyebrows raised.

"Yeah?"

"Where did this magazine come from?"

Dean opens his mouth to ask what magazine and then he remembers. He swallows before he's even done chewing which makes him choke a little. He takes a swig of water and clears his throat, face beet red by the time he's done.

"Dunno. Must've fallen into the cart, I guess."

Sam holds the magazine up, wicked amusement all over his face. He's smiling so hard his dimples are showing and there it is. That damn magazine.

"Why did you get a *Women's World* magazine?"

All three of them stop what they're doing and just stare at the magazine, the cover bright with some middle-aged lady looking chemically happy in the middle and a few pictures of food surrounding her with enticing headlines like "Boost Your Mood, Your Energy, and Your Spirits!" and "Lose 7lbs. in Five Days!" and "Make a Cupcake Bouquet of HAPPINESS!"

Sam and Dad both turn to look at Dean at the same time.

"It's just, uh. Heh." Dean clears his throat again compulsively. He pokes around at his chili with his spoon, shrugging. "It had a, um. A recipe."

Sam and Dad exchange a look.

"A recipe," they repeat in unison.

"Yeah, for like. A potato casserole using cornflakes I thought Sammy would like. I didn't want to just rip it out, so." He sniffs casually, looking around the cabin, anywhere but at his dad and his brother. He finally can't take it anymore and looks over at Sam out of the corner of his eyes and he's startled by the starry look he's getting from him.

"You got a mom magazine so you could make me food from it?"

"Oh, Jesus. I didn't save a fuckin' baby seal or nothin'."

Dad hides his laughter in mouthfuls of chili and Sam doesn't say anything else. After Dad downs the last of his beer and starts to laugh outright, Dean tenses up, eyes wide with indignation.

"Hey! You let Sam dress you up like Snow White once so he could be a witch and give you a poison apple!"

"Okay, wait, hold on a minute. I was the manliest Snow White on the planet, I'll have you know," Dad shoots back, pointing his

empty bottle at Dean.

"Dad. I just want you to replay that sentence in your head. Just think about what you just said."

"Who cried during *The Mighty Ducks*?"

"Hey!" Dean jumps up, his voice squeaking a little. Dad sits back in his chair, eyebrows raised, mouth pursed in amusement. "Don't you bring the Ducks into this! That was a heartfelt movie! Quack, Dad! Quack!"

Dad's face is priceless, his eyes dramatically wide.

"Uh-huh."

Dean huffs. "You cried when Mufasa died!"

"Who didn't!?"

"I didn't!"

"Well, clearly you have a heart of stone, Winchester!"

"Your... *face* is a heart of stone," Dean retorts, in full fake pout mode as he limps over to the kitchen where Sam is still standing, leafing through the magazine. Dean glares at him as hard as he can only to have Sam beam up at him, his eyes sparkling like a damn cartoon. Dean groans and runs water into his bowl.

"You love me," Sam says with a happy sigh.

"Ugh, shut up."

"You loooove me!"

"How could I love such an annoying little shit?"

"I don't know but you dooo." Sam wraps his arms around Dean's waist and sticks right to his side, a goofy grin plastered all over his face. Dean sighs and wraps his arm around Sam, snuffling his nose around in his hair for just a second before he squeezes him one last time and lets him go.

"Go open the game, short stack. I'm blue."

"But I wanna be blue!"

"Tough titty. I'm blue and I'm gonna kick your ass."

"I think you boys forget that I'm the Trouble Champion of the United States of America." Dad puts his bowl aside and leans forward, cracking his knuckles. "I feel sorry for you both."

"Yeah, we'll see, old man," Sam replies as he rips the plastic off. And just like that, they're all back to normal. Dean has to keep his grin in check as he settles down on the bed, scooting back just

enough so that Sam can set the board up on the edge of it.

--

Two games of Trouble, three beers for Dad and two for Dean, a whole package of Oreos, a thumb war, five death threats, one victory for Sam and one for Dad later, Sam is all but asleep. He's curled up on the bed with his head on Dean's good leg, his arms tangled around Dean's calf, fingers curled around his ankle. Dean is petting his hair absently, watching as Dad puts the game back up, all the pieces going back into their proper containers, the rules folded up right. The small fire in the fireplace is the only light left, the smell from the kerosene lamp still lingering.

Dad closes the box and pushes it away, sitting back in the chair with a heavy, happy groan. He yawns, trying to stifle it behind his hand. Dean just watches him, an easy smile on his lips. Sam shifts against him, tucking up tighter against Dean. Dad looks over at them after a moment and shakes his head.

"That boy," he sighs, his eyes on Sam. His voice is soft, meant only for Dean. Dean takes the opportunity to look down at Sam, at all that long hair in his face, his small body almost gymnastically contorted around Dean's. Dean runs the pad of his thumb over the shell of Sam's ear, tracing it all the way down to the lobe and then back up again. His smile is quieter now, heart-deep.

"Hellion," Dean whispers, his voice flooded with warmth. "You know he doesn't mean half the shit he says, Dad."

"No, he does," Dad laughs quietly, lifting a hand to rub at his scruffy chin. "He does, make no mistake. But that's okay. He's got fight in him, just like his mom. I can't fault him for it. No matter how much I want to strangle him sometimes."

Dean exhales a little breath of a laugh, his gaze far-off, lost somewhere near the fireplace. Dad doesn't talk about Mom much, and Dean savors every little hint about her, collects them in his mind. He's been putting her together like a puzzle since he was little.

"It's okay, you know. That you can't be here. It doesn't matter. 'S just another day." Dean says it because he knows he needs to, not

because he means it. He's rubbing Sam's back now, hand flat and light along his little shoulder blades, over the notches of his spine through his oversized hoodie.

Dad doesn't say anything back because there's nothing to say. They stay quiet just like that for several minutes, the fire crackling across the room, the smell of it permeating everything. Dean loves the smell of a fireplace. He loves a contained fire, one that is only there to help.

"You mean the world to him."

Dean looks up for that, meeting Dad's eyes, trying to understand where it came from. Dad is watching them, watching Dean's hand on Sam, Sam's viney hold on Dean. He raises his eyebrows at Dean, gives a single nod.

"I mean it. You hung the moon, to him. He looks at you like there's nobody else in the world worth seein'. He'd bare-knuckle fight anybody who came at him to defend you."

Dean thinks this over, quiet, his eyes soft on his little brother. His touch becomes more solid, palms warm on Sam's back, in his hair.

"I feel the same way about him," he admits, barely loud enough for Dad to hear him. He's very aware of his heart, the warmth of it in his chest, the fierce, bright glow he always feels when he thinks about Sammy, really thinks about him. He doesn't know what else to say, can't let out any of the hundred words tangled up around that one big word in his head: Sam. It's for him and Sam alone, and he doesn't know if he'll ever talk about it, not to anybody. Not even to Sam himself. It just *is*, it's just *there*, and they don't need words for it. Never have.

"I know you do." Dad reaches over and ruffles Dean's hair, just a gentle scruff before he stands up. "It's almost midnight. I've gotta be up at four to leave for Sioux Falls again. Get some sleep, boy."

"Yessir. Night, Dad."

Dad disappears into the bedroom, the door creaking and clicking shut. Dean's left alone with Sam sleeping on him and he smiles down at him. He shifts as gently as he can manage, moving to lay down on the bed next to him, repositioning them until Sam is curled up all along Dean's side, those gangly spider limbs wrap-

ping around Dean, keeping him right where he is.

Like Dean would ever want to be anywhere else.

Sam is awake when Dad leaves before dawn. He listens to him getting ready: the practiced, intent sounds of a man with a mission. He doesn't try to be quiet when he comes through the living-room where Dean sleeps and Sam pretends.

He watches Dad from under nearly-closed lashes, watches him pack up a few cans of tuna, a pack of crackers, and some bottles of water. He watches him glance around the cabin and Sam can read his mind, could recite his mental checklist for the road. He watches him check beneath his coat, at the small of his back for his gun. He's nearly at the door before he finally looks over at the bed, gaze catching on Dean for a few precious seconds before he's looking right at Sam.

Sam doesn't move, knows better than to close his eyes completely. He keeps his breath even and deep and wonders what his dad sees, wonders if his thoughts are stressed or warm when he sees Sam, small and awkward and smart and smartass and custom-built with a fierceness that stays quiet most of the time. Most of the time. But it can shake foundations. Can cut right to Dad's core and Sam doesn't know how Dad can love him, sometimes. But he hopes he can this morning. Hopes he can take good thoughts with him with a smile.

And there it is, the tiniest hint of a smile playing at Dad's tired face and then there's the squeak-creak of the door and a sharp, slicing burst of icy cold and then he's gone, just like that. Heavy boots on old wood, comforting sound of the driver door whining and then that engine. Sam mentally pulls himself back inside out of the cold, away from Dad's mind and he looks over at Dean laying next to him, oblivious and asleep and unbothered by anything.

Sam knows that he doesn't really need Dad here. It's never been about Dad, or it hasn't been for a long time. Dean is the one he's always wanted to stay home, wanted right here beside him. And

he's starting to feel old enough to take care of Dean right back. Like maybe he'll be good at it, someday.

"I'll take care of you, too," Sam whispers to Dean, staring so close at his face, at the slight tremble of his eyelashes, the pliant pink of his mouth.

He falls back asleep before he has a single other thought, his fingers tangled shyly with Dean's, paused by sleep while pretending that he's allowed to do such a thing.

--

The electricity comes on around noon. Sam can hear Dean's triumphant whoop from outside where he's dragging in more firewood and he beams, takes off for the cabin at a run. He bursts inside, arms cradling big chunks of wood and there's Dean, shimmying in slow motion with a grin on his face, the dingy, naked bulb above him flickering bright.

"Power on?" He hugs the wood to his chest, a smile digging at the corners of his mouth.

"Oh, yeah," Dean gets out one more wiggle of his butt before he claps, letting out a celebratory bark of laughter. "Let's keep the fire going though, alright? No need to waste more of the man's electricity than we have to."

Sam nods, crouching down to start adding wood to the fire. He snuffles a little but pretends he doesn't notice that his nose is running. The cold that's coming on is inevitable, but he plans on ignoring it for as long as he can.

He jumps when a car horn blares outside, the sound of it echoing in the trees around them. Sam turns to look at Dean, his eyes wide, a little afraid. Dean smiles at him and just the sight of it calms Sam down a ridiculous amount. He leans into it when Dean's hand lights on his head, fingers digging into his hair.

"It's okay, Sammy. It's Joe, that kid who rang us up at Wal-Mart yesterday? He made a special delivery for me. Hey, I'll be right back, okay? Maybe start pickin' out what you want for lunch."

"Yeah, Dean," Sam says softly, going unheard as Dean practically skips out of the house. Sam smiles after him, shaking his head

as he gets to his feet again. He can't imagine what Joe could have brought from *Wal-Mart* that could make Dean so happy.

--

Two fried Spam sandwiches later, it's well after noon and the snow has picked up again outside. Dean had stayed outside in the cold for nearly half an hour while Sam fried up the thick slices of Spam, sniffing all the while. He'd come back in half-frozen but smiling, wide and lazy, a sweet green smell following him inside.

It had been then that Sam realized Joe probably hadn't brought Dean anything from Wal-Mart. He's not entirely sure, but he's almost positive they don't sell pot at stores yet.

He doesn't mind though, not even the tiniest bit. Dean is the absolute best when he's high, he's happy and touchy-feely and so, so warm. Sam washes the dishes while Dean gathers up all the tapes Dad had left in a stack on the pushed-aside coffee table, all the tapes from the car that are older than both he and Dean.

Sam doesn't say so, but he's glad that Dean has a music player again. Dad had sold Dean's boombox last fall when money was especially tight, along with their Super Nintendo. Dean hadn't said anything, but Sam still hasn't really forgiven their dad for taking those things, silly, indulgent things, from them.

Dean's camped out on the pull-out bed in under ten minutes, headphones on his ears, eyes closed, pretty smile on his face. Sam takes his time washing the cast-iron skillet he'd unearthed, his eyes on his brother, on the sight of his bare toes, on the sliver of skin exposed between his boxers and his t-shirt.

He's humming to himself, moving in tiny rolls on the bed, hands curling up on his stomach to very, very lazily mimic a guitar. It takes Sam about five seconds to realize that he's listening to Led Zeppelin's self-titled.

He finishes the dishes and blows his nose with the toilet paper they'd bought, already feeling a little feverish and shitty but Dean. Dean's being so hot and perfect and Sam is not letting this moment pass him by.

Sam strips down to his own boxers and crawls onto the bed

next to Dean, already smiling as he tucks himself up under Dean's arm. Dean moves one headphone back just a little so he can hear Sam.

"Mm," Dean grunts, arm coming down to wrap around Sam's shoulders, to pull him close. "You're burnin' up."

"All the hot and cold and hot and cold," Sam mumbles into Dean's dirty t-shirt, his nose pressed nearly under Dean's arm and good god above, he's in heaven. Dean's hand tightens a little, starting to massage Sam's shoulder and Sam nearly moans.

"I'll make you some tea here in a minute." Or at least that's what Sam thinks Dean said. He can barely hear his mumbling over the music blaring at top volume from the crappy little speakers of Dean's headphones. Sam looks up at Dean and snorts.

"Dean. We don't have tea. We've never had tea."

"Well." Dean pauses, obviously deep in thought. "Hot chocolate, then. I got some at the Wal-Mart store. With marshmallows. Marsh. Mallows. Marshymallows."

"Okay, Dean. Thanks."

"San'wiches were good, Sammy. So good. Takin' good care of me, you know it?" Sam burns and burns when Dean squeezes his arm again. He flushes so hot that he's sweating and he just clings to Dean, arm wrapped tight around Dean's waist. He hears Dean flip the tape over and hit another button to either fast-forward or rewind.

"Such an awesome album. Jesus," Dean sighs, relaxing back against the bed again. "Can you imagine being alive then? When this debuted? Just sittin' around, not knowing who Zeppelin is and then all of a sudden this thing exists and it just changes you forever. Just imagine."

Sam smiles into Dean's shirt, his eyes barely open but he's watching Dean's hand where it's spread out over his own tummy, where he's rubbing his stomach high then low, high then low. Sam squirms and keeps his hips back from Dean like he's learned to do.

"You love Zeppelin more than Dad." It's very soft, just a statement, an admiring one. "He likes 'em but you love 'em."

"They're the best band to ever exist," Dean replies immediately

and adamantly. It's just a statement, too, no room for argument. No other answers are valid. Sam has seen Dean nearly get into a fistfight with a man twice his age and almost twice his size over Zeppelin. If Dad hadn't intervened, Sam is sure that Dean would have at least gotten his nose broken for Jimmy Page.

"Why do you love them so much?"

"There are just. There are just some things that can't be taken from you, Sammy. Not really. I mean. There's not much that's mine. Just mine. You know what I mean? I have my clothes. My gun. My knife. But not much else, you know?"

Sam wants to say, you have me. Every single inch and thought of me is yours, whether you want it or not.

"But music. *Zeppelin*. That can't be taken away. Not ever. By anybody. Somebody could go outside and torch the car next week. All our shit inside. Just gone, like that. I could get fucking shot or have my leg cut off tomorrow. But no matter what happens, I can always come back and 'Rain Song' will always exist, just the way it is. It will always make me feel exactly the same way. It will always exist, no matter what anybody does. And so it can always be *mine*."

Sam nods fiercely, Dean's shirt tugged tight because it's gripped in Sam's fist. He loves Dean like this, so open and passionate and right here for him, only for him.

"They're sex and poetry and insane layers of sound and bluesy pagan gods and they can never be duplicated. By anybody. How amazing is that? What they did was new and unheard of. Anything that followed is a shadow. They're just shadows, Sammy. Even if they're really fuckin' good shadows, that's all they are."

They lay there in relative quiet for a little bit, listening to "Babe, I'm Gonna Leave You" and Sam watches Dean from his little hiding spot against him, watches his facial expressions, listens to his breathing get faster when the tempo picks up.

"You know Dad saw them in concert once? Drove over to St. Louis to see them at the St. Louis Arena. Four and a half hours away. February 16, 1975." Sam mouths it along with him, has heard the story a hundred times but Dean loves to tell it, loves to think about how he's one degree away from a Led Zeppelin concert.

"He got to see them play 'Stairway.' '*Stairway*,' Sammy." Sam

smiles when Dean's eyes open, red-rimmed and bright, glassy green, to meet his own for emphasis. "And 'Kashmir.' Fuck. Can you imagine seeing 'Kashmir'? Can you fuckin' imagine?"

Before Sam can answer he hears the unmistakable sound of the guitar that opens 'You Shook Me' blaring in Dean's ears and bleeding out into the whole cabin. Dean moans, actually moans, shifting on the bed. Sam watches Dean's hips lift and thrust lazing before they settle back down. Sam pulls his bottom lip into his mouth and sucks on it, trying to distract himself from how immediately hard he is just over that, just that sound from Dean and his *fucking hips*.

"This song is exactly like fucking. Fuck, yeah. Just that deep grind. God, feels so good." Sam can only watch as Dean rolls his hips to the beat, to that rut and grind of the guitar and Sam almost bites clean through his bottom lip when Dean moves a hand down to his dick to adjust himself. Sam can see the bulge of Dean's dick there, a little hard just from the song, just the fucking music. He wants to push his hand down, tickle over the little golden hairs trailing down his stomach and into his shorts, wants to take him in his hand and feel him scorch against his palm, just burn there like the center of the sun.

"Yeah, Dean?" He spreads his hand out to rub at Dean's stomach, slow and lazy and he wants so badly to shove his hips right up against his body, to hump Dean into a screaming, quaking orgasm but he can never, ever do it. Not ever. He twists his legs together, trapping his dick between his thighs a little to give it some relief. Dean's still moving, still loose-legged and grinding up into whatever he's picturing in his beautiful, stoned head.

"Yeah, baby," Dean huffs back. "So fuckin' good." Sam almost gasps when Dean's arm tightens around him, when he drags Sam in closer and Sam just shoves his face into Dean's sweaty neck, closer to the music just in time for the harmonica to start up and it's obscene, really, all of this. The gorgeous filth of the song, the heat between the two of them and the beautiful fuck of Dean's teenage hips.

Sam can see it, Dean's dick standing up and hard, tenting his dark blue boxers, can see the heavy sway of it under the fabric

as Dean moves his hips back and forth. Sam wants to climb him like a stallion, wants to push his little virgin butt right over that dick and see what Dean can do with him. He lets out a tiny sound against Dean's neck, almost a whimper even as his fingers drag over one of Dean's hard nipples through his thrift store t-shirt.

"Fuck," Dean gasps and Sam gasps too, feverishly hot already and he feels like he's going to pass out from this, from all of this. He rubs at Dean's nipple with tiny, tiny movements, with terrified fingers. He feels Dean sweating through his clothes and he wants to hold him down and lick him clean, wants every drop on his tongue. He's beyond disgusting and he knows it, absolutely knows it. He doesn't want to do that to anyone else, not even Cindy Crawford.

Sam watches Dean's hand sneak down his body again and grab his dick, hard and ruthless. He squeezes it a few times and Sam pinches Dean's nipple through his shirt, pinches it hard and Dean's hips shoot straight up. He watches Dean rub at his dick desperately even as Robert Plant is screaming along with that burning guitar, watches Dean fuck up into his hand and he can feel it all pulsing through Dean's body, can feel the almost unnatural burn of his skin and the gasping heave of his chest and the unbelievable sounds that Dean keeps trapped in his throat.

The song ends just as Dean comes, right against the flat of his own wide palm. He's jittery all over, he's shaking hard and Sam just clutches at him, just watches him ride out of his orgasm and the smell of it hits the air, thick and tangy and overwhelming. Sam digs his hips right up against one of Dean's hipbones, just presses up desperately and that single point of contact, just that one movement has Sam going off like a fucking firework, coming all against Dean's side, right when "Dazed and Confused" starts up.

They pant together, Sam clinging pathetically to his big brother as he fights through the come-down, tries so hard to stay quiet, not to make too much sound and freak Dean out. They go still and the song plays on, just as searing and sexy as "You Shook Me."

Sam dares to glance up at Dean and he's amazed to see that he's barely coherent but he's smiling, a fat, satisfied smile.

“Zep's better than sex,” Dean rumbles, licking his lips just once before he's out for the count, leaving Sam shaking at his side through the rest of the song.

--

The sun is nearly setting by the time Dean drags himself from bed for the second time that day. Sam has already showered, cleaned the kitchen, brought the food they'd been keeping out in the snow and put it in the small fridge, done most of Dean's laundry and has started on his own. The laundry is hung up from thin rope Sam found in the woodshed, held up by the ancient wooden clothespins he carries with him wherever they go. The cabin smells good, like laundry detergent and the lemon bleach of clean, like the stew he's making on the stove, with potatoes and chicken and squiggly pasta. He's wringing out the last pair of his underwear, carrying them across the room to the room to hang them up next to Dean's. He blushes for how much smaller they are than his brother's.

He plucks a slice of the orange he's cut up from the counter and bites into it, letting the bright burst of citrus color his mouth and his senses and he pretends indulgently that it's summertime and they're in a beach house somewhere in one of the Carolinas. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, trying to imagine the smell of salty sea air, the sight of Dean summer-dark, nose red-tipped and his hair a little longer, a little blonder on the ends. And he'd smile when he tugged off his practically transparent underwear, soaked from the sea, his eyes never leaving Sam's and--

“Hey, Sammy. You fall asleep standing up again?”

Sam's eyes snap open and there's Dean, groggy and looking like he's been run over by a truck. His hair is crazy and there's dry come on his boxers. Sam blushes deep red and averts his eyes, concentrating instead on the shirt he's washing in the sink.

“No, just resting my eyes.” He looks back up at his brother who is rubbing his face and he can't help but smile. “Sleep well?”

“I feel like shit. What the fuck time is it?”

“Probably almost six. I've started dinner. There's a light in the

bathroom now, if you wanna take a shower. I'll help you clean your leg after." He wrings the shirt out as hard as he can, gritting his teeth as his tired arms work to get all the water out. He makes his way over to the line and hangs it up, using his forearm to wipe his sweaty hair back off his forehead.

He glances up at his brother and finds Dean just watching him, a weird smile on his face. Sam stops, raising his eyebrows, glancing around self-consciously.

"...What?"

Dean just shakes his head, letting out a little breath of laughter as he runs a hand through his hair, trying to tame it.

"Nothin'. Just. You takin' care of us. Of me. Bein' a good little housewife."

Sam feels that like lightning all through him, feels it zip up his spine and burst bright on his cheeks, make his heart rabbit-fast in his chest. He searches his mind, frantic for the normal reaction he should have to that. He finds it and glares at Dean as best as he can, throwing in an eyeroll for good measure.

"Shut up, jerk. It's just stuff that needed to get done and I--"

"Hey." Dean shuffles over to him, his big hand sliding across the small of Sam's back. Sam dares to look over at him and he finds that Dean's still the tiniest bit high, that his smile is big and real and he relaxes just a little. "I mean it. Thanks, Sammy."

Sam looks up at his brother, up into those hazy green eyes and feels warm all over again, just like that. Dean's hand is still on his back and he can't help if he arches for him a little bit, hoping Dean can feel it under his palm.

"You reek, dude. Go take a shower. And gimme those clothes so I can wash 'em."

Dean grins at Sam, taking a step back which simultaneously breaks Sam's heart and lets him actually breathe again. He can only watch as Dean tugs his shirt over his head, leaving him bare-chested, his shoulders so broad, arms toned, body so tight. Sam keeps his hands in the soapy water, head turned toward his brother, just watching. And Dean watches him right back.

Dean tugs on his boxers with his thumb, pulling them down just to barely reveal the beginnings of the dark hair low on his bel-

ly, just above his dick. Sam can't help it, lets his eyes zero in. He licks his lips as quick as he can, sucking in a huge breath. He flicks his eyes up and sees that Dean is watching him still. Dean smirks at him, turns away and pushes the boxers down, giving Sam a full view of his pale, bare ass and he tosses the boxers back toward Sam that, of course, land perfectly on Sam's head.

The light flicks on in the bathroom and Dean shuts the door between them and Sam is stuck where he is, his world dark under the boxers covering his face and all he can smell is Dean's come.

If he jerks off into them before he washes them, it's his secret.



January 24

Five days pass pretty much the same as the other, and Sam cannot remember a happier time in his life. The snow only deepens and the days are long and sometimes he feels positively smothered by Dean, and he loves it. He loves it. The fifth day is Dean's birthday, and Sam wakes up at 4:30 in the morning, so excited that he can't sleep. It feels like Christmas, like something amazing's gonna happen as soon as Dean wakes up.

He watches Dean sleep until he realizes that's a little too creepy, even for him. He gets dressed as quiet as possible and heads out into the dark pre-dawn, making the long, lonely walk to the damn Wal-Mart.

He gets fixin's for meatloaf and real mashed potatoes, gets a fresh-baked apple pie and a six-pack of good root beer. He stands in the middle of the practically deserted store, trying to decide if he should get Dean anything else, what he could possibly want for his birthday. A *Maxim* magazine? No. Not dirty enough. Dean doesn't like new music, so that's out. No TV for movies, so no to

that, too.

He finally decides on a new, good flannel shirt, thick and warm and soft already. He gets him some more batteries for his Walkman and heads to the cashiers, throwing a considering glance toward the family planning section. If he just got some lube and gave it to Dean, he wonders if Dean would get the hint.

Probably not.

He trudges back to the cabin with his purchases, the bottles of root beer clinking all the way. The sun is rising as he makes his way back up the hill, and he's smiling to himself even as he's panting for breath.

The second he steps onto the porch the door flies open and there's Dean, wide-eyed and panicked and panting like he just walked from Wal-Mart, too. Sam cocks his head, eyebrows drawn together.

"Dean, what--"

"Sammy, goddamnit. *Goddamn it.*" Dean grabs Sam and pulls him in against himself, arms going around Sam so tight and fierce that Sam drops the bags, the lot of them landing with a heavy thunk on the porch, bottles rattling hard. He hugs Dean back reluctantly, confused but he's not gonna say no to a hug from Dean.

"What's going on? Did something happen? Did Dad--"

"You think you can just fuckin' leave whenever you want and not tell me? No note or nothin'? Just leave and come back whenever you want? Jesus christ, kid. I was goin' out of my mind."

"I was just gone for like, an hour. I just went up to Wal-Mart and--"

"And what? You lost the ability to fucking write?"

"No, I just--"

"You just what?" Dean pulls back and glares down at Sam, and if there wasn't fear standing at the forefront of the emotions in his eyes, Sam would be absolutely pissed.

"I'm sorry," Sam sighs, his shoulders dropping. "I didn't think you'd wake up before I got back. I just wanted to get a few things for your birthday. I didn't mean to scare you."

"My birthday?" Dean looks genuinely confused before it hits him and his face smoothes out. He laughs, giving a dismissive lit-

tle shake of his head. "Right. My birthday."

"Yeah, which I just ruined. Of course. I'm just like Dad." Sam grabs at the bags, clumsy in his hurry and nearly dropping them again. His face is red with embarrassment and anger at himself. He pushes into the cabin and drags the bags over to the counter. There are tears in his eyes and his heart is beating hard and fast in his chest and he hates himself, absolutely hates himself for making Dean wake up first thing on his sixteenth birthday and nearly have a panic attack over him.

"Just like Dad. I shouldn't even be here, either. I can't do anything right even when all I wanna do is--"

"Sammy? Hey. Hey, look at me." Dean's eyes are right on him when he does look up and he looks serious, intent. "You didn't ruin anything. You didn't. You just scared me a little, is all. It's my fault for gettin' all worked up over nothing, okay?"

"I just." Sam sucks in a quick breath and the tears in his eyes grow and blur his vision and he goes back to pulling things out of the bags: the package of ground beef, the onion, the ketchup, the spices. "I j-just want you to have a good birthday. You deserve. Y-you deserve..."

"Hey, what's all this? What's this, Sammy babe? How'd you afford all this anyway?" He steps up behind Sam and leans down to rest his chin on his shoulder, his arms going around Sam's waist to tug him back into a hug.

"I've been saving my money for awhile. It's just. Just stuff for meatloaf. And garlic mashed potatoes. I just wanted to make you dinner. I thought maybe you'd like it." He sounds unsure, his voice weak and wavering and he's glad Dean is behind him now so he can't see the few tears that escape. He just wants it to be perfect. He just wants to be able to give Dean absolutely everything, doesn't want him to feel like he's missing anything today. He can't screw this one up.

"Ooh, and that root beer we like. Did I get elected king or something?" Sam can feel Dean's grin against his cheek and it eases the lump in Sam's throat a little.

"Happy birthday, Dean." Sam turns around suddenly and wraps his arms around Dean's waist, holding him just as tight as Dean

had been holding him earlier.

"Thanks, kiddo. Man, sixteen, can you believe it? I'm finally legal to drive." Dean's hands are heavy on Sam's back, rubbing in slow circles. Sam snorts.

"You've been driving for two years, idiot."

"I said *legal*, Sammy."

"I know how important the law is to you." Sam grins at him before turning back to his haul, grabbing up the few things that need to be in the refrigerator and shoving them in there. He keeps the pie and the presents in their bags and sticks them on the floor.

"Speaking of. You got a girl in those bags there for me? I'm not picky. Just as long as she has most of her teeth. Well, no teeth might be good, too. Hm."

Sam laughs, the sound dull in his ears. He gives Dean a weak shove toward the main room. It's an expected remark from Dean, a very common one, but it still hurts. It hurts because Sam's an idiot who thought he'd be enough for the boy who deserves everything.

"Sorry, Dean. They were fresh out at the store. Do you, um. Do you want an omelet, maybe? I've got some bacon and tomatoes."

"You spoil me so much. Know just what I want." Dean falls back on the bed with a happy sigh and Sam watches him for a few seconds, looking away without responding. There's too much to say in return.

--

"C'mon, Sammy. Pleeeeeease? Why can't I have my presents now?" Dean is actually, legitimately whining from his spot on the bed with newly clean sheets on it. He's drinking the hot chocolate Sam just made for him, overflowing with melty marshmallows, a big, bratty grin on his face.

Sam is mashing the ground beef up with the spices and onions and egg and some cracker crumbs. It's another one of his dad's occasionally-made meals, one that supposedly came from Sam's mom. Sam had written the recipe down in one of his notebooks and kept it like it was a secret.

He sighs but he can't keep the grin from his face. He looks up at Dean from under his lashes and Dean is beaming like the devil at him, sipping on his hot chocolate and loving every second of being spoiled.

"Not until after we eat. Besides, I still have to wrap up a couple of things anyway."

"Oooh, like what?!"

"Dean!" Sam knows how to sound exasperated with his brother but they both know it's an act. Sam is about two seconds from running over and kissing Dean's teasing mouth and he swears that Dean knows it. There's no other reason for him to be so damn adorable. "You can wait."

"Fine," Dean sighs, so heavy and put-upon but he hasn't stopped smiling. "You need any help, Sammy Sam?"

"No, it's your day. You just sit there, and um. I. I can read to you later, if you want? We're in the middle of *The Two Towers*."

"Yeah! They're about to find Merry and Pippin in Isengard, the little fuckers. Ha. Man, I wanna know an Ent. Wouldn't that be awesome?" Dean plucks one of the least melted marshmallows out of the mug and takes a bite out of it.

"I wanna know an elf," Sam replies with a smile, squishing the big ball of meat into the loaf pan, spreading it out nice and even. "Or a Núme... Nú-uh. Elros' family."

"Yeaah, a hot-ass elf. What was that one, Sammy? In *The Silmarillion*? The badass chick who got the Silmaril?"

"Lúthien. She was amazing." Sam shoves the pan into the oven and then turns his attention to the potatoes boiling on the stove.

"She was the real hero of that story, seriously. Dude didn't do shit but get rescued. Damn, I wanna girl like that." Dean sighs and settles back against the pillows, his eyes on the fire that he revived a few minutes ago.

Sam stares down into the boiling water and barely even manages a smile.

"Like what?"

"Just. A badass, you know? Not a damsel in distress, Princess Peach girl. She gets her own shit done, takes care of herself. That's hot as hell."

“Like Galadriel.”

“Yeah, her, too! Shit. Yeah, like her. Totally hot. She your favorite, Sammy?” Sam looks over at Dean who is grinning at him knowingly, eyebrows waggling.

Sam shrugs, making himself look busy by picking up the pot and pouring the hot water out slowly in the sink.

“C'mon, tell me. Who's your favorite? There's gotta be somebody you wanna be stuck with on your way to Mordor or whatever.”

Sam dumps the potatoes into a bowl and grabs the milk and butter out of the fridge. “Aragorn,” he mumbles.

Dean sits up, putting his hot chocolate down as he leans forward to hear Sam better. “Come again?”

Sam clears his throat and throws the entire stick of butter into the bowl with the potatoes.

“Aragorn.”

Dean pauses, just sits there and stares at Sam, and Sam can tell with just a glance that Dean's trying to reason his way through it.

“Well. Yeah, I mean. Yeah, totally. If anyone can get you there, it's a Ranger, right? But, I mean, like. You know. *Get lost with*. Yanno.”

Sam looks over at him, just a flash of his eyes before he's focusing on the potatoes, mashing the absolute hell out of them with a fork. He stays quiet, his cheeks pink. He can't look up at Dean. Can't even imagine what's going through his head.

“Aragorn, huh?”

Sam looks up at Dean for that and finds him looking a little flushed, too, a little out of his element but he's trying. Sam gives him a tiny, unsure smile.

“Yeah.”

“Well,” Dean starts, clearing his throat a couple of times. He grabs his hot chocolate again and pokes at his almost completely melted marshmallows. “I wouldn't kick Legolas out of bed.”

Sam's eyes are cartoon wide when he looks up at Dean again. Dean takes one look at Sam and snorts, hot chocolate flying all over the clean sheets and Dean is coughing, choking on marshmallows, probably.

"Sammy!" He hacks and smacks his own chest, absolutely cackling now. "You should see your face. Ohmygod."

"You're an asshole," Sam says under his breath, his hands shaking a little as he mashes the potatoes in with the butter.

"Well, yeah, but it's my birthday." Dean burps loudly, rubbing at his tummy. "So you gotta be nice to me."

--

The meatloaf is a little burnt and the mashed potatoes are a little lumpy, but it's good. Dean eats two entire helpings and he almost moans when he sees the pie Sam puts in front of him with a single blue candle in the middle.

"What kind is it?" He can't look away from the pie, and he licks his lips like a starved dog, like he hadn't just eaten his weight in meatloaf.

"Apple. And!" Sam jumps up and runs over to the freezer, pulling out a huge bowl and dashing back over with it. "I made snowcream. Tons of sugar, just like you like it."

"Ohmygod," Dean actually does moan this time, blindly taking the spoon Sam gives him and he digs into the snowcream that's hardened a little from its time in the freezer and god, yes. It's sugary and creamy and so, so good. He's on his third spoonful when he manages to look up at Sam who is just beaming at him, somehow the happiest boy in all the world just seeing Dean gorge himself on food.

"Make a wish before the wax gets all over the pie, doofus."

"Shit. You're right. Okay." He focuses on the little flickering flame, mulling over his choices here. Sex, of course. He always wants that. A blowjob would be perfect right now. Or a beach. That would be awesome. Dad magically giving him the car. Okay, that one. Definitely that one.

He blows the candle out and Sam laughs, plucking it out of the pie and shaking his head. "Took you long enough."

"I was weighing my options! Not everyday I get a wish." He shoves his still-cold spoon into the pie and pulls out a big chunk, giving Sam his biggest shit-eating grin before shoving the whole

thing in his mouth. Sam smirks at him, taking their plates and going into the kitchen.

"Is it time for presents? Huh? Huh? Huh huh huh?" He gets a little pie and a little snowcream on his spoon and, oh Jesus yes, it's even better together.

Sam disappears into Dad's room where he'd gone earlier to apparently wrap the presents and he reemerges with two packages wrapped in newspaper and one folded up piece of paper.

He pauses a few feet from the bed and chews on the inside of his bottom lip, looking hesitant.

"This is. I mean. This isn't anything amazing, Dean. I don't want you to be disappointed. I couldn't really get you anything good because we've been stuck here and I mean, what could you really want from Wal-Mart? I looked for Joe again for more pot but he wasn't there and--"

"Sam."

"This is your sixteenth birthday and I just. I really wanted it to be a good one. I didn't want you to feel like you're missing out on anything, and I wanted to make it as good as I could--"

"Sammy."

Dean can tell Sam's getting upset again, getting tears in his eyes like he had this morning, when he'd practically ripped Dean's heart out. Just like he's about to do right now if he doesn't stop. Thankfully, Sam does stop; he blinks helplessly at Dean and Dean just gives him a small smile.

"This whole day has been amazing. All of it because of you. Anything else is just icing on the cake, okay?"

Sam takes a deep breath and lets it out slow, visibly calming down.

"O-okay."

"Okay? Okay. Good. Now gimme my damn presents before I have to throw a temper tantrum." He wiggles on the bed and makes grabby hands and Sam laughs, taking the few steps required to get to Dean and he hands him the packages first.

Dean rips into the smallest one and he lets out a laugh when he sees the batteries. "Oh, thank god. I was almost out. I'm stuck on *Zeppelin II*. Can't stop listenin'. Thanks, Sammy."

He sets them aside and grabs the bigger package, assuming it's the big present so he takes his time with it. He opens it to find a thick, good flannel shirt inside in orange, grey, and white. He unfolds it and runs his hands over it, his smile so big it hurts.

"Sammy, this is awesome. I can wear this forever, you know it? And I don't have one this color. My favorite one got ruined in that last hunt."

"I know," Sam says softly. He's sitting on the floor in front of Dean and he's practically vibrating with energy, with happiness. Dean feels an overwhelming need to pick Sam up under his arms and curl him in his lap.

He turns his attention back to the shirt, taking his time unbuttoning each button before slipping it on over his t-shirt, amazed that it fits perfectly, that it comes all the way down to his hands and it already feels like his.

"It's so soft. Did you feel it?" Dean offers his arm to Sam to let him feel the material and Sam pets his forearm almost reverently, petting Dean without looking up from it.

"What's that, Sammy?" He nods at the folded paper beside Sam on the floor. Sam pulls his hands away, tensing a little before looking over at it himself.

"It's, um. It's nothing. I changed my mind." He snatches the paper up and holds it behind his back. Dean raises his eyebrows, his curiosity piqued.

"Sammy," he singsongs, trying very hard to keep his hands to himself, to not make a grab for it because he knows that'll just end with it being ripped and both of them being upset. "Is that for me?"

"It's just. It's stupid. You won't like it. You'll just laugh. It's dumb." Sam pushes up onto his knees, about to stand up completely but Dean reaches out, grabs ahold of Sam's arm and forces him to meet his eyes.

"You really think I would ever laugh at somethin' you did for me? Ever? I know I'm a jerk, Sammy, but not about that. Not about you, not really. Okay? You gotta trust me. You trust me, right?"

Their eyes stay locked together for what feels like hours before Sam finally blinks, giving in. He sighs as he pulls the paper around

and hands it to Dean. He takes a few steps back immediately, like he can't bear to watch Dean open it. Dean watches him carefully, a little nervous now.

"Can I open it?"

Sam shrugs, chewing at the inside of his cheek.

"If you want."

Dean waits a few more seconds, giving Sam even more time to back out, if he needs it. When nothing else happens, he looks back down at the paper, catching an edge with the pad of his thumb and opening it up.

It's a drawing. It's an amazingly accurate depiction of the Impala with three figures in and around it: one that looks a lot like Dean in the driver's seat, elbow resting on the window, big, stupid smile on his face. In the passenger's seat is a man with long, wild dark hair, one leg hanging out of the open window, a guitar strapped across his chest. He's playing intently, face down, focused. On top of the car is the third figure, a long, tall blonde man with an epically curly mane of hair, a bared chest, and big bell bottom pants covering his legs. He's clutching a microphone and singing into it, words streaming out of his mouth and twisting out over the rest of the picture. The whole rest of the page is covered in lyrics, Led Zeppelin lyrics to be specific.

Dean glances up at Sam, the grin on his face simply unstoppable. Sam is practically shaking with nerves, his hands clutched together on his lap.

"It's. It's you with Jimmy Page and. And Robert Plant. In the car. Because. Because I know it feels like they're there with you, sometimes. When you're just really into the music and you're in the car and. And everything feels right and you're happy. I just. I know it's crappy and I wish I was better at drawing. I just." He pulls in a huge breath to explain more, maybe, but he lets it out in a rush.

"Just. Happy birthday, Dean."

Dean does what he wanted to before, he reaches for his little brother right under his arms like he's a little kid again that wants to be picked up and carried. He lifts Sam right up into his lap, ignoring the pie and the snowcream and everything else. He smiles when Sam just wraps himself around him, arms and legs impossi-

bly tight and Dean just holds him right back.

"You know, this is the best thing anybody's ever done for me. Ever. Nobody gets me like you, Sammy. Nobody. And nobody ever will. So you'll always be the best at my birthdays. Thank you, kiddo. I mean it. For everything."

Sam is still shaking a little but Dean just holds him, just rocks them a bit, keeps Sam right against him. It's then that it really hits Dean that he's sixteen, he's almost an adult in so many ways. He feels it then, with Sam against him. Feels how important he is to this boy, how important they are to each other.

"What do you say we get into our PJs and read about some Ents?" Dean smiles at Sam when he finally lifts up. Sam's face is wet from tears but Dean doesn't say anything about them. He just lets Sam wipe them off on his new flannel shirt and laughs a little when Sam nods.

Twenty minutes later, everything's put away or in the sink, most of the lights are out but the fireplace and Dean emerges from the bathroom to find Sam sitting on the bed, his big, ancient copy of *The Lord of the Rings* in his lap.

Dean climbs gingerly onto the bed, mindful of his unbandaged stitches, and rests his head on Sam's lap. Sam giggles, actually giggles, his hand immediately going to Dean's hair to pet him. Dean smiles as his eyes slip closed.

"Is this where you're gonna lay?" Sam sounds almost hopeful.

"Are you gonna keep petting me?"

"Do you want me to?"

"Mm-hmm."

"Then. Then, yes," Sam smiles, stroking through Dean's hair just like Dean does to him all the time.

"Then, yes. This is where I'm gonna lay."

"You want me to start?"

Dean stretches out, letting his legs drape over the arm of the couch. "Yeah, Sammy. You can start."

Sam opens his book where he has it marked with an old playing card, letting it spread out in the curl of his arm. The sun is setting outside and the snow has picked up again, and Dean cannot think of a place he wants to be more in the world.

“So it was that in the light of a fair morning King Théoden and Gandalf the White Rider met again upon the green grass beside the Deeping-stream. There was also Aragorn son of Arathorn, and Legolas the Elf--”

“Mmmmmm.”

“Dean, shut up!”



1996

Dean hauls in the last of the bags from the car, out of breath from the constant back and forth to get all their shit in the house in Dad's thirty minute time limit. He stops just inside the door and throws Sam's bag full of books toward the couch, sweat dripping from his hair, face red.

"Why the fuck are we always renting houses in Indiana?"

Dad looks up from where he's sharpening his machete at the tiny kitchen table, eyes narrowed on his son.

"Language, Dean."

Sam stands just behind Dean, still on the porch, waiting for Dean to either realize Sam's behind him or just move out of the way so Sam can come in, too.

"At least it's not snowing this time, right?" Sam aims his smile right up at Dean, his voice quiet. Dad and Dean have been arguing the entire day, and it always puts Sam on edge. Dean's supposed to be the one that gets along with Dad, and it scares him when they get like this.

Dean's eyes soften just a little and he steps out of the way to let Sam come into the house, closing the door after him.

"As soon as he leaves, we'll order a pizza or somethin', okay?"

Sam nods, leaning into the hand that Dean rests on his cheek. He hurries over to the sink and fills up his fountain cup from the gas station with water, gulping all of it down before he refills it and brings the cup to Dean.

"Don't you be wastin' money on pizza, boy. I can't leave you that much this time. You'll have to either get a job somewhere or be smart with your money for once until I can get you some more.

You hear me?"

Dean grabs the cup from Sam, taking a big drink before he turns to glare at their dad.

"How long are you gonna be gone, anyway? Why are you talking like it's gonna be a month or somethin'?"

"I don't know how long it'll be. I can't plan these things, Dean. Hunts don't work like that and you know it. You watch your tone, too." Dad sheaths the machete and stands up from the table, a little slow in the movement because he still has stitches on his side that are healing. He looks exhausted and haunted and, for once, Sam feels bad for him.

"Do you have our transcripts, Dad?" Sam looks around the room at each of the bags, trying to remember where they'd shoved them when they left Minnesota.

"Yeah, in the black backpack next to the couch. Alright, boys. I'll call you from the road. Dean--"

"Dad, I know."

Dad steps up to Dean so fast that Sam nearly gasps. He rushes toward them, forcing his small body between them, his back to Dean, facing Dad who is nearly on top of him. Dad is pissed and so is Dean and Sam does the only thing he can think of. He throws his arms around Dad.

"See you soon." Sam holds on tight and he can feel the confusion all through Dad's body, in the hesitant way he hugs back. Dad takes a step back and gives Sam a pat on the back, letting him go and meeting his eyes with a bemused smile.

"Uh, yeah. See you soon, Sammy." Dad looks up at Dean but

Sam keeps his back right up against Dean's chest, keeping them apart as long as he can. Dad grabs up the keys, giving them one last nod before he's gone.

They don't look at each other until the engine starts. Sam turns to smile at Dean who is staring at him with a raised eyebrow.

"You feelin' cuddly today, Sammy?"

Sam grins at Dean, suddenly so glad that Dad's gone, all that tension just vanishing with the faded sound of the Impala rumbling down the road.

He jumps at Dean, arms around his neck, making Dean fall back toward the couch with a surprised grunt.

"Maybe."

They're in Fairmount, Indiana, and Dean fucking hates it here. He's seventeen and hardly relates to his classmates at all, let alone enough to make friends with them. But he's a funny guy, charismatic and hot and has his dad's walk so a flock always just sort of forms behind him from one end of the hallway to the other between classes. He doesn't know why. Really. It just happens. This time, the flock is headed up by a gorgeous redhead named Holly Edkins who wears punch-red lipstick and short skirts and Dean is so, so there.

Holly's parents don't really give a shit what she and her twin brother do, so their group of friends have more or less taken up residence in the Edkins' basement after school and on the weekends. It's a purely 70s basement, wood panelling and thick carpet and couches and bean bags and their dad's record collection complete with a sweet-ass stereo system. The second Dean joins their little gypsy band, he becomes the DJ and doesn't take lip from anyone about the music. These bastards think that The Wallflowers are cutting edge. Jesus.

It's a Saturday night and Dean just hadn't been able to leave Sam at home. He just couldn't do it. Sam had look so put-out, shoulders falling and his face schooled too quickly into neutrality for it to be genuine. So he'd thrown his favorite denim jacket at

Sam and popped the collar for him and told him not to say “cool beans” or “grody” or do *any* Jim Carrey impressions and now here they are, Edkins' basement, five high schoolers and Sam Winchester.

It's Sam's nightmare, to be honest.

Sammy still isn't very tall at thirteen, but Dean doesn't mind. He can't pretend yet that he and Sam are just friends or that Sam's a little older so it's not really weird that he goes everywhere with his baby brother, but he doesn't actually care about any of these people. Not really. He makes friends but he forgets their names two states away. It's just the way he's found to function in their life.

“s my brother, Sammy. Sammy, this is ever'body.” Dean nods lazily at the group that just stares up at Sam, blinking through bloodshot eyes and some of them even nod. One girl in particular gives him a slow, dangerous-looking grin and he looks away quickly, glancing over at Dean for help.

Dean just grins at him and gives him a hard slap on the shoulder before stepping over people to get to the stereo.

It's already so smoky and hazy that Sam can't really see anyone very well, so he just offers up an awkward wave and shoves his hands into the pockets of his borrowed jacket and lets his hair fall in his eyes and tries to look unaffected.

“How old are you?” It's Holly, the only one he recognizes. She's Dean's current girlfriend, if you even want to call her that. She's wearing a lemondrop yellow skirt that barely covers her and it's pushed up a little where she's draped over the couch. She's wearing Barbie pink panties and Sam feels the heat burning in his cheeks. He meets her eyes quickly and her red mouth is already in a smirk like she knows what he's thinking.

“Th-Fourteen.” He shakes his hair out of his eyes and holds her gaze almost defiantly. There's no way she *actually* knows what he was thinking about.

“Fourteen, huh? That make you a freshman? I haven't seen you around.” She stares straight into his eyes as she takes the joint offered to her by a boy with her exact hair color right beside her, pinching it and pressing it to her lips to take a long drag. Sam opens and closes his mouth a few times and he almost sighs when

he feels Dean's arm wrap around his shoulders.

"He's a little short. Hard to see in the hallways. Right, Sammy?" Dean's grin is vicious and Sam can't help but glare up at him even if he is grateful for the save. Dean nods back toward the stack of records. "Come help me pick something. Gotta save these people's souls, man."

"Hey! The Gin Blossoms are amazing!"

"Oh, shut the fuck up, Eddie. You didn't even know who Stevie Ray Vaughan was until you met me." Dean doesn't even look up, just crouches down amongst the records and shuffles through them, panning for gold. Sam keeps quiet about how he really likes the Gin Blossoms, about how they fill him with longing and a strange nostalgia and the sweet ache of wanting because he doesn't want that look of disappointment from Dean directed at him, even if it's half in jest.

"Ah, ah! Here we go. Okay, Sammy." Dean holds up two records, The Doors' *Waiting for the Sun* or Bob Seger's *Night Moves*. "Pick."

Sam squints at them thoughtfully, considering the mood and the company and lifts a finger to touch The Doors. "And then Seger."

Dean's grin is blinding and he lifts the record to tap Sam gently on top of the head with it. "A fine choice, my boy. See, guys!" He lifts his voice and glares back at his friends. "Sammy here's only thirteen, and he has better taste than all the rest of you combined!"

"Fourteen," Sam corrects softly, but the truth is already out there. His cheeks pink and he keeps his head down, watching Dean handle the record reverently, capable hands loading it onto the platter and lifting the tonearm to place the needle perfectly at the beginning of the record. Sam just observes, fascinated, watches Dean mess with the levers on the system and finally turn it up when "Hello, I Love You" starts up.

"C'mon, man, come hang out. These guys are cool, I promise. I think Lyla over there's got her eye on you." Dean stands up and nudges Sam when he follows suit, directing his gaze over at the little dark-headed girl tucked into a red beanbag chair, big, dark eyes right on him. Sam looks away again and back up at Dean, just

glancing at him to embolden himself before he starts the short trek back over to the group. Holly's smile looks sweeter now but that's only because it's now just for Dean.

"Hey, baby. C'mere. Toby, move your ass." Holly glares over at the boy that can only be her brother, shoving at him until he groans and gives up his seat next to her on the couch. Dean grins apologetically at Toby and sinks down next to Holly only to have her in his lap in the next second. He drapes a casual arm around her hip, hand splayed on her decidedly bare thigh. She holds the joint to his mouth and he closes his eyes and inhales slowly, long lashes fluttering as he holds it in and lets it out several beats later. His eyes open and find Sam and Sam feels pinned in his gaze, his heart wild and jumpy.

"Sit down, Sammy. They won't hurtcha. Hol, give Sam a drag."

"No, no, Dean, I'm--"

"Sam." He's using his Dad voice, but a lazy version of it, and Sam sinks down to his knees immediately. He takes up residence beside the couch, his shoulder against Dean's calf. He looks up at Dean unsurely but Dean's smile is approving and happy and so Sam relaxes just a little bit.

"Here."

Sam takes the joint from Holly's small hand and stares at it, not really sure how to approach it. He's seen Dean smoke a few times and even smoked a cigarette once himself, but that's not really adequate preparation for smoking a joint expertly in a roomful of potheads.

"Need help?" The cute brunette is suddenly in front of him, Lyla, and Sam's eyes widen. He's about to deny it, to try and figure it out on his own but Dean, as always, beats him to it.

"He'd love it. Wouldn't you, kid? Lyla here is a wise woman, you listen to her." Sam can see Dean's cheshire cat grin out of the corner of his eyes, see his fingers trailing high up Holly's thigh and disappear a little under her skirt. He refocuses on Lyla and really looks at her and realizes how fucking pretty she is, not a stitch of makeup, inky dark lashes and a headful of straight, dark hair. His heart races a little as he twitches on a shy smile.

"Here." Her voice is soft, sweet and Sam feels a little calmer

just for hearing it. She sinks down next to him and takes the joint from him, pulling a lighter out of nowhere and relighting the end that had gone out. "Just take the tip between your lips and inhale deep. Deep as you can. Make sure it goes in your lungs and not just in your mouth, you know? Like this." She demonstrates, deep petal pink lips just barely pursing around the tip and she does just what she said and holds it in her lungs just like Dean did, letting it out in a pretty plume after several long beats. Her grin is big and happy as she passes it back over to him. "Try."

He feels Dean shift beside him and this all suddenly feels so intimate, so close, secret. It thrills him and terrifies him to his very core. He follows her orders to the letter, careful not to soak the tip with his spit and he inhales a huge lungful, holding it as long as he can but he coughs a bit when he exhales and he blushes when he hears the others laugh good-naturedly.

"There ya go." Dean's hand is in his hair and his eyes sink closed just for a second, just a long blink and inside of that second is nirvana. His eyes open and Dean's hand is gone and Lyla is watching him and he takes another toke, not wanting to be left behind and he holds her gaze when he exhales. The smell of the weed is so weird, thick and earthy and syrupy sweet all at the same time, and it's all over him, all over the room, the world, as far as he knows. He realizes that he's, almost shockingly, already feeling it.

"Whoa," Sam exhales, just loud enough to be heard over Jim Morrison and there are more laughs, only this time, he laughs along with them. He hears another lighter and smells another whiff of marijuana beside him and glances over to see that Dean's lit up a whole new joint. Sam watches him inhale, watches him just as unabashedly as Holly is, only Holly is squirming in his lap, one of her hands up under his shirt to rub at his stomach. Sam feels something dull digging inside his gut, something aching and sharp and he looks away to focus his attention on Lyla again.

"Let's try something," she suggests as she squirms closer to Sam. She takes another drag before the joint is taken away from her by Eddie or Toby or he doesn't really know, all he knows is that she's super close to him and then her mouth is on his and she's licking in past his lips and he parts his mouth because he knows

what she wants him to do and all of a sudden there's smoke filling his mouth. It's scary at first, the lack of control and inhaling something from someone besides carbon dioxide, but he takes it, drinks it into his lungs and then exhales it back into her mouth, thrilled beyond all reason by her pleased little moan and the way she just kind of starts kissing him. He kisses her back, a little inexperienced but he's watched Dean's mouth long enough to nearly be an expert, and he almost jumps through the ceiling when he feels Dean's fingers teasing at the nape of his neck, callouses against very tender skin. Goosebumps fly all over his body and he tries his very best to simultaneously push back into that hand and up into Lyla's mouth.

"Atta boy, Sammy." Dean's voice is soft and his nails are scritch-ing over Sam's scalp and Sam is suddenly so very hard in his jeans and Lyla is getting even closer. He ends the kiss as fast as a high thirteen-year-old can, smiling at her with a flushed face and she just laughs, leaning in to get one last kiss before she stands up again, disappearing from his sight. He leans back against the arm of the couch, Dean's fingers gone but the ghost of them is there and he feels a little melty, soft cotton behind his eyes and the room spinning and endless and when he feels the joint pressed to his lips again, he inhales.

--

A third joint's lit and Dean has lost track of how many hits he's had but he's feeling damn good, feeling all spilled out and happy and he's making out with Holly on the couch, her t-shirt pushed up, bra cups pulled down so he can rub at both of her nipples while she sucks on his tongue. The Doors are swaggering on from the speakers, "Five to One" now, and Eddie is passed out on the brown beanbag and Toby and Lyla and Sam are dancing together and by themselves at the same time and it's all kinds of hot.

Toby and Lyla are grinding when the beat of the song starts up and Sam is by himself, so fucking stoned out of his mind that he doesn't care who's watching him, doesn't care that his too-small t-shirt is riding up as he swings his arms around, his young, bony

hipbones showing above his baggy jeans, just above the elastic band of his Wal-Mart briefs. He's skinny and tight-bodied and somehow very sexy the way he twists and throws his hair around, so lost to the beat and in his own head, eyes closed, dreamy smile on his face.

Dean watches him through slitted eyes as he kisses down Holly's chest, tugging her shirt up over her head and making criminally quick work of her bra, her tits free and tight and full in his palms, in his mouth. He sucks a nipple into his mouth and watches Sam's hips, the muscles of his young back. He groans when Holly undoes his jeans and pulls his dick out, slick blurting from the tip that she spreads out over the rest of him and starts to stroke him, grip firm, twist at the head, perfect.

He moves her so that she's straddling one of his legs and he guides her to grind her cunt against his thigh. She does, making the prettiest little fucking sounds while he gnaws her nipple raw. Her fingers press down against his balls and he gasps, hissing out through his teeth. "*Fuck.*"

Dean's eyes fall closed as he thrusts up against her, into her hand and he holds her hips to fuck her on his thigh. Holly's soaked through her panties and he can feel it damp on his thigh through his jeans. The couch sinks on his right and Dean can fucking smell him, teenage boy sweat and pot and their cheap detergent. Sammy.

He opens his eyes as much as he can and his head lulls over, mouth fat from sucking tits and he meets Sam's eyes dead-on. Sam is curled on his side, face and hair sweaty, pits stained, eyes red and watery and he's licking his lips.

"Dean," he says so softly and then Holly's mouth is unexpectedly on his dick and Dean nearly falls apart. Sam breaks eye contact to watch Holly, watching her suck on Dean's dick, unblinking. The record's over and it's quiet now except for the wet sounds of sucking cock, Holly's tongue licking flat and sweet all up on the underside of Dean's dick. Sam makes a small noise of petulance and moves even closer, face tucking into Dean's neck, his breath scorching against Dean's already burning skin.

"Oh, Jesus," Dean growls, his voice ripped apart, head spin-

ning. Holly takes him down her throat and Dean's hips fuck up off the couch and his arm reaches out on pure instinct, wrapping around Sam's shoulders and pulling him in close, close. Sam inhales against Dean's neck, a savoring sound, and Dean feels his mouth moving there, the hot slick of his tongue and he only has time to move his hands, to slide one up into Sam's hair and grip hard while doing the same thing to Holly's, shoving her down on his dick while he thrusts up, just two shallow thrusts and then he's exploding, fucking fireworks in an outdated basement in northern Indiana. He manages a sigh, a whispered *sorry* to no one in particular and then he's out.

Sam stays right where he is, tucked against his burning brother and he watches Holly even still, watches her take care of Dean's dick until it's soft, until it's clean of everything but spit, until it's spent and only then does she tuck him back into his jeans. She leaves them unfastened and her green eyes are on Sam, sudden and truly knowing. He gazes at her from under his lashes, safe against Dean's body and she cranes up just a little, just enough to catch Sam's mouth, hot and unexpected and the fresh tang of come races through all of his senses. She feeds him a fat wad of whatever's in her mouth, whatever she's held in there of Dean's come and her spit and it should be absolutely disgusting but Sam is shattered because of it, he's more aware of the entire fucking universe than he ever has been in his life and it's all because he now knows exactly what Dean tastes like. He swallows down his gift and she pulls back, her lips free of all the red now and she smiles at him, small, secret.

Holly slinks over to the other side of the room to change the record and Sam is left with Dean, the taste of him in his mouth and his world permanently altered.

Sam knows before he even knows her name that she's way out of his league. He's definitely minor league with some college ball and she won the fucking World Series twice in a row with the best team in history.

And her name is Sunny.

Sunny.

Her hair is dark gold and cascades in hundreds of springy curls all the way down to the middle of her back. She has Dean's eyes, down to the exact color and long babydoll lashes. She's sprinkled with freckles over warm caramel skin and she's long and lithe and wears shorts that earn the name and she has the best boobs in the eighth grade, handsdown. She listens to 7 Year Bitch and Bikini Kill on the lawn after school and she wears combat boots.

Sam fell in love with her when he saw her kick the shit out of a football player who thought it was his right to walk by and grab her ass in the hallway.

Eighth grade is divided into two different hallways and so he never sees her, except during lunch. She has a group of friends comprised mostly of girls and a few guys who wear a lot of black.

Sam is terrified of her.

He sits with some guys he's managed to make sort-of friends and he just stares at her all through lunch. Just eats his greasy pizza and stares.

It takes three days of this for her to look up, to catch his eyes on her. He looks down immediately, his heart pounding his ears and suddenly he's more interested in one of the guys' sordid stories about his hot aunt than he ever has been. He sees a shadow fall over their table and he smells some kind of sweet perfume and knows. Oh, god. She's going to step on him. He's going to die under a pair of purple Doc Martens.

"Hey. You."

The guys fall immediately and deathly silent and Sam lets his eyes slip closed for just a second to brace himself for whatever humiliation he's about to experience. He opens his eyes and looks over and up and there she is, even more beautiful and terrifying up close. He actually gulps.

She raises her eyebrows at him, arms going up to cross each other and it pushes her boobs up and oh.

Sam shifts in his seat.

"Is there a problem?" Her voice is even strong, it's light but powerful, kind of like the elf hair Galadriel used to make Legolas' bow

from when they visited--

There are fingers snapping in front of his face and he blinks a few times before she comes into focus again. His cheeks flush pink and he avoids her eyes again, shoulders drawing in.

"N-no. No. I'm sorry."

"Why are you sorry?" Her tone is unreadable and so Sam has to look up at her again, damnit. Her face has softened the tiniest bit and Sam feels every single relief it affords him.

"For. For staring at you like that. It wasn't cool. I'm sorry."

"Why were you staring at me?"

Sam is aware of how quiet it is now in the cafeteria. It's not completely quiet but there is a hush, at least in their corner of the world. A couple of the guys are huddled together, super interested in whatever is happening on a Gameboy. It's okay. He can accept this gracefully. He can get stomped by a girl and get up and go to the nurse and maybe muster up a few tears so he can go home early and die in the peace and quiet of the room he's sharing with Dean. Totally fine. He's a Winchester. Suffer silently.

"Because. You're the prettiest girl I've ever seen and Cody Trammell can barely walk from where you kicked him and I like your boots."

He has no idea how he just said any of that shit. Any of it. It's all true of course, but shut the fuck up, Winchester! He's just relieved he didn't accidentally say 'boobs' instead of 'boots.'

She is absolutely silent and Sam flinches and dares to look at her again, expecting to see the bottom of said boot coming down on his face. What he finds instead is the prettiest pink spreading out under the dozens of freckles on her cheeks and a smile trying its very best to hide on her mouth. He feels so confused and somehow even more scared.

"Come find me after school. We can go to the park and hang out. I'll be at the side entrance next to the choir room."

Sam can only open and close his mouth, in a totally smooth, hot way of course, his heart now in his throat and he doesn't know what to say to her until she's giving him a real smile and then turning to walk away. He flies to his feet, his lunch tray clattering against the formica table.

“Wait! I'm. I'm Sam. Sam Winchester.”

She stops and turns to face him, grinning full-stop now. She gives him a once-over that makes him flush from head to toe.

“I know who you are, Sam Winchester. I'm Sunny Rogers.”

It doesn't take the cafeteria long to get back to its regularly scheduled chaos and Sunny is back with her friends, laughing and smiling and her eyes find Sam's every once in awhile and Sam, elated beyond all reckoning, can only grin back.

--

“Finally.”

Sam's head jerks to the left when he hears the word and there she is, sliding off the bench and standing up. Sunny's a little bit taller than him and it makes him stand up straighter, hands shoved stubbornly into the pockets of his hoodie. He offers her a shy smile, barely meeting her eyes from under his lashes.

“Hey. Sorry. I was turning in some extra credit for Algebra.”

“Why do you need to turn in extra credit?” She's beside him now, fingers caught in the straps of her backpack covered in words written in white-out, a crazy bunch of keychains hanging from the zipper pulls. She's wearing a band t-shirt of a group he's never heard of, and it looks like it's been shredded by a big cat. He can see a dark grey tank top underneath some of the slices of worn cotton and it makes his heart rate pick up. He realizes that he's been quiet for too long again and he looks up to meet her eyes, embarrassed by her knowing smile.

“I, uh. I don't, I guess. Just wanna make sure I keep a good grade.”

“Mm.” Sunny accepts his response and doesn't tease him, doesn't argue. She just bumps his shoulder with her own and they start walking, just like that. Like this is just another day, like this is totally normal for them. Sam can barely feel his legs.

--

“Bugles or Doritos?”

Sunny's holding up two bags, her gaze so intense that Sam takes this as an important question, a make or break question. He shifts from one foot to the other in the chip aisle of the gas station right across from the school and answers carefully.

“...Bugles?”

Sunny beams at him and Sam lets out a bark of laughter, relieved. She puts the Doritos back where they went and hands the winning bag of chips to Sam.

“You can make witch fingernails with Bugles. Very important.” She nods sagely and Sam bites down on the inside of his cheek to keep from telling her that the last witch he saw had a boring housewife French manicure.

“Well well well, look who's buyin' junk food. No apples in here, Sammy.”

Before Sam can even turn around, he feels Dean's arm around his shoulders, feels his warmth right there against him and he freezes, eyes cartoonishly wide. He blinks at Sunny who is looking Dean, who is *really* looking Dean, sees how beautiful he is and who is now in the process of falling in love with him.

Sam knows every single step of falling in love with Dean.

“Hey, Dean,” he mumbles, jostled closer as Dean tightens his arm around him. He glances over and sees Dean's stupid perfect nose and his stupid stupid fucking mouth that is curling into a smile and those eyes that he hates so much looking at Sunny. Like, *looking* at Sunny. The way Dean looks at hot girls. The way Dean never, ever looks at Sam.

“Who's your girlfriend?” Dean's voice is deeper, nearly purring. Sunny pinks under the attention from Dean fucking Winchester, even going so far as to duck her head and twist her toes in toward each other and look up at Dean under her Dean-matching eyelashes. Sam hates his life.

“I'm Sunny. Who are you?”

“I'm hurt. Sammy hasn't mentioned me?” Dean takes his arm off of Sam who nearly stumbles with the loss of Dean's warmth. He tugs Sam to face him with one hand on his sleeve, his eyes sparkling with mischief and pride. “What, are you ashamed of me, kid?”

"N-no. No, I just..." Sam's looking down so far that he swears he can see under his own shoes.

"I'm his brother. His seventeen-year-old brother. Dean. Hi." He offers her his hand and tugs her a little closer as he shakes it, his smile absolutely feline. Sam pictures it, sudden and unbidden, his brother-slash-life and his crush-slash-potential girlfriend falling for each other and completely ignoring Sam, just walking off together, arms linked, off to have pretty, dark blonde-headed, freckle-faced babies with a keen love of ass-kicking boots and unapologetic rock'n'roll.

Ignoring the fact that Sunny is just thirteen and not even Dean would stoop that low. Which hurts because he's thirteen himself and--

"...does this all the time. I swear. Hellooo. Earth to Sammy?" He sees Dean's thick fingers snapping in front of his face and he blinks back to the here and now where Sunny and Dean are both watching him with annoyingly similar grins.

"Sorry. Sorry. Didn't get much sleep last night. Guess I'm tired." It's a lie for the most part, but it rolls off his tongue easily enough. Sunny visibly deflates even as she tries to keep her smile in place.

"Oh. Well. We can hang out some other time, if you want?"

"No, I! I'm. I'll be okay, I promise. It's. I just--"

"He just has to eat something and then he'll be golden, right?" Dean steps in like he always does but this time, he's genuinely helpful. He gives Sam an earnest smile, the act falling away and Sam finally sees his brother there, underneath it all.

"Yeah. I'll just grab one of those microwave burritos up front, and I'll be fine." Sam nods to the front of the store and meets Sunny's eyes, trying to convince her that he's telling the truth. "Promise."

"Oh, dude, don't make her get stuck with you after you've had a burrito. Not very romantic, Sammy."

Sam's eyes are big as saucers when he looks over at Dean, a horrified expression on his face.

"Dean!"

Dean beams at him and gives him a hard slap on the back. "Alright, my work here is done. I'll be over at Holly's 'til late, okay?"

Don't wait up for me." He waggles his eyebrows and Sam can't keep the dull ache away that he feels settling across his chest. He gives Dean a wan smile in return before he looks away from him.

"Whatever."

"It was *very* nice meeting you, Sunny." Sam can *hear* Dean's eyes traveling up and down Sunny's body one more time and Sunny's flattered laugh almost makes Sam throw a fit. Dean's halfway to the door before he turns to them, snapping his fingers like he just remembered something.

"Hey, you two. Me'n'Hol were gonna order a pizza and watch *The Shining* at the house tomorrow night. Should be fun. You guys want in?"

"Jesus, Dean," Sam mumbles under his breath, honestly wanting to sink right into the ground.

Of course Dean gets to ask Sam's girlfriend on a date before he does. Of course Sam's first real date is going to be because of his brother, with his brother. With his brother's handsy, sexually driven girlfriend there, too. Just the thought of Holly brings to mind the exact taste of Dean's come on his tongue, of Dean's face when he shot his load into Holly's hot fucking--

Oh.

He blinks.

They're both staring at him again and Sam nearly runs away this time, and only half because his dick is thickening in his jeans.

"So. What do you think, Sam? I think it sounds fun." Sunny's tone makes it obvious this isn't the first time she's asked Sam in the tiny span of time since Dean posed the question.

Sam's eyes are on Dean, searching out any motives or foul play. All he sees there is eagerness, a little bit of feistiness that Sam quite honestly wants to lick out of his mouth but it's an innocent enough proposal. He looks over at Sunny then, trying his very best to look like a normal boy who isn't struggling between giving his full attention to a beautiful girl and his brother whose very existence completely devastates Sam's common sense.

"Sure. Sounds awesome."

Dean's smile makes the whole fucking gas station look brighter and Sam finds himself wanting to beg Dean not to go.

"Awesome," Dean echoes, giving Sam a panty-dropping wink before he lifts his head in a goodbye-nod and leaves, tugging hard on the invisible string between himself and Sam.

Sam looks over at Sunny out of the corner of his eyes as she grabs a bag of pizza flavored Combos and wonders suddenly what the hell he's doing, why he ever thought he wanted to date this girl, why he has ever tried to pretend there was anybody besides--

"Are you gonna go get your burrito? I'll grab us some drinks and meet you up front, okay?"

Sunny is so pretty. She could kick his ass and her boobs really are nice and she didn't run after Dean when he left. The smile Sam gives her when he finds it is authentic if not full. "Sure."

--

They end up right by the creek that runs through the park. Sunny has her shoes off and her feet in the little stream of water that runs right over the pretty brown of her skin. Sam is making tiny origami stars out of notebook paper, putting them in a little pile on a rock next to his foot. They're quiet now after they've eaten, after they've made small talk on the way down here and their moods settle down around each other. It's a peaceful silence, thoughtful, calm in a way Sam has never, ever felt with a girl before.

"So, you're new here, huh?"

Sam glances up and sees that she's not looking at him, she's not looking at anything. Her eyes are closed and her face is tipped up to accept the warmth of the afternoon sun. Sam is suddenly grateful to her parents for giving her such an appropriate name.

"Yeah. Just moved here about a month ago."

She gives a hum of acknowledgement and falls quiet again for a moment.

"Where did you move from?"

Sam has to really think about the question. Where were they last? Up in Minnesota. Tracking a wendigo. Yeah.

"Ely, Minnesota. Up near the Canadian border."

"Oh." She looks at him, eyebrows raised in surprise. "My mom's

side is from Duluth. You don't have a Minnesota accent at all."

"Oh, I'm not from Minnesota," he replies quickly with a laugh. He squeezes the sides of the little paper hexagon in his hand, working it gently until it puffs out into a tiny star. Adds it to the pile.

"Where are you from then?"

Sam hates this question. A lot. He has to answer it every time he moves, everywhere he goes. He's from nowhere. He's from everywhere. He's nobody so there's no good answer here. Except the easiest. The most painful one.

"Kansas."

Sunny grins for that, obviously approving. "A Midwestern boy. Nice."

Sam shakes his head with a small smile, shrugs. He starts to carefully fold another strip of paper. "Yeah, I guess. I've spent most of my life moving around though."

He feels her look over at him then and he tenses a bit under the scrutiny. He wonders where Dean is, what he's doing.

"Why?"

The other question he hates a lot.

"Dad's job. Has us on the road a lot."

"What does he do?"

"Sales."

Sunny's very intuitive, it seems, because she doesn't push him, doesn't ask for an expansion on such stunted answers. She just nods and closes her eyes again, moving this time to lay back in the grass, feet still in the water. She long since stripped off her top shirt, leaving her in the tank top. Sam can see the swell of her breasts prominently from where she's laying now. He stares intensely, wondering just how they feel, if they're as soft as they look, how they would fit in his hands. If her nipples are the same color as her dusky pink mouth. She sighs and Sam almost whimpers for the way it makes her breasts rise and fall dramatically.

"So you've traveled all over, huh?" Her tone is different. Softer, less guarded. Wistful. That's what it is.

"Yeah." Sam's is the opposite of wistful. Wistless. Is that a word? It should be. "Pretty much."

"How many states have you been to?"

"All of them, mostly. 'Cept for like, you know. Alaska and Hawaii, I guess." Another star added to the pile.

"I want to go *everywhere*." She sounds fierce now, passionate. Her hand is resting on her stomach and Sam just watches her, listens to her speak. "I want to get out of this fucking town. Just go. Right now. Leave and don't say shit to anybody. Just go and never come back."

Sam mulls this over, just curling one of the paper strips around his finger now until it's a tight spiral. "Are you from here?"

"Yeah." She laughs, just a breath through her nose that is anything but amused. "Yeah, born and raised. Only been as far away as Pittsburgh. I've never even been to Florida. Never even seen the ocean. Can you believe that? I've been alive for almost fourteen years. Fourteen years and I've never seen the damn ocean."

Her eyes are open and meeting his and he gives her a smile.

"It's just a big thing of water, really," he offers.

"Shut up." She laughs, turning over to lay on her stomach now and she lifts her legs out of the water, letting her feet tangle where she swings them in the air, neverminding the water that drips onto her back from her wet toes. "I mean it. I mean, just think about it. You've seen all the states, you've been everywhere, and we're the same age. I've lived here since I was born. Everybody knows me. *Everybody*. I can't go to the grocery store without running into somebody. I can't sneak anywhere because my mom can find out everything because everybody knows what I look like. Do you know how many times I've been here, right here? Put my feet in that water?"

Sam swallows hard. Everything she's said, all of it, is all he's ever wanted. It's what has sounded like heaven to him since he was old enough to realize that nobody else grew up in the backseat of a Chevy.

"You'll leave one day," he says quietly. He abandons the piece of paper and starts to line up the stars he's made, letting the point of one touch the next one and the next one and the next one. "You'll leave and everything you remember about it will seem like a dream. You'll just ache inside for all of it, just want to see it one

more time. And it'll seem perfect when you're not here. And when you see it again you'll just want to cry or something because it's more perfect than you even remembered. It'll be home and nowhere else can ever replace that."

She watches him, doesn't say a word. He feels like an idiot but he's too afraid, too stubborn to look up, to crack a joke to break the tension, like Dean would. He puts the stars into a circle with one in the center and when he does finally look up, she's right there beside him, smelling like sunshine and chips.

"You don't have any place you feel that way about. Do you?"

He licks his lips and stares at a tiny cluster of freckles on her left shoulder that looks like Cassiopeia. A place, no. Not even Lawrence that he still calls home, even though he doesn't know what it looks like, not a single house or street. But a person, yes. A thousand times, yes. It's how he feels every single day when Dean drops him off at school, how he feels whenever Dean is more than a thin wall away. But that's his secret, and no amount of pretty girls in the world can make him give it up.

He finally locks eyes with her again and shakes his head as an answer and he knows, without a single doubt, that she wants him to kiss her. He lowers his lashes, stares right down at her flower pink mouth and slides his own right against it, just like Dean taught him how to do without even realizing it. When her tongue touches his, he forces all thoughts of Dean firmly out of his mind and focuses on melting himself into this girl, one lick of his tongue at a time.

"Sammy, will you stop primpin' and hurry the fuck up? The girls'll be here any minute and I'm sorry, man. You can't fix all that ugly. It just ain't gonna happen."

Sam jumps at the sound of Dean's fist pounding on the bathroom door and he scowls at the words.

"I'm not primping! I'm just putting on some deodorant and I'll be right out. Jeez, just give me a freakin' minute, okay?"

Truth is that Sam is clutching Dean's razor and contemplating

taking it to his face. Except that he's been staring in the mirror for going on five minutes and he's yet to spot a hair long enough to shave off. He sighs and tosses the razor back onto the sink, looking up at his own reflection in the mirror with critical eyes.

Speaking of, he hates his eyes. They never know what color they want to be and they're shaped weird. Like, really weird. And his cheeks are too fat and his mouth isn't very full, or at least not as full as Dean's. (No one, not even the very prettiest girls Dean has brought around, has ever had a mouth like Dean's. Ever.) His hair is sticking up from where he'd slept on it that morning so he runs some water and pats it on top of his head, not really accomplishing much but making his hair wet and heavy in one spot.

He groans and swipes at it a few more times before he gives up. He opens the rickety medicine cabinet and pulls out Dean's small bottle of cologne. He goes very still, listening for sounds of Dean moving around out in the livingroom before he sprays himself as softly as he can with the cologne, right on his neck like he's seen Dean do. He caps it quickly and replaces it and studies himself in the mirror again. Still looks the same. Smells good though.

"Sammy, man, are you jerking off? Seriously, because--"

"Dean!" Sam's voice is a squeaky shriek of a sound and he's beet red when he rips the door open and stares up at his brother who's leaning against the door frame, forearm braced against the wood, a leering smile spread across his fucking pretty face. Asshole.

"You were, weren't you?"

"No. No, I wasn't. I just look like shit and my hair's all stupid and I don't have a clean shirt and--"

"Hey hey hey, wait. Hold up, look at me."

Sam stops from where he's started a perfectly good storming-off and turns to face Dean, his eyes on the amulet settled on his chest and not at his face. Dean lets out a tiny huff of breath and Sam can feel it flutter his hair.

"Sammy." It's a patient tone, an understanding one. It's the perfect one to draw Sam's eyes up to meet Dean's that are green, green green as everything and the only color they get is more green. He averts his eyes almost immediately, feeling ridiculously inferior.

"Dude, you look fine. And your hair is." Sam looks up at Dean just in time to watch the sweetest expression pass over his face, to watch him lift a hand and run his fingers down through Sam's hair, trying to tame it. He gives a laugh, a soft, harmless one. "Can't just wet it in one spot, idiot."

Sam smiles, ducking his head and letting Dean work. He takes the smallest step closer just to bask in him for as long as he can, to encourage Dean's hand to keep doing what it's doing.

"All my clothes are dirty. I haven't done any laundry this week and--"

"I did a load for you last night. Check your drawers. C'mon." Dean's hand leaves his hair and Sam almost sighs but he follows Dean obediently into their room like the puppy he is. Dean opens Sam's top drawer and rummages around, pulling out a plain white t-shirt that is really tight on Sam, especially since he grew that extra inch this past fall.

"Dean, I can't wear that shirt. It's skin-tight on me." He steps up to the dresser and starts to look through the drawer for his Dad's old Velvet Underground shirt.

"Duh, that's exactly why you need to wear it. Don't you know anything about girls? C'mon, take this one off." Dean reaches for the hem of Sam's shirt and tugs it up, making Sam flush immediately. He reaches down to take it off himself, not even letting himself entertain the thought of Dean taking his shirt off for him.

He stares up at his brother, feeling scrawny and like a child next to Dean who is fully grown and solidly built and just. Perfect. Dean is fucking perfect. He looks down at his own thin chest and wraps his arms around it to hide it from Dean. Dean snorts, knowing exactly what Sam's up to, and shoves Sam's hands away.

"Ain't nothin' I've not seen before. C'mon, up." He motions with a jerk of his head and Sam lifts his arms just as Dean pulls the shirt down over his head. He slides his arms through the holes and tugs the shirt down as far as it'll go but it still leaves a strip of skin flashing whenever he moves, the very tops of his briefs showing above the loose waist of his jeans.

He looks up, mouth open to complain but Dean's eyes are raking over his body, hands broad and warm as they slide over his

chest to smooth the shirt out. It only occurs to Sam then that this might be weird, that most brothers their age probably don't help each other get dressed. The thought makes his heart skip, makes goosebumps fly over his arms and his nipples harden a little, completely visible through the tragically thin cotton.

"Yeah," Dean rumbles, eyes lingering on Sam's chest for a split second longer before meeting Sam's again, giving him a wicked wink. "You look like one-a those boys in the teenybopper magazines. She's gonna eat you alive."

"That's gross," Sam shoots back weakly, reaching up once more to fix his hair. He's stuck on the fact that Dean thinks he looks good, that his eyes are on him and only him and it's not gonna last much longer tonight. As soon as Holly's here, it'll be over. He meets Dean's eyes and knows that Dean can read him like a book, can tell that Sam is grateful for the praise, that he wants more, always wants more of anything Dean gives him.

Dean sniffs, leaning down to sniff around Sam's neck, his hands settling on Sam's shoulders. "Wearing my cologne."

Sam closes his eyes because Dean is fucking *smelling him* and his voice is so low, so growly and he has to clutch at the hem of his shirt to stop from putting his hands on Dean's hips, from pulling him closer. "Smells good. Girls love that stuff, man. She's just gonna."

Dean steps back and smirks at Sam, giving an almost disbelieving shake of his head.

"Am I gonna have to give you the sex talk? Babies and condoms and clits and--"

"Dean, ohmygod." Sam jerks back from him then, his whole body flushing hot and he practically runs from the sound of Dean's voice, from his gleeful bark of laughter. There's a knock on the door before Sam can say or do anything else, and he's almost relieved that at least one of the girls is here now. Surely Dean won't talk about sex when they're here.

Dean races from behind Sam straight for the door and Sam groans, snapping too late out of his thoughts. Please don't be Sunny please don't be Sunny please don't be--

"Sunny! Hey. Wow, you look gorgeous. Damn, girl." Dean's

trademark low whistle of real appreciation flutters into Sam's ears and he's rushing toward the door, desperate to save Sunny or himself, he doesn't know. He stops short because. Wow. Dean's totally right.

"...Hi." He stands beside his brother, both of them taking in the low-cut of Sunny's otherwise modest top, little cap sleeves and the forever-length of her legs, her shorts obscenely tiny and tight as anything against her skin. She meets Sam's eyes nervously, giving him a smile that's interrupted only by shy glances at Dean.

Sam jerks back and practically has to shove Dean out of the way, motioning for Sunny to come in. "You. You look really pretty. I'm glad you're here."

Dean makes a fake gagging sound and Sam steps hard on the top of his foot, shutting him up for at least second.

Sunny lifts her eyes up to Sam's and Sam feels the intensity of it down to his toes. She takes her time looking him over, her full bottom lip caught between her teeth when she catches his gaze again.

"You look good, Sam. Like." She actually blushes and Sam almost does a dance. "Like, real good."

"Thanks."

They both look over at Dean at the same time to find him just grinning at them, staring at them without apology.

"Dean," Sam complains under his breath with a soft sigh just as Dean comes over and wraps his arm around him, smiling mouth pressed to Sam's ear.

"She wants it bad, Sammy. Wants those hands of yours all over her."

Sam closes his eyes, fighting with his instincts to push in closer to Dean, to climb his body and hear those dirty words whispered against his skin. He shoves at Dean, elbowing him none-too-gently in the ribs. Dean laughs and pulls away, about to say something that would probably ruin Sam for good but there's another knock at the door, definitely Holly this time.

Dean shoots Sam a look, a loaded, unfamiliar one on the way to the door and Sam can only stare after him, lost and wanting and feeling absolutely alien in his own body.

"There's my girl." Dean's practically fucking purring when Holly saunters in and she doesn't waste any time, just drops her purse and jumps up onto Dean's body, not at all startled when Dean slams her back against the door to close it. He latches onto her mouth, kissing away all that cherry red lipstick as he spreads his hands out on her ass, flashing it under her tiny skirt to Sam and Sunny who are stuck staring, unblinking.

Dean grinds his hips right up between her legs and she cries out, arms tightening around his neck. "Fuck me, baby. God, c'mon and fuck me. I need it."

"Dean." Sam's voice is so soft that he barely hears it himself but he's begging, pleading with Dean to please stop, to never stop, to show him exactly how deep he fucks, to get his hands off that girl and just. Just.

Dean hears him, miracle of miracles. Hears him over the sound of Holly panting against his mouth and he ends the kiss, keeping his mouth right against Holly's, his lips already slick and swollen. "Got company, babe. It's us and the kids tonight."

Holly leans back against the wall, breathless and almost looking drugged and her eyes land on Sam. He gives her a weak smile, can't even lift his hand to wave. He feels sick. And young. And like every single thing is wrong when nothing is, really. This is how it's supposed to be. This is what Dean deserves, what Dean wants. And Sam can be okay with that. He can. Really.

"Hey, Holly." He forces his voice to be even, as mature as he can. It's totally normal to see his brother do that. Happens all the time. It doesn't rip his heart straight out of his throat and set it on fire. Nope.

"Sammy." She wipes her mouth as Dean sets her back on the ground. She's a full head shorter than Dean, a tiny thing, really, which is a desirable thing for a girl, Sam supposes. She walks over to him and leans in to kiss the side of his mouth, one of her small, soft hands clasped around his bicep. "You look amazing."

She pulls back and lets her eyes dart over to Sunny and they widen. "Wow. Sam. Wow. Is this..?"

"This is, um. This is Sunny. She's. We, um."

"I'm Sam's girlfriend. Hi," Sunny's smile is bright and sweet and

subtly possessive. She offers her hand to Holly and Sam and Dean can only watch as they take each other in and shake hands. And holy shit. Holy fucking shit.

Sam has a girlfriend.

"Jesus Christ, Sam." Holly tears her eyes away from Sunny and looks right at Sam, eyebrows lifted. "I'm sorry, but." She looks back over at Sunny like she can't help herself. "You are the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. Like. Ever."

"Thanks." Sunny's posture changes, a little relieved, a little shy. She laughs under her breath and her smile softens and Sam notices they're still holding hands. He manages to glance over at Dean who looks like he's just been told the secret of life. Dean locks eyes with Sam and his eyebrows fly up and the expression is obvious: *Dude. Our girlfriends are flirting and this is better than any porn ever.*

"You're only thirteen? Really?"

"Yeah, I, um. I'm just tall for my age, I guess." Sunny tucks her hair behind her ear but it just tumbles forward again, endless curls and Sam feels light-headed all of a sudden. His girlfriend.

"Yeah. That's it." Holly's eyes travel very obviously down to Sunny's breasts and she looks up from under her eyelashes, her smile almost wicked. "Well, Sunny. If you're single when you get to high school next year, give me a call, okay?"

"You pervert, shut up." Dean's red as a beet but his voice is light. He leans over and kisses Holly, all tongue and sweetly invasive and Sam wants to punch him. "So, me'n Sam ordered pizza and wings that'll be here in a few. You still wanna watch *The Shining*, babe?"

"Maybe. I brought a few movies with me. Maybe we can take a vote." She stalks over to the couch and sinks down on it like she lives here and it makes Sam antsy. He shoves his hands in his pockets and offers Sunny a nervous smile, heartened when the smile she gives him in return is real. He follows her to sit on the couch next to Holly and leans forward to see the movies she brought.

Dean takes the tapes from her, frowning a little as he reads the titles. "*Adventures in Babysitting. Pretty Woman. Dirty D--*" He looks over at her sharply.

"Dude. I don't do chick flicks. These are all chick flicks."

“Okay, first of all, don't act like a sexist dick. I know you're not. And second, these are quality movies! They're some of my favorites.”

“I like *Adventures in Babysitting*,” Sunny offers softly.

Holly lights up, beaming over at Sunny and then up at Dean. “See? Don't make me sit on her lap all night because I'll do it.”

Sam covers his mouth with his hand to hide his smile. This girl has Dean's number.

“Oh, you think that's a deterrent for me? I'll let you sit on whatever part of her you want. As long as I get to watch.” Dean shoots a wink at Sam who shifts on the couch, leaning back to stay as uninvolved as he can.

Holly rolls her eyes and shoves Dean until he slips off the arm of the couch where he's perched. “Girls don't just have sex with each other just for guys to watch, you know. Just like guys don't have sex for girls to watch.”

Sam can feel the comment like it's underlined and bolded and addressed To: Sam Winchester. He feels like he's trapped in his very worst nightmare.

Dean's scoff sounds a little unsure. “Pfft. Girls don't want to watch guys have sex.”

The statement is followed by silence, a silence that obviously makes Dean insanely uncomfortable.

“...Right?”

Holly and Sunny exchange a look and they both look back up at Dean who takes a few steps back from them.

“Whoa. Whoa, whoa. Seriously? Girls like to watch guys stick their dicks up each other's ass?”

Holly shrugs, not playing into Dean's dramatics. “I think it's hot. Like, really, really hot.”

“Like. Full-on anal? Like dick all up in there, balls against balls, scruffy faces and beard burns and guy grunts and the whole nine? Seriously?”

Sunny looks out of her element and is staring at her hands, picking at her hot pink nailpolish. Sam is ready to run out into traffic and so Holly is left alone to contest Dean, but she doesn't seem to mind.

"Hell, yeah. Why not?"

She doesn't break away from Dean's wide-eyed stare and so he flounders a little, losing confidence. He sits down on the coffee table across from her and decidedly doesn't look over at Sam. Sam will never, ever unhear Dean talking about gay sex. Not ever.

"I don't know. I just didn't think girls, like. Thought about that stuff."

"Guys get off on watching girls. What's the difference?"

"Guys are pigs. Like, complete animals."

"Well. Some girls are animals, too. You *know* I'm an animal." Her smile is a challenge and Dean grins at her and Sam wonders if maybe Dean will marry this girl someday.

Another knock at the door and Sam is flying to his feet, nearly tripping over Dean's long legs and when Dean brings his hands up to steady Sam he damn near cries. "I'm okay! I'm."

He wrestles himself from Dean's grasp and grabs the money on the counter, half listening to Dean and Holly say dirty shit to each other and he practically throws the money at the poor pizza girl so he can go save Sunny from seeing two strangers engage in fore-play in front of her.

Sam grabs a roll of paper towels and four cans of grape soda and deposits it all on the coffee table and they all grab a slice of pizza, eating in quiet for a few minutes as the news plays on low volume on the TV.

"I brought *Rebel Without a Cause*, too," Holly says between bites. Sunny lights up and hops a bit on the couch, the most animated that Sam's ever seen her.

"Yes! *Rebel*, yes!"

Dean smiles at Sunny, licking his thumb clean of grease. "You like James Dean, huh?"

Holly and Sunny both just stare at Dean.

"You know that this is James Dean's hometown, right?"

Dean pauses mid-chew, eyebrows arched.

"Like. Here? Fairmount?"

"Yeah! Ohmygod, baby, you really didn't know? He grew up here. He's buried here. You've never been to his grave?!" Holly is so excited that she's practically vibrating. She leans forward and

kisses Dean soft on the mouth, rubbing the tips of their adorable noses together. "Maybe we can go this weekend. Can't believe you didn't know."

Sam and Sunny keep on eating, watching the other two out of the corners of their eyes. Sam rips into his crust and tries not to bite through his own tongue. Sunny takes matters into her own hands and stands up, slipping the tape out of its box and putting it into the VCR.

"You're my James Dean. You know it? So fucking sexy. Just like James Dean." Holly leaves her pizza on the coffee table and climbs up onto Dean's lap, straddling him and leaning down to kiss him hard, arching into his hands that stretch over her ass again, just like earlier.

"Guys, the movie's starting." Sam knows he's mumbling but he also is about five seconds away from a panic attack or just flat out crying, so he can't really be blamed. He's already half hard in his jeans and he hasn't even really looked at his now-girlfriend because his brother is almost completely hard and Sam can see the outline of Dean's dick every time Holly's hips pull back before dragging forward again and Sam literally doesn't know how he's going to survive this night.

He reaches out, slightly shaky fingers lighting on Dean's forearm. "Dean."

Dean freezes, stops like he's been paused. He looks over at Sam, blinking like he's just now realizing he's there. "Sorry. Sorry, Sam-my, we'll be good. I'm sorry."

He pushes at Holly until she's beside him again, her skirt back down as far as it'll go and Dean reaches for the hot wings and the blue cheese. He gives Sam the most apologetic smile he's ever managed and Sam just sits back, hands clenched around his napkin, eyes forcefully trained on the television screen.

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Halfway through the movie, Holly squirms into Dean's lap again, this time facing out toward the TV and they have the added privacy of the blanket Dean dragged from his bed.

Sam looks over at them out of the corner of his eyes and he sees Dean's mouth, soft and lush, kissing along the pale line of Holly's neck, his fingers stroking her red hair out of the way to get to more skin. His eyes are on the screen but his cheeks are a little flushed and Sam knows because he knows his brother, that Dean isn't taking in any of what he's seeing of the movie.

Holly draws in a sharp, almost silent breath but Sam sees it. He watches her arch against him, watches the outline of her legs spread a little and he can see Dean's arm where it's covered up, can see it moving where it's snug against Holly's front, can see the hint of where his hand is between her legs, the way it's digging and moving.

Sam's heart is pounding and he's so tense that he actually jumps when he feels Sunny's hand slide across his chest. He jerks his eyes away from Dean and Holly and looks over at his girlfriend, pupils blown with embarrassment and arousal and jealousy. Her smile calms him a little, and so does her hand that slides along one of his cheeks.

"Hi," she whispers, her bright eyes slipping down to his mouth. Sam licks his lips instinctively and he only has time to close his eyes when Sunny kisses him. He blushes even as slips his tongue into her mouth, lapping at the roof of her mouth and moaning so, so softly when she starts to suckle at his tongue.

He freezes when he feels Dean shift beside him, at his back, really, Dean's bicep grazing along Sam's back as Dean repositions and Holly slides further down on the couch, her feet planted on the floor now.

"Here, get my fingers wet. These are goin' in your ass, babe." Dean's voice is like gravel and velvet so close to Sam's ear and Sam gasps at his words, at how easily his perverted mind can make them about him. Sam pushes his hips at Sunny, wanton because of his brother and how Dean's whiskey voice affects him.

"Sam," Sunny sighs across his mouth, one of her long legs draping over Sam's lap. She presses the inside of her thigh right over his crotch and he pushes up gratefully. She reaches down for his hands and slides them up her stomach under her tank top, not letting them stop until they're cupping her over her bra. Sam

breaks the kiss so he can stare down at his hands, breathless at the way her breasts feel. He squeezes at them and she moans, a sweet rumbling sound that overpowers Natalie Wood's voice on the TV and Holly's hurt little gasps where Dean is no doubt stretching her ass around his thick fingers.

"Sam, take off her shirt. And her bra. I've gotta see 'em. Please?" Holly is practically whimpering the words at Sam and before Sam can answer, Dean moans and shifts again so that Sam is practically leaning back on Dean's arm. Sam relaxes there slowly, not able to get too comfortable because Dean's arm keeps moving, tight, minute movements where he's fingering Holly.

Sunny doesn't wait for Sam to make a move, she just pulls her tank top off, staring down at Sam while Sam's eyes are glued to her cleavage.

"Sammy, take her bra off. Don't make her do it. Go on, boy." Sam obeys because it's Dean, because he's Sam. He shifts Sunny closer on his lap, the warmth between her legs settling right over his aching dick. He reaches behind her and fumbles with the clasp, his tongue caught between his teeth as he tries to make sense of it blindly.

Sunny reaches back and guides Sam's hands to the right place, showing him how to slip the hook from the eye and it goes faster after that. He undoes the last one and the whole thing loosens and she slides it off her body, leaving her naked from the waist up. Sam leans back fully against Dean and just stares at her, his mouth watering.

"You can touch 'em," she whispers to him, reaching for his hands again, drawing them up to cup her breasts again and Sam feels his dick leak a thick drop of precome when her nipples harden against his palms. He swallows hard, his face on fire when he starts to squeeze them, when he gets used to the weight of them in his hands and how fucking soft they are, how firm at the same time.

"Fuck, yeah, Sammy. That's my boy. Feel so good, don't they?" Goosebumps fly across Sam's body at Dean's little growl of approval. He closes his hands until he's just touching her nipples and he pinches at them a little just to see what it'll do. Sunny gasps, her

head falling forward as she rocks on him.

"Your little boy's doing good, Dean. Makin' her feel so good, isn't he?" Holly's voice is so soft, right up against Dean's ear where she's kissing at him, at his jaw. Dean moans and his hand at Sam's back jerks hard, fingers obviously shoving up deeper into Holly which makes Holly whine, tense.

"Yeah," Dean grits out and Sam trembles.

"Tell him what to do next, baby. Tell your sweet boy what to do. Teach him."

Sam wants to punch Holly in the face. He wants to kiss her. Wants to give her the whole world. What she's doing for him. She *knows* and she's doing this for him. Tears burn in Sam's eyes, starved, hungry tears. He looks up at Sunny's gorgeous body on top of him and waits for his big brother's voice.

"Put one in your mouth, Sammy. Get your mouth on it and suck on it. Don't be too soft. She can handle it."

Sunny pushes closer, lining her nipple up right against Sam's mouth and Sam feels Holly's hand pushing up into his hair from the nape up, feels her petting him while Dean breathes hard right behind him. Sam parts his lips and draws her nipple in with his tongue, sucks it right into his mouth and it's so easy, it's almost grossly natural, the way he's sucking on her tit.

She cries out and pushes closer, arms wrapping around Sam's head to keep him where he is and he feels Holly's arm graze his head and his eyes fly open when Sunny gasps again suddenly. Holly is twisting and plucking at Sunny's neglected breast, working it until it's bright pink and tender and it all, the whole fucking thing, makes Sam suck even harder.

"I bet he's so hard, isn't he, Sun? Bet he's about to come all in his jeans. Bet it hurts, doesn't it, Sammy? You need her to take you out? Get that big boy dick out?" Holly is fucking filthy, like, sex phone operator, porn video filthy. But it's so working for him, for all of them, obviously.

"Jesus fucking Christ," Dean groans. "Fuck."

"Yeah," Sam whimpers, fucking *whimpers*. "Yeah. Please."

Sunny moves back, putting some space between their bodies and she reaches down, pushing his shirt up a little so she can get

to the button of his jeans. She pops it open and slides the zipper down and he lifts his hips so she can shove them down a little. Just that little bit of room feels so good, eases the extreme ache of being so hard and so trapped.

Holly's hand presses against Sam's chest, pushing him to lean back even further against Dean until he's practically laying on him. Dean twists a little so that Sam is braced up on his chest and Sam's eyes fall closed so he can just smell his brother, just hear his soft, panting breaths, hear his slick fingers working in Holly's ass and her cunt.

Sunny reaches into his briefs and pulls him out and both she and Holly make little hums, sweet little happy sounds that do all kinds of good things for Sam's ego.

"Mm, that's a good big dick. Just like his brother. Good genes, boys." Holly kisses Sam's cheek and Dean makes a sound, a warning sound, a possessive one.

"Don't you touch him, Holly. Don't."

"Oh, I won't. He's not mine. I know he's not mine." The tone is off in Holly's voice, it's a little strange. He feels Holly's lips against his ear and her voice is so quiet, so soft that Sam can barely hear it.

"You're his baby. You know that, don't you? Even if he doesn't know it. Every single inch of you is his. Can't you feel it? Can't you imagine his hands on you, the way they're on me? I know you can. God, I just know you can."

Tears burn in Sam's eyes and he sucks in a huge, loud breath just as Sunny wraps her hand around his dick and strokes down, a little too loose but fuck, somebody else's hand is on his dick. He bites down hard on his bottom lip to keep in the sound that wants to burst from him. It stays in his throat, a strangled, desperate thing. Dean is suddenly gone, up off the couch and Holly is with him, right up against him.

Sam opens his eyes as he falls back against the couch, the cushion warm from where Dean's body has been. He meets Dean's eyes and he's never seen that look on Dean, not ever. Not when he talks about Mom, not when he's driving with the windows down, listening to AC/DC, not when he knows the girl he's flirting with

his gonna give it up to him. Not when he's flayed open by some faceless monster in the backseat of the Impala. It's all of those things, this one expression, really. His eyes are bright with the conflict and they bore into Sam's fucking soul.

He wants to reach for Dean, to beg him to come back, to make the girls leave. He wants to tell him everything, to get Dean to fucking talk to him, really talk to him, just this once, just right now. He wants to kiss him. He wants to see how much of Dean he can fit in his own body until it destroys them both. He wants to tell his brother that he's so fucking in love with him that he doesn't know how to get past it. That Sunny is just a beautiful substitute for the boy who is staring at him like he has his hands around Sam's throat, like he has full control over every breath he takes.

Sunny figures out a rhythm, hand working just the head, just tight enough to rub at the bundle of nerves under the head that Sam lives for and he cries out, arching up off the couch, eyes still on Dean.

Dean grits his teeth, tenses his jaw and grabs Holly with slick fingers around her bicep. "My bed. Now."

Sam can only watch as Holly strips on the way to the bedroom, the one he shares with Dean even though there's another room with just one bed, one that Dad's only slept in three times. He sees the heavy sway of her breasts and the tiniest thatch of red between her legs and Dean's beautiful naked back when he shoves her on the bed.

"Sam?" Sam's eyes shoot up and Sunny is staring down at him, hesitation all over her face, her eyebrows drawn together in confusion and maybe a little hurt. Her hand is off his dick and he reaches down to replace it because maybe he's an animal, too.

"You. You still want this, right? Want me to." She looks down to where his hand is gripping his own dick, the head of it the same deep pink as his mouth, all shiny with slick and hard as a fucking coffin nail. She licks her lips and glances back up at him, seeming to just be waiting for his permission.

"Yeah. Yeah, of course. I'm." He doesn't want to apologize because he doesn't want to admit there's anything to apologize for. He's not desperate to look over at his brother who is now naked,

or at least that's what the sounds of clothes hitting the floor is telling him. He doesn't want to see what's happening, exactly where Dean's hand is coming down on Holly's body when he hears the slaps, hears her sharp cries. "I'm just nervous."

Sunny's face softens then. She leans down and kisses his mouth, soft and just once, meeting his eyes as she slides down his body. "It's okay. I've done this before once. I'll. Just relax, okay?"

"Okay," Sam whispers. He turns his head to face Dean and Holly and covers most of his face with his forearm. He can see them now, the second Sunny's mouth wraps around the head of his dick. The door to the room is wide open and they're in profile to him. Dean has her on the bed, on her knees and elbows, ass in the air. Sam hears the snap of Dean wrapping a condom around his dick and god. Fuck. Dean's dick. Too far away to see in any real detail but it's there, right fucking there,

so unbelievably hard and he's fisting it lazily, like he does this all the fucking time, which. Well. he does.

"Gonna fuck your ass."

He squeezes something into his palm and slicks it over his fingers and reaches up to shove them into Holly without pause. She tenses and leans forward and Sam gasps when Sunny takes Sam into her mouth finally.

"Good, baby?" Sunny breathes, hot and husky over Sam's dick. Sam nods under his arm, terrified to say anything, to break the spell of what's about to happen.

Holly is tense on the bed, her body in a insanely beautiful arch but her shoulders are drawn in and she's panting against the sheets. Dean is fucking her open on his fingers with his right hand and jerking off idly with the other.

"Easy. Easy easy, Dean. God, be easy." Holly is whining as she rocks back on his fingers, her own hand disappearing between her legs where she starts to rub slow, steady. Dean doesn't say a word, his face intense, unreadable.

The wet suction on Sam's dick is the most beautiful thing he's ever felt. He tries to thrust up but Sunny's hands fly to his hips, keep him down. He takes a deep breath and tries to calm down, to keep his head here. He's getting his dick sucked and about to

watch Dean fuck a girl in the ass. And this isn't a fucking dream. This isn't a dream because he can still smell the hot wings and the movie is still playing stubbornly on the TV and there's a spring digging into his back from between the couch cushions and he feels vaguely sick about this whole thing.

Sam can tell when Dean starts to feed his dick into Holly because the sound she makes is like nothing Sam's ever heard before. She crawls up the bed, trying to get away from him but Dean's hand has a bruising grip on her hip and he forces her to open for him, to take it. Sam leaks a thick spurt of slick into Sunny's mouth and he feels his own asshole tense, feels it fucking ache. He'd take it for Dean. He'd take every inch, he'd take it no matter how hard or how long Dean needed to give it to him. He'd take him with no condom, let him come inside of him. He'd be the best Dean's ever had. He'd find a way to be Dean's dream.

"Relax, sweetheart. Just relax, just like last time. Shh." Dean's halfway in her now and his hands are rubbing up across her back, sliding down to rub at her tits before one hand slides between her legs. She spreads her thighs a little more to give him room and when she moans, Sam knows that Dean has his fingers in her.

Fuck, yeah, Dean's hands. Dean's fucking big hands and Sam wishes he had two holes down there for Dean, too. Wishes he could have his dick and his hand inside of him. God, he'd figure out a way. He'd figure out a way to relax enough to at least get a couple of Dean's fingers in right along side his dick. He could do it. God, he'd do anything Dean wanted him to. Anything.

The sound Dean makes when he sinks all the way into Holly's ass makes Sam fuck his hips up, makes him choke Sunny and he touches the top of her head then, hands stroking over her soft curls. "S-sorry. God, I'm sorry."

She pulls up off of his dick, panting as she keeps a hand wrapped around the base of him. She looks over into the room when Dean starts to fuck Holly, when he gets his hands braced on her hips, just above her ass and starts to pound into her.

"Dean. Dean, god, baby, not so hard. Baby, please." Holly is reaching back for him, her hand rubbing along Dean's ribs as she shifts on the bed, turning diagonally on the bed so that Sam now

has a three-quarter view, so he can see where Dean is fucking into Holly, a little slower now, where her pretty little fingers are shoved into her equally pretty pink cunt, two fingers hooked right up inside while her thumb works furiously at her clit. He can see Dean's ass tense and relax as he works inside of her. He can see the dusky shadow of his hole when he curls his body over Holly's, practically laying on her now, making her hold his weight while he changes angles inside of her, giving Sam the very best view of everything.

Sunny starts to jerk Sam off, his dick slick enough that it feels so, so good. Sam glances back at her and sees that she's watching them too, that her hand is down her own unbuttoned shorts and she's rubbing herself hard, mouth open. Sam reaches down for her breasts again, letting them swing into his palms and he rubs at them, twisting her nipples hard enough to make her gasp.

Dean grunts in the other room, a chest-deep sound and the mattress shrieks as Dean and Holly's bodies collapse on the bed, Holly trapped under Dean's big body, looking so absolutely small under him, so breakable under his fucking gorgeous bulk. Sam fucks Sunny's hand now, feet braced on the couch, hands like anchors on Sunny's tits, fingers clasped around her nipples and he's just pulling. Holly is prone on the mattress now, her legs together and Dean is right on top of her, body melded to hers, belly right up in the curve of her back. He's fucking her so deep they're both making sounds like they can feel it and Holly is just shaking under him, sobbing with each thrust, the soft please-please-please-baby-pleases like a CD skipping.

"Take it, fucking take it. So fucking dirty how much you love my dick in your ass. Fucking come on my dick. Right now. Now." Dean's voice is unnaturally clear to Sam, crystal clear and so intimate and rough as gravel and he is lifting and dropping his body on Holly's, fucking her with all of his weight and she screams when she comes, shaking apart right there on the old mattress, hanging off of Dean's dick.

Sam reaches down to fist his own dick, Sunny's hand faltering as she clearly starts to come right when Holly does, her little gasps unending and almost surprised-sounding. Sam can't even look at her, can't tear his eyes away from Dean's body, the long, breath-

taking line of Dean's back, the fluid slide of his muscles, the sweat dripping down his spine and off his body onto Holly's as he braces himself up and just lets go, fucking her hard enough that she can't breathe. He's finally making noise, beautiful, open-mouthed, vulnerable sounds that make Sam ache, make him want so badly to be touching him, to be getting Dean through this.

Dean's rhythm falters and he thrusts into her almost brutally, driving up deep and locking in and just staying there, his entire body tense and trembling and Sam can see, he can fucking see Dean's balls draw tight, see that soft skin right behind them contract as he starts to come. Sam loses it then, stripping his own dick so fast his arm is cramping and he's coming, thick, painful jets that land on his chest, his face, his open mouth.

He doesn't realize the sounds he's making until he comes back into himself a few seconds later, these sobbing, hurt animal sounds and he strokes his dick until it hurts too much to touch it. He can hear Dean in there, can hear his "fuck, yeah, oh fuck yeah"s and hear Holly's voice, hoarse and breaking but he catches little bits of it: "watching you" and "loves watching you fuck me" and "needs it too."

Dean's hips keep working tiredly, just grinding against Holly's soft little ass until he just can't move anymore. It's not until he can hear them kissing, those wet, lazy sounds that he looks away, that he tears his eyes away from Dean who is fucked-out and pliant and so heavy-looking now. Sam wants it. He wants to feel Dean's dick jerk inside of him, wants to feel him go soft. Wants that voice deafening him with screams and possessive growls and hungry little rumbling purrs. Wants Dean smothering him, wants him so heavy on top of him that Sam can't breathe. Wants to smell his sweat and his come and his burning hot breath. He has never wanted anything more and will never want it from anyone else.

Sunny's mouth catches his in a sleepy, pleased kiss and Sam kisses her back with as much energy as he can muster. She hums and sighs against his lips as she tucks him back into his pants and reaches for her bra.

"I've gotta go. We have class in the morning and Mom wants me home by eleven."

Sam can't even respond. He's broken open, ruined. Dean is naked and buried inside of someone else just feet away from him and Sam can't think of anything else. When he looks back up at Sunny she's dressed, shoes on but unlaced. She leans back down for another kiss and glances in at the two unmoving bodies in the other room. She gives Sam a little smile.

"See you in the morning?"

Sam looks back up at her again, their eyes meeting briefly. She looks a little guarded, a question heavy in her eyes. Sam just smiles at her and stretches out on the couch, looking utterly debauched and young and he yawns just to be cute. She snorts and kicks at his bare foot with her purple boot.

"Bye, Sam."

"Bye, Sunny." He smiles until she's gone, until the door is closed and then it falls away completely. He reaches for Dean's blanket that still smells just like him and he pulls it over himself, burying completely under it and he curls up facing away from the open bedroom door. The tears get soaked into the blanket and Sam ignores them.

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He stirs when he feels the blanket being pulled from over his head, exposing him to the cool air in the house and to Holly who is standing over him, still naked and so pale in the near darkness of the room. She's not smiling and Sam isn't either and he pushes himself to sit up, the blanket falling away. He glances over at the bedroom door and finds it closed.

He jerks when her hand strokes across his cheek and he looks back up at her, feeling utterly at her mercy and obedient. She moves now to lay beside him on the couch, stretching out on her stomach, her pale ass right in his lap.

"Do you wanna see what he did to me?"

Sam looks up at her, alarmed and disbelieving. It's too good, too perfect. It feels like a dream, or a trap. He nods at her, a tiny movement and she finally smiles. She presses her knees a little into the couch and pushes her ass up closer to his face, reaching

back to tug one cheek back.

"Oh," Sam breathes, his hand coming up very gently to rest on her other cheek, baring her hole for his eyes that have adjusted to the light now. It's angry red and puffy and tender-looking. Sam licks his lips reflexively and glances up from under his hair. She's watching him, her face tucked against a pillow.

"Does. Does it hurt?"

"Mm-hmm. Hurts like hell. 'S why I can't sleep. It's so sore. Inside, too."

"Yeah," Sam sighs, a wistful, dreamy sound. He runs his thumb so very softly over her hole and she hisses, tensing in his lap. He jerks his hand away, eyes wide, mouth open to apologize.

"It's okay," she whispers, reaching back with both hands now to hold herself open completely. From this angle, he can see the slit of her cunt too, bare and shining from where she came so hard earlier, Sam guesses. He meets her eyes again and it's a questioning look even though he doesn't really know what question he's asking her.

"Wanna lick it? Taste where he's been?"

Sam is nodding so quick and so hard that it makes him dizzy. They both shift on the couch until she's practically on her knees again, ass in the air and Sam is almost on his stomach, face right up against her. He spreads her with his own hands and she strokes his hair back with hers now that they're free. She tugs him forward until his face is pushing up against her and he lets his tongue slide out, already practically drooling as he licks at her asshole, his tongue flat and wet right against it.

She moans, a low, aching sound that she buries into the pillow. Her hand tightens in his hair as she pushes him even closer and he repeats the motion, feeling encouraged and so fucking turned on. He tongues at it after a few licks, prodding at all the little puffy wrinkles with the slick tip of his tongue. He slips it just barely inside of her and she gasps, sharp and needy. Dean's been here, right here. He can taste the latex of the condom and the weird flavor of the lube but there's something salty under it, something earthy and Sam pretends with everything he is that it's the taste of Dean's fingers, his skin.

“Can you taste him? Taste that dick you want so much? Oh, shit.” She’s so unbelievably filthy, a fucking sexual psychic and Sam is so hard again that he’s about to cry. He grinds down deep into the couch as he shoves his tongue up inside of her and wraps his lips around her hole and sucks. She’s holding him in place with one hand, other hand working at her clit again as she rides his face and he just lets her, Dean’s fucking girlfriend riding his tongue while he soothes the ache left by Dean’s dick. He shoves his hand down into his pants and jerks off hard, knows he’s gonna come so soon and he’s totally okay with that.

Holly’s hole flutters around his mouth, it tenses and shivers like a fucking living thing and Sam reaches forward, runs his fingers over Holly’s slit that is so wet it’s obscene. She spreads her legs so far that one of them falls off the couch.

“God yes put your fingers in. Put your fucking fingers in me right now.” She reaches between her legs and shoves Sam’s hand into the right formation, his fore and middle fingers crooked and she feeds them up into herself and Sam can only moan around her ass where he’s still eating her out.

“Keep ‘em curled, just like that. Just fucking like that, ohmygod.”

She grabs his wrist now that he’s in the right position and she pulls on it hard, showing him just how hard and how deep she needs him to fuck her. He obeys because she’s a goddess, she’s the best thing that’s ever actually happened to his dick. She squirms on his hand, moving around until he feels something spongy inside of her, something slick and swollen and he’s almost scared but the way her body shakes means he’s doing something right.

“Right there god yes right there, you fucking good boy. Curl those fingers and fuck me right there as hard as you can don’t fucking stop.”

Sam’s arm is fucking killing him but he doesn’t stop, he listens to the letter and he fucks her cunt with his fingers right on that spot, his mouth uncoordinated on her ass and so he’s just licking and sucking and biting at her and he can feel where she’s rubbing her clit and she clenches up so tight around his fingers that it almost hurts, that there’s just no room left in her and he pulls them out and she sprays what looks like water all over him, soaking

in his white shirt and he gasps, lifting back to just stare at her in shock.

She is convulsing on the couch, she sounds like she's actually crying and she reaches for Sam, tears streaking her face and she shoves at his jeans, at his underwear and grabs his dick and he has to tear into his bottom lip, draw blood to keep from coming.

"Did I hurt you? Holly, did I hurt you, I--"

"You fucking Winchesters. I swear to god, you're fucking angels. God, just sent from heaven to make me come." She wraps her legs around Sam's waist, pressing his dick flush up against her cunt, just letting it rub all up against her soft lips that are absolutely soaked. He thrusts weakly and buries his face in her neck and whimpers there. He feels the hard bump of her clit against his dick where she's basically just rubbing them together, where he's caught between her cunt and her babysoft thighs.

She wraps her arms around his neck and grinds against him and they don't speak for a long time, just rub against each other, all panting breath and the slick sounds between them. She presses her mouth to Sam's ear, sucking on his earlobe.

"He's so big inside. God, he'd fill you up so good. You'd be too tight to take all of him but he'd train you on his dick. He'd get you to take him whenever he wanted you. He'd fuck your tight little ass and your throat whenever he needed it, wouldn't he?"

She licks her fingers and he nearly jumps off the couch when he feels them circle around his hole, wet and completely foreign. She forces the first knuckle inside of him and he goes so tense, curling up against her and he almost starts begging right then.

"Ohmygod, you're so tight. Such a pretty little virgin meant for his dick. Hmm? Would you let him fuck you? If he came out here right now and saw us, saw you? How needy you are for him? Would you spread your legs for him and let him do you raw? Let him come in you? Would you be his little baby right now? Would you, Sammy?"

"Yes." He sobs so hard it hurts and she's saying everything deep inside of him, every single thing he has to bury down deep even when he's alone and he has his hand on his dick and the images come unbidden to his mind. These things. These beautiful, pre-

cious things she's saying, she's giving life. Right here, with Dean in the next room. They're all true, every fucking word.

She rides the length of his dick, straddling him now and rubbing down on it where it's flat against his stomach and her hand is between them, that finger curling up inside of his ass and just that, just the hint of it, of how Dean would feel, all of those words of hers breathing and moving like shadows in the air around them and Sam comes, striping his own stomach with the come left in his body and she falls down against him, rubbing at him hard with her own orgasm, her thighs trembling and tight on his ribs. She works that finger in him relentlessly and he milks it, fluttering and clutching at it until he falls back against the couch, absolutely boneless and spent, tears slipping down the side of his face.

She comes down much more slowly but she's draped over him when she's finished with him, pushing his hair off his face and kissing at his cheeks, at the tears sliding there.

They come down together, until they're both breathing evenly and very still and Sam cannot believe that he's underneath his brother's girlfriend, that he just had sex with her right after Dean did. He slides a hand down her back and squeezes her ass, the tip of his forefinger playing at her hole. She grunts, shying away from his finger and growling a little when he ignores her, when he pushes his whole finger into her anyway, just to be exactly where Dean was, mirroring her finger that is still feeling around inside of him.

"You're both insatiable. Perfect for each other." She grins down at him tiredly, studying his face before she kisses the side of his mouth. He dares to meet her eyes, to let her see whatever he's hiding in his own. She strokes his hair back from his face, nails like heaven on his scalp.

"You don't think I'm a freak?" Sam is speaking just loud enough for her to hear him. Dean cannot hear this, not ever.

"Mm. No. Not at all. I mean." She smiles. "Not everyone is in love with their brother, but. It's not new. Or bad. No matter what anyone tells you, okay?" She looks at him sternly, not speaking again until he nods even if he doesn't actually mean it.

"I don't blame you. I'm half in love with him myself, and I ha-

ven't had him my whole life like you have. I can't imagine how you feel. He's amazing. He's beautiful and the smartest person I've ever met and he fucks like a beast and he'll hold you afterwards and he's so funny and sweet and--"

She stops, her eyes filled with apology.

"Well. You know all that. Anyway. He's told me a little about you all. Your family. How you guys have to move all the time. How he's mostly raised you, how you're his. His to protect and take care of. How are you not supposed to be in love with him? You sweet thing."

She kisses his mouth this time, slow and sweet, her finger still digging around in his body, rubbing against something in him that makes him feel urgent even though he's exhausted. She hums when she finds the spot and just keeps rubbing there like she's content to never do anything else ever again. He feels a heat building low in his belly and his dick twitches, tired and impossible.

"That's your prostate, babe. G-spot for boys who like to have their tight little ass fucked, like you." She kisses him again and this time he pushes his tongue into her mouth, spreading his legs a little so she can get her finger even deeper, please. "Just tell Dean to spread you out on his lap and fuck up, toward your belly button. He'll find it and he'll make you see stars."

"He'll never." Sam strangles out a whine as he works back on her finger. "He'll never do that. He's not. He doesn't know. He can never know."

"Just give him time. Just give him a couple of years until he can see you as somebody who's not just his little boy. When you're taller and he can't resist you anymore. Because that's all he's doing at this point. Just resisting you. Trust me."

"What makes you say that?" He's panting again, too exhausted to get hard again but he feels something building in him anyway, like he's gonna come whether his dick gets involved or not. He groans when she forces another finger up inside of him, a tight squeeze, a little dry so it pinches but it feels good, so weird and huge and good. She curls her fingers again against what is apparently his prostate and he arches up, lazy and needing off the

couch.

"Because he was fucking me one time and I started talking about you, your pretty eyes and your mouth and your tight little body and how I wanted to taste your ass and he fucked me so hard he almost broke my pelvis, I swear to god. Came so hard he almost blacked out."

He bites both of his lips into his mouth, fucking himself shamelessly on her fingers, her words making him absolutely dizzy. "I need to. I just. I. I can't."

"Hold on. Shh, hold on, I'll get you. Just like you did for me. I'll milk you like you did me, pretty boy. Just like Dean will. Hold still." She crouches between his legs, pushing them far apart. She takes her fingers out and slides them up into herself, soaking them with her own slick and pushing them back up inside of Sam so much easier. She rubs at his prostate hard now, not teasing but laser-focused, insistent. He gasps and tries to push away from her hand.

"I'm gonna. I feel like. Ohmygod. Deeper. Can you go deeper? I just."

She rubs at the skin right behind his balls, rubbing just like she's rubbing inside of him, straining to reach as deep inside of him as she can. They both watch as she fucks him, silent and panting and he feels so weird, like he's not even in his own body, like he's in a girl's body and he's being used, finally used just like he needs to be. He feels the heat spreading through him now, heading up into his balls and to his dick and he bites down on his own hand, teeth sinking in or else he's gonna scream.

They both gasp when come starts to dribble out of his soft dick, when it leaks into a little almost clear puddle on his twitching stomach. He feels like he's on fire all over, the white-hot center of it between his legs. It feels so good it hurts and he can't do anything but take it, but try to breathe through it.

"That's it. Fuck, that's so hot. You're a fucking natural, baby. Dean's little boy. God, yes, you are, look at you. Givin' it up so good."

Sam writhes on her hand, whining when it starts to hurt so much he can't stand it. He reaches down to touch her arm, not

strong enough to push her away but she gets the message. She keeps her fingers in him but stills them, leaning down to get close to his face, her smile right against his lips before she kisses him. He kisses her back as best as he can, so weak that he can't even keep his eyes open.

He almost cries when she touches his dick, when she pushes his underwear back up onto his body. He feels her tongue drag across his stomach, cleaning up the mess he just made. She kisses him again and he tastes himself, swallows down what she's giving him.

"Thank you," he whispers, barely even awake anymore but he feels her hand in his hair again.

He's out before she even responds.

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He wakes up to a bright room and the sound of something crashing from the bedroom, of Dean saying "Fuck!" in an angry bark. Sam flies up, immediately alert, his father's son. He stands up and stumbles toward the bedroom, his eyes bleary.

"Dean? Dean, are you okay?"

Dean appears in the door, wearing nothing but a pair of jeans unzipped and barely hanging on his hips, his amulet settled on his chest and absolutely nothing else. Sam stops dead in his tracks, fully awake all of a sudden but he's too fucking tired to be faced with this so early. He just stares at Dean, letting his eyes drag up and down his body like a lick. He can see the faint shadow of dark hairs peeking out from Dean's undone jeans and he can't help that he drags his tongue over his lips. He flicks his eyes up to Dean's and almost jumps when he realizes that Dean is looking right at him.

Their gazes hold for possibly too long, definitely too long for two brothers aware of what happened the night before. Sam's the first to break and he ducks his head in shyness or shame, he doesn't know which. Is too tired to care. He turns back around and heads for the bathroom, leaving the door open as he wets a washcloth and drags it over his face and chest, wrinkling his nose a bit at the dried come flaking off. Sex is so gross, really.

Dean is at the door, hovering awkwardly. "So, uh."

Sam starts to brush his teeth a little too hard, making his gums bleed but he's dedicated. He looks up into the mirror, meeting Dean's eyes that way. Dean looks away this time, scrubs a hand through his hair. He still has his damn pants undone.

"Last night was, uh." He clears his throat and Sam spits into the sink, rinses his mouth. Watches the pink foam slide down the drain. He runs his tongue over his teeth and grabs up the deodorant they share and scrubs some on his pits. Dean's still there.

"I'm, uh. I'm sorry about all that, Sammy. I just. Sometimes Holly just gets carried away and I get carried away with her."

Sam makes a noncommittal sound as he brushes his hair, trying very hard to tame it and failing with a frustrated huff. Dean steps in and get his fingers wet in the sink and runs them through Sam's hair, calmly fixing the thick waves down into something slightly presentable. Sam looks up at Dean through his lashes and then straight down into his open jeans, getting a greedy eyeful of the hair just above Dean's dick, the bulge just barely trapped in the worn denim. He crosses his arms over his chest and closes his eyes.

"You mad at me?"

Dean sounds so soft, so worried that Sam opens his eyes again and looks up at Dean. This look between them, Sam's used to. Dean a little broken open and vulnerable so early and Sam's just the same way. Dean's hands are still in Sam's hair but they're petting now, soothing. Sam couldn't be mad at him even if he tried.

"I'm not mad, Dean. It was." He swallows the truth, how much he'd enjoyed it, how much he cherishes the vivid film he has trapped in his head of Dean the way he was, body tight and sweaty and muscles moving like liquid under his beautiful skin as he pounded into a soft, warm body just the way he was born to do. "It's okay."

"It's just that." Dean exhales noisily through his nose and hops up on the counter, legs spread and inviting. "Holly's had it kinda bad. She has this uncle that." He trails off, expecting Sam to pick up the thread and just understand. When Sam just looks at him, blinks a couple of times, waiting, Dean sighs and hops down off

the counter.

"He touched her. You know? When she was little. Her and her brother, the twin. You 'member him, right?"

Sam nods, stays quiet. He feels a heaviness in the pit of his stomach, feels a little sick. He feels the extent that this has to do with him and he doesn't want to hear anymore.

He follows Dean into their room and watches as Dean dresses, as he zips up his pants and pulls a shirt over his head. Sam sits on the bed, waiting. Dean takes the shirt off again and throws it at Sam. Sam pulls it on without a word, feeling the slight warmth from Dean's body heat in it. It's not clean and it smells like Dean and Sam wants to wallow in it.

"He, uh. Made 'em do stuff to each other. Did stuff to them. And she and her brother."

Dean is wearing another shirt now and he's pulling his shitkickers on. Sam fishes around on the floor for his Chucks and keeps his head down, doesn't look over at Dean.

"Well. They still. They're still kind of. It's just weird, man. Just fucked up. And she wants to have sex constantly. Like, *constantly*. Pulls me outta class and everything. And she gets me to do weird shit. She likes it, uh." Dean's cheeks flush and he glances away from Sam's sudden, piercing gaze.

"Like we did it last night. And she likes it really rough. She likes to say no and for me to keep going, no matter how much she fights me. Stuff like that. I mean, it's good, like. Really, really good, but. Shit. I don't know why I'm sayin' all this to you."

"It's okay," Sam offers quietly. He's completely drawn in on himself, staring down at his hands.

"It's just. Weird because of her brother. And she's kind of an exhibitionist, you know? She got off on last night so hard. Couldn't stop talking about it afterwards. You guys watching?"

Dean's face is redder than Sam's ever seen it in his life. He watches Dean shift on the bed and he realizes that Dean's a little turned on, just talking about this. Sam feels a little comforted that he's not the only one fucked-up here. Even if he doesn't really know what 'exhibitionist' means exactly.

"I just. That's why I didn't want her to touch you. Hell, maybe

that's why I'm telling you. I don't ever want anybody touchin' you like that." Dean looks over at Sam and the look on his face is fierce and protective and he's gripping the messy sheet under his hand. Sam just waits, just lets Dean look his fill and lets the delicious feeling of all that overprotectiveness wash all over him. He feels warm and content right here in Dean's gaze, in the middle of his attention.

He will never tell Dean it's all for nothing, that Holly got to him no matter how much Dean didn't want her to. That she was his first in tons of things and now he feels like he violated her and was violated right back. It's tainted now, all of it. Even her words, the most comforting part of all, are ruined. He can't take the word of a broken girl. Not about this. Not about Dean. No matter how much he wants to believe her.

He's a fuck-up and he's looking at his brother like he wants Dean to kiss him and he does want him to and he can't be here anymore. He jumps up from the bed, from Dean's suffocating gaze that he wants to fucking build a fortress around and live in forever. He grabs up his backpack and slings it over one shoulder.

"I've gotta go to school."

"Yeah. Yeah, Sammy, I'm sorry." Dean shakes his head, pulling himself out of whatever dark, warm place he was just in where he wants to keep Sam hidden from the world and he reaches into his back pocket for his wallet, fishing out a ten and handing it over. "Lunch money. We'll figure out dinner tonight, okay?"

Sam shoves the bill into his back pocket and flings his hair out of his eyes, not wanting to meet Dean's eyes or he'll just beg to stay home, to stay right here with Dean, beg that they both play hooky from school and hide under the dirty sheets that smell like sex and Sam wants to know every single hair on Dean's body with his mouth by nightfall. That's what he wants. He just nods though, nods and glances at Dean and then ducks out of the room.

Dean grabs his own bag, pathetically light because. Well, Dean doesn't do books. He races after Sam, a big hand lighting on Sam's little bird shoulder and Sam looks back at him, his eyes full of *please let's stay home, please let me be your Holly now, please kiss me clean.*

"You wanna ride?"

"No, I'll." Sam glances up at the sky, at the clouds rolling overhead. No rain yet, but it might start before he can get to school. "I'll just walk."

Dean squints at him, face visibly falling.

"You sure? Hey, you got your phone?"

"Yeah, Dean." Sam starts off down the sidewalk, shaking his head as he does. "I'm not a little kid."

Sam feels Dean stop at that, feels the wave of sadness from him but he doesn't turn around to see.

10:46 a.m.

Dean is already thinking about ditching school, and he isn't even through second period yet. He's in English, listening to his teacher talk about the fucking Puritans and *Pilgrim's Progress* or some shit, and who cares, really? Those stupid puritanical white dudes who thought divine intervention only happened in their favor. Everything else was the work of the devil. If they only knew that--

His cell phone vibrates so loudly in his backpack slouched on the floor beside him that he almost makes a sound. Jesus Christ. He hates the damn thing, hates having to remember to charge it, but when he's needed it, he's always been grateful. Like right now, when it's Dad probably calling to tell Dean he's on his way back, or that he needs help on a hunt.

Dean shoots out of his chair, halfway to the door before he opens his mouth.

"Yo, Jenkins. Gotta take a leak, man."

His teacher with the tragic comb-over and permanent mumble glares up at him and Dean just gives him his prettiest smile. The man doesn't like him, but Dean has always had the luxury of not giving a shit who likes him. Everyone is temporary anyway.

He digs into his bag when he's alone in the hallway, squinting down at his clunky cell phone's screen, surprised when he sees Sam's name and not Dad. He feels a chill run through his body,

his heart immediately speeding up. Something's wrong. Something's definitely wrong.

He mashes his finger on the accept call button and leans back against the lockers, jamming his finger in his other ear so he can be sure he hears Sam.

"Sammy?"

"Dean." Sam's voice is very soft, barely a breath. Is he calling from class? Why the fuck--

"Sam, I'm here. What's going on? Where are you, why aren't you in class?"

"I'm. Dean, I think there's somebody here. At the school. Somebody has a gun and th-they've been shooting people. I've. I've heard him killing people."

The set of Dean's shoulders changes immediately. His eyes narrow and his jaw clenches and he abandons his backpack and starts at a dead run for the exit.

"Sammy, talk to me. Are you okay? Are you hurt?"

"I'm okay. I'm. I'm in a bathroom with Sunny. We're hiding in a stall."

"Sam, listen to me. I want you two to hang your backpacks up on the hook and stand on top of the toilet seat, okay? Crouch down low and don't let any part of yourself be seen from outside. You're staying on the phone with me. Don't say another word. I want you to push a button once for yes and two for no. Do you understand me?"

There's a beat and then Dean hears the tone of one key pressed. He bursts through the outside where there are already people stirring, where there's already movement going on. He sees a few people gathered on the sidewalks, hears their voices raised in growing hysteria. Everyone is turned in the direction of the junior high school just across the street and up a single block. He picks up his own speed, his breath coming out in efficient, practiced exhales.

"Are you hurt?"

He nearly crumbles to the ground in relief when he hears two buttons pushed. He knows he should ask about Sunny, but Sam's what matters right now. He can think of nothing and no one else.

“Okay, Sam. Are you on the se--”

“Dean.” Sam sounds frightened in a way that Dean has never heard before, his voice just a tiny breath of sound. Dean stops right where he is on the sidewalk, his heart in his throat.

“Sam. What is it? Sammy, please, man, don't fuck with me right now. Are you okay? Is--”

“He's.” A thick swallow in a dry throat and Sam is breathing soft but quick. Dean feels helpless tears burn in his eyes but he forces himself to run again. Just one more block to the junior high. Just one more.

“He's outside. I can hear him. Outside the bathroom.”

There is a loaded silence and then Dean hears a faint pop then through the phone speaker. He stops again, feeling like he could honest-to-god collapse right here.

He hears the creak of a door opening and then the frightened little sound of what can only be Sunny. He hears Sam making soft shushing sounds, tiny, tiny sounds that Dean knows means Sam is just as afraid as she is.

“I'm almost there, Sammy. I'm gonna get you, I promise. I'm here. Don't say anything, little brother, okay? Just be quiet and--”

There's another shot, a deafening one and Dean stops in the lawn of the school, right near the front steps. “Sam!”

It all floods his mind, merciless and punishing: the thought of Sam, so small and painfully beautiful and brilliant and his little boy, sprawled out on the dirty tile of a dingy bathroom, dead. Dead, like he's just anyone. Like he's not the most important thing in the entire universe.

Dean chokes on a sob, tries so hard to keep the tears from falling from his burning eyes. He's Dean Winchester. He's John's son, and he has to get through this. Just fucking focus on the job at hand and get through this. Keep Sam safe.

He doesn't hear anything else, just a lot of muffled sounds and Dean pulls his phone from his ear and runs up the steps of the school, ignoring the yells of the officer behind him who has just pulled up. He can hear more sirens in the distance, the sound all blending together into chaos and he shoves right through the front doors, running through his limited knowledge of the school.

Eighth grade classes are all on the second floor, and there's gotta be at least two bathrooms up there.

The school is deadly quiet except for the building insanity outside. Dean listens with his hunter's ears and every single second of his father's Marine training, trying to suss out any movement, any hint of where the shooter is.

He stays near the wall as he makes his way through the main lobby and toward the offices. He sees movement in there, women under desks and doors cracking open just barely before closing again. He can see where bullets have shattered the glass, can see a foot sticking out past one of the secretary's desks. He turns away and keeps going.

He makes his way down one hallway and then another before he finds the stairs leading to the second floor. He takes them as silently as possible, knowing that he's heading right toward the guy and that he doesn't have a single weapon on him but the knife tucked into the back of his boot.

The hallways are a ghost town, eerily silent but attentive. He walks past a classroom door and hears a whimper, a gasp. He ducks down, keeping himself hidden from the window height of the doors. He nearly trips on a backpack in front of a set of lockers, books spilled out, a girl's makeup case. He can see another body on the other end of the hallway, long dark hair, pink sweater, blood all around her.

He puts his phone to his ear again and he can hear Sunny crying very close to the speaker. "Sam? Sam, fucking talk to me. Which bathroom, man? Just tell me which one."

"T-the one at the back of the building. Next to the art rooms."

Dean rips the phone from his ear when he hears a sudden clatter of footsteps. He ducks away from them and tucks into a corner just out of eyesight of the stairwell. He sees him: tall, dark hair, black jacket. Dean sees the flash of a 9mm Glock in one hand. He hears a click and then the sound of an empty magazine clattering against tile. The heavy fall of boots makes its way down the steps, further away from him and Dean takes off down the hall again.

"On my way to you. He just went downstairs. Almost there, Sammy."

He doesn't hang up, couldn't break his connection with Sam even if he had a gun against his own head. He sees the universal symbol for bathrooms and pushes himself even harder, his legs aching from the panicked pace of his running and the tension in his muscles. He clutches the phone in his hand and pushes the boy's bathroom door open, peeking his head in.

"Sammy?"

There's immediate movement, a struggle and a shuffle and Dean sees Sam's dirty Converse hit the tile in the middle stall. Dean drops his phone and makes it to the stall door before it even opens and god, there he is, there's his sweet boy and he grabs Sam by his shirt and hauls him in against himself, wrapping his arms around him and curling down over him, face shoved into the top of Sam's head.

He sees Sunny out of the corner of his eyes and he can tell that she's okay, scared but okay, so he doesn't give her a second thought.

"Baby." He doesn't mean to say it, doesn't mean to let it ever leave the tight trap of his mind but he's about to fall apart here. A *man*, a human being almost hurt his brother. Could have killed his brother. Not a ghoul, not a werewolf, not a wendigo. A person. In all of Dean's late-night worries, all of those hours spent in a car with Dad with Sam back in some motel room alone, Dean had never even thought about it. That a guy with no conscience and a gun could take Sam away from him. It's too much. It's more than he can even comprehend. "*Sammy*."

He presses Sam back into the open stall door where their backpacks are still hanging, hearing it clatter back against the wall and Sam whimpers but Dean just has a fucking need to shield him, to cover him and keep him right here where no one else can see him. Ever again. He's never, ever letting this happen again.

Sam is shaking against him as he stands on his tiptoes and wraps his arms around Dean's neck. He's trembling like a leaf and Dean just presses against him harder, so hard he can barely breathe himself and he's practically curled in half to press his face so close to Sam's. He presses his forehead hard enough against Sam's to bruise.

“You okay?”

Sam nods, an almost frantic movement. Dean's hands do their customary travel over Sam's body, hands pressing big and heavy into Sam's most tender places, just making sure. He can feel Sunny's eyes on him, on them. Feel her confusion and her need to say something. He doesn't care. He just doesn't fucking care.

“He. He fired a shot in here. It hit the stall where we were and ricocheted, and.” Sunny is practically hysterical, arms wrapped around herself and Dean looks over at her for that, suddenly interested in what she has to say.

“And? And did it..?”

Dean looks around the inside of the stall, locating the bullet hole and. And if it came in right there it would have--

He looks at Sam, his pupils growing in horror. Sam just shakes his head at him, tears spilling down his cheeks but he still manages to find his voice.

“Dean, really. It just grazed me. Dean.” Sam relaxes back against the stall, resigned to the way Dean is manhandling him, ripping at his shirt as gingerly as he can.

“Where, Sammy? Show me.”

Sam lifts one of his sleeves that Dean notices now is bloody. There on his thin bicep is a bloodied mess. Dean's eyes widen and he steps up against him again, hands going to Sam's arm as carefully as they can. He gets close, trying to see through all the blood.

“See? Just grazed me. Maybe a couple of stitches. Dean. Dean, listen to me.” Sam's hands cup Dean's cheeks and only then does Dean tear his eyes away from that wound, that place where Sam is hurt, where Dean failed to get to him in time. Where that fucking monster hurt his baby brother.

“I just wanna get out of here. Okay? I just want to be home with you.”

Their eyes are locked together, Sam's hands on his cheeks and Dean could faint from this insane swell of emotion. He wants to blow the entire world up and lock Sam in a bomb shelter with him for the rest of their lives. He wants to shove and shove their bodies together until his own gives and Sam just sinks right into him, just tucks right up into his ribs, nestled right up against his heart.

He wants to spread Sam out right here and run his hands all over him, to check every single inch of this boy who belongs to him just to be sure. Just to be sure.

"Dean," Sam whispers, thumbs stroking over the apples of Dean's cheeks. Dean refocuses and zeroes in on Sam's tearful eyes and he hears him then, really hears him. "Please."

"Yeah. Yeah, Sammy. Okay." He steps back from him finally, giving him a single inch of space and Sam inhales, fast and relieved, like he hadn't been able to breathe at all with Dean so close. Dean shucks his jacket off and drapes it over Sam's shoulders, helping Sam put his arms through. He tugs the jacket closed and almost cries at how big it is on Sam. He's so *little*. He's so young and he's so little and it doesn't matter how smart he is. He's still young enough that he needs Dean, and Dean has never felt it more acutely than he does right now.

There's commotion outside now, doors opening and the sound of police swarming the place, shouting out 'clear' and numbers that Dean knows means how many bodies have been found. And he knows he's gone, that there's something broken inside of him because he doesn't care as much as he should. Because Sam is alive. He's whole and right here and Dean is never letting him go again. Never, ever again.

"Sam." Sunny tugs on Sam's hand and she's hiccupping she's crying so hard and Dean knows that he should be comforting her. That she's probably never heard a gun outside of movies, unlike him and Sam. That she's just as young and she's never felt truly threatened and this is going to fuck her up pretty bad. But Dean just keeps on looking at Sam, just strokes his sweaty hair back from his face and watches Sam turn his attention to his girlfriend. How does Sam have a girlfriend?

"It'll be okay. Shh, we're fine. Sun, we got through it. Okay?" Sam turns to her and cups her cheeks and kisses her with more skill than Dean ever knew he had. He keeps his hand, possessive and constant, at the back of Sam's head.

"Sam, don't leave me. Please don't leave me. I'm scared. Dean." She looks up at him, pleading with him. "Can I please go home with you guys? Please?"

Dean looks between them and it just takes a single glance at Sam's expression: how he's truly shaken, how he's barely holding it together for her, for either of them, for Dean to make his mind up.

"Your folks are gonna be worried sick about you. They need to know you're alright. You know you've gotta go home. You might need to talk to the police and--"

"You guys aren't going to? Sam, you've been *shot*! You have to talk to the police. You have to go to the hospital! You--"

"I'll take care of him. Promise. He'll call you later. Go on, okay? Just go on," Dean keeps his voice even, as calm as he can manage but he's getting impatient. They're still in the bathroom and it's getting louder out there and if anyone tries to come between him and Sam, Dean's just gonna fucking lose it.

Sunny finally nods, wiping at her eyes with the sleeves of her hoodie. They step outside and look around wordlessly at the rush of people, the sounds of crying and pained, frightened voices. Dean tucks Sam in against him, shielding him from as many eyes as he can and Sam just lets him. Sunny glances back at them a few times but she goes, walking slowly toward a group of kids that are hugging each other, surrounded by officers.

"C'mon, Sammy. Let's get you home." Dean pulls Sam closer, tucking his head against his shoulder. It makes for a slow walk but it doesn't matter. Nobody notices the boy in a jacket that swallows him with an older boy wrapped around him, mouth right up to his ear, whispering reassurances where no one else can hear them. They make their way down the stairs and outside, overlooked by most everyone because there's enough to do, to care about.

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The drive back to the house is short and silent. Dean has his hand stretched across the bench seat, fingers gripping Sam's thigh as gently as he can manage. Sam doesn't look out the window, doesn't look at Dean. He just keeps the jacket pulled tight around his body and stares down at his legs, at Dean's hand.

Dean parks the car in the driveway and kills the engine to rush

around to the passenger side. He opens the door and squints in at Sam who looks up at him from under too-long hair with a tiny smile.

“What, are you gonna carry me, Dean?”

“You're not too big for it,” Dean argues in a mumble. He crouches down beside the car and tugs on Sam's thigh to turn him in the seat and then he pulls him toward him when they're facing each other. Sam just watches him, so strangely compliant. Dean reaches for Sam's arms, careful with the hurt one as he pulls them around his own neck. He grips Sam's thighs and hauls him up on his body, Sam's legs locking around him like they used to when he was younger.

“Still so little,” Dean sighs to himself as he stands up, Sam so light in his arms. Sam tucks his chin against Dean's shoulder, arms tightening around his neck.

“No ‘m not,” he whispers right against Dean's ear and for some reason, it sends shivers all through Dean's body. He pictures Sam last night, just last night though it seems like years ago, his mouth on Sunny's hard nipple and one of her shy hands on Sam's dick. Sam practically had sex last night and he's still small enough for Dean to carry like this, like he weighs nothing. It's tragic and painful and makes Dean feel warm all over with something he refuses to think about.

He lets them into the house and locks the door behind them, clicking the deadbolt over, too. Sam is still trembling very faintly all over and so Dean cuts his lockdown procedure short and carries him into the room that is dark except for the light from between the blinds, that is a little warm and so familiar by this point. It's home.

“No,” Sam says quickly just as Dean goes to lower Sam onto his bed. “No, I want. I want your bed.”

“Okay. Anything you want. Here we go.” Dean cradles Sam's head as he lowers him there. He stays crouched over him, just staring at him in the dim light. Sam just stares right back, tears slipping forgotten from his eyes. Dean shifts to sit beside Sam on the small bed, letting the back of his knuckles drag over one of Sam's damp cheeks.

“You okay?”

Sam nods but it just makes him tear up all over again. He reaches up and tugs on Dean's t-shirt, still wearing his heavy jacket. Dean obeys, goes right down to him, moves to lay out long against Sam's side. Sam's hand flattens out and just rubs at Dean's chest, small, uneven circles. His fingers tumble over the amulet every few passes, and each one gives Dean goosebumps. He covers Sam's hand with his own, not trying to stop him, just making sure Sam knows he's right here, he's not going anywhere ever again.

“I need to fix up that cut on your arm, Sammy. I don't think you'll need stitches. Just a couple of butterflies and a hydro. That okay?”

Another nod. Dean reaches for him then, trying to tug at the jacket and Sam tenses up, won't move his arms to let Dean take it off. Dean raises his eyebrows, confused.

“I can't get to it until you take all this off, kid. You know that.”

Sam's hands are curled around the edges of the jacket, holding them closed, keeping it on. He's still just for a moment, debating in silence. He finally sighs and relaxes his hands, letting the jacket fall open again. He sits up just enough to let Dean help him and he reaches for the jacket once it's off. He keeps it right in his lap, not ready to let go.

“I just. I just want to hold it for a little while.”

Dean feels his heart swell so much it hurts his entire chest. He scoots closer to Sam and he feels Sam inhale, feels him just fucking breathe Dean in and Dean feels a dangerous possessiveness shoot through his body. He takes a deep breath, forcing it all down, forcing himself to just calm the fuck down. He takes off Sam's shirt and tosses it aside, his eyes zeroing in on the gash on Sam's arm.

“Gonna go grab the kit, okay? You want anything else?”

Sam has the jacket curled in his arms like a teddy bear and he looks up at Dean, his eyes still dull and far-off like they had been since they left that bathroom. He shakes his head but Dean grabs him a glass of water from the sink anyway before he makes his way back in with a bowl of warm water with a cloth in it and the first-aid kit which was really just a duffel bag that they keep

in Dad's barely-used room. He has a pack of peanut butter and crackers hanging from his teeth.

He hands Sam the water and the bowl and drops the duffel at the foot of the bed to root around in it. He pulls out the ziplock bag of bandages, the medical tape, and an almost empty tube of Neosporin. He fishes a pill out of a separate baggie and hands it over to Sam.

"Eat a couple of crackers before you take this, bud. It'll rip your stomach apart otherwise." He starts to clean the wound as Sam eats the crackers, one arm still tucked around the jacket. Dean works as efficiently as an emergency room nurse, cleaning and drying the wound which is a little worse than he originally thought but at least it's mostly stopped bleeding. He dabs it with Neosporin and uses four butterfly bandages on it before wrapping it lightly in gauze. Sam doesn't make a sound the entire time, just eats his crackers and swallows his pill and is now just gazing at Dean quietly, watching him work.

Dean puts all the stuff aside, puts the duffel on the floor and then it's just him and Sam again. Sam is already a little loopy, a slightly drugged smile showing through the tears. Dean strokes Sam's hair like he always does, loses his fingers in the unbelievable thickness of it that is so soft, so much better than anybody else's hair he's ever touched. Sam practically purrs and shifts a little closer to Dean and Dean nearly laughs. Of course Sam is extra affectionate on opiates. It only makes sense.

"Feel good, Sammy?"

"Always feel good, Dean. You always feel so good." He nuzzles up to Dean's arm that is so near his face and Dean just moves closer, very little space between them now.

"You think you could sleep?"

"I love your hands. I just love them so much." Sam reaches for Dean's other hand, the one that's not in his hair. He pulls it up to his face and runs his fingers over it, over his wide palm and his thick fingers and rounded fingernails. "Always keep me safe. Always protect me and save me. You have such big hands, Dean. I feel like they could be all over me, all at the same time."

Dean can only watch as Sam takes his hand and presses it right

up to Sam's bare chest. His fingers twitch there but he keeps them still, just lets Sam do what he wants. He feels a jolt through him, stomach to spine, when he feels Sam's nipple hard under his fingertips. He doesn't argue, doesn't tell Sam that he's shit at protecting him, at keeping him safe. He's only ever there to clean up the mess afterwards, to do what he can. But no more. Never again.

"You're high, Sammy. And hilarious. Now, c'mon." He guides Sam to lay down and Sam goes willingly, turning to lay on his stomach with the jacket tucked underneath him. Dean just gazes down at him, at Sam's back exposed to him. He runs a hand from Sam's shoulder blades down to the small of his back and then back up again.

Sam stays quiet but goosebumps fly up and down his body with every pass of Dean's hand and Dean's cheeks burn a little when Sam starts arching his back. He clears his throat softly and starts to just run the tip of one finger over his skin, letting it spin and swirl and draw. Just like they used to when they were little, curled up in bed together, one of them turned on their side so the other could draw on their back. The other would guess and then they'd switch. They'd do it for hours, trapped in the little cocoon of their bed, Dad snoring softly in the background.

"Guess what it is," Dean mumbles, his voice quiet, gruff, sounding more like Dad everyday.

Sam makes a sound very close to a moan and repositions his head on the pillow so he can face Dean. His face is smooth, clear of pain, but his eyelashes are still wet. His mouth is the prettiest, pinkest little bow and it's smiling very faintly.

"A monster truck."

They both let out identical breaths of laughter and Dean shakes his head.

"Nope."

He draws it again, more slowly this time, spanning just beneath Sam's shoulder blades to right up to the tops of his jeans. Sam stretches and luxuriates under the touch, just like a spoiled cat.

"Mm. A girl."

"Which girl?"

Dean makes a show of drawing bigger boobs with big, wide

nipples and he runs his hand down Sam's spine to tickle right between her imaginary legs. Sam shivers.

"Pamela Anderson."

"Yahtzee."

He rubs Sam's back to erase it before he starts again. Sam is quite, concentrating, picturing. He snorts after a minute and shakes his head. "Dude. Another girl?"

"Nope."

"A guy?"

"Mm."

Dean goes over the long hair and the big chest again and Sam's body is shaking with laughter.

"Fabio?"

They both snort and laugh then, even as Dean's hand is erasing Fabio from Sam's back.

"You've always been too good at this."

"You've just always been predictable."

Dean runs his finger over Sam's back again, but it's a word this time. He traces it over and over and over, so that Sam couldn't mistake it. Safe. Safe. Safe safe safe.

Sam makes a soft sound and Dean, fluent in Sam, knows he got it. Dean can see the tears slipping down Sam's face again even though his eyes are closed.

"Sammy," he sighs. He tugs his own shirt over his head moves to lay beside Sam on the bed but Sam is tucked up into himself, his legs pulled underneath his body, back exposed still. Dean just stares at him and feels helpless. He's learned a lot of things from his dad but dealing with this? With a fucking school shooting and his baby brother feeling scared, actually scared? This is all foreign to Dean. A complete nightmare.

He stands up and takes off his jeans and finds a pair of boxers on the floor, slipping them on. He crawls back onto the bed and refuses to overthink anything as he drapes himself over Sam's body, chest right up against his back. Sam loosens up a little then, lets Dean stretch him out so that his arms and legs aren't tucked tight under him. Dean stays pressed full-body right on top of him, his belly fitting right into the deep arch of Sam's back. He laces

their hands together and then wraps all four of their arms around Sam's body, hugging him tight. His mouth is resting right at the nape of Sam's neck, soft and waiting just there. Sam's exhausted and drugged and the terror slips out of him in waves. Before long, he's sobbing softly into Dean's jacket and Dean is kissing at his neck, arms so tight around Sam they're shaking.

"Me'n' Sunny skipped class. She wanted to go to the bathroom and make out, so we did. We were in a stall and we heard a pop. It sounded like an old movie gun. Not like a real gun. I guess he was too far away. Then we heard more. Like. Probably a dozen, maybe more. And people screaming. Doors shutting. I heard someone just saying 'please.' 'Please, please, please, don't.' And more shots. Dean, there were just so many shots.

And I wanted to go out there but I couldn't. Sunny was so scared and she almost fainted on me. She was just shaking and crying and she was being too loud and I was trying to calm her down. I couldn't leave her. I couldn't go save all those people. I could have saved them."

"Sam, he had a gun. You didn't. It wouldn't have been a fair fight."

"Yeah, but, Dean. Dad's trained us on that a million times. How to win in any fight. I could have done it. Done, just. Just *something*. But I didn't. It. It just wasn't a ghost, you know? Or. Or a witch or something. It was. Just some guy and that was even scarier. You know? It wasn't just being evil because that's what it is. It was a guy killing kids."

"It's okay to be scared. It's okay that you were scared. You know that, right?"

"I just needed you," Sam said in the softest rush of words, so soft that Dean barely heard it. "I was stuck in some bathroom and you weren't there with me, weren't anywhere nearby and I just needed you so bad. And. I'm sorry I called you. That I put you in danger by making you come to the school in the middle of all that. I just needed you to. To."

Dean moves them then, turns Sam over and pulls Sam's arms and legs around him, tucks right up against him. He drags the blanket over their bodies so that Sam feels contained. Hidden.

"I always want to protect you. To. To save you. Okay? No matter what. No matter how old you are, or how big you get. You'll always be my little brother and there is nothing I want more than to have you safe. So I'm glad you called me. Can you imagine if I just heard about it afterwards? What I'd do? What I'd have done to get to you? Jesus, Sammy."

He meets Sam's eyes, both of his hands on Sam's head, keeping him right here, their eyes connected.

"I'd do anything to get to you. Anything. You're. You're mine, okay? And it's my job to keep you safe."

Sam just stares at him with sleepy, heavy eyes, those long lashes getting closer and closer to Sam's cheeks. Dean leans forward and kisses the tip of Sam's nose then lifts his head to kiss his forehead, right between his eyes. He pulls back and Sam's eyes are closed completely then.

Dean hugs Sam to him, rubs at his back slow, careful to avoid touching Sam's hurt arm.

"I've got you, baby brother. Just sleep. I've got you."

Dean feels Sam fall asleep, feels his body relax, his breath even out against his ear. He kisses at Sam's bare shoulder, just twice, right above the gauze. Sam's alive and right here with him. It's all that matters. He knows that intellectually, but he can't help that what he thinks about right before he drifts off to sleep too is cornering the faceless shooter, trapping him in a room and shooting off each of his limbs before finally aiming for his head, letting him know that this is just for the threat against Sam right before he kills him.

He holds Sam so tight he can feel his heartbeat right against his own ribcage. It's not even 1p.m. and they're both asleep, dead to the world.

--

The front door slams in the late afternoon and Dean jumps awake, startled. He's out of bed and halfway to the door when he sees his father standing in the doorway to their bedroom, backlit by the lowering sun, a couple of days' worth of stubble collected

on his face. He looks wrecked, furious, and panicked. Dean, for a single, incoherent moment, is terrified.

“...Dad?”

“Where is he? Where is he? I saw on the news. I saw it on the fucking news, and.”

Sam stirs in the bed finally, whimpering like he always does when he's woken up suddenly. He rolls over and sees his dad and squints at him.

“Dad? What're you doin' home?”

“Sammy.”

Dean watches their dad, their superhero of a father, the man who can do the hardest, most painful things without any outward reaction, falter. Dad sinks down to his knees right there by the bed and cups Sam's face, right over his cheeks still warm from sleep. It hits Dean then, this whole thing from his dad's point of view. He saw the news about the shooting wherever he was, thought Sam was hurt, maybe even dead. And his phone was... fuck. In that school. Somewhere lost in that bathroom. Sam's, too.

Dean takes a step back, shoulders curling inward. He watches Dad hug Sam and tries to muster to courage to accept blame for this.

“Dad, I'm. I'm okay. Dean got to me. He came to the school and got to me. He saved me, Dad. I'm.”

“You're hurt.” Dad cups Sam's bare arm as tenderly as Dean's ever seen him do anything, just below the gauze. He turns his eyes over to Dean and Dean flinches just for the look: deadly, cold. Seething. “He's hurt.”

“He, um. Th-the guy, he. He fired a shot into the bathroom where I was. It ricocheted and. But. But I'm okay. Dean patched me up. I'm okay, Dad. Really.”

Dad is still looking at Dean and Dean, being the coward he is, can't seem to meet his dad's eyes. He's looking at Sam's arm, his little arm. He needs to check on the wound, maybe change the gauze. He pr--

Dad is there, sudden and accosting. Dean flinches again but holds it in as much as possible. He stands up straighter, shoulders back, forces himself to meet Dad's eyes.

“Outside, Dean. Now.”

“Sir.” Dean nods, can't look over at Sammy, cannot handle any expression on his face right now. He just ducks his head and leaves the room, not stopping until he's in the backyard, the tiny thing contained by a chainlink fence. There's a couple of chairs out there, a few empty beer bottles, ashes from several joints littering the tiny square of concrete that makes up the 'patio' he's now standing on. There's two trees and an old clothesline and it's secretly Dean's favorite place in the world.

Dad shuts the sliding glass door behind him and walks to the edge of the concrete, not stepping in the grass. He looks out over the backyard and Dean just watches him and waits, watches as Dad's shoulders rise and then fall as he takes a deep breath to try and calm down. But when he turns around, he doesn't look any calmer.

“When exactly where you going to take time out of your busy schedule to call me and tell me that my youngest son was involved in a fucking school shooting, Dean?”

“Dad, I'm sorry,” Dean rushes to get out. He takes his own deep breath, trying to stay calm, don't get emotional. It only makes Dad angrier when Dean gets emotional right back at him. “It all happened so fast, and when I got Sammy home he was a mess. He was just wrecked, and I patched him up and tried to calm him down and just get him to rest. A-and he did, and I fell asleep too and that's all that's happened. I. I shouldn't have fallen asleep. I should have called you--”

“Damn right you should have. I gotta find out from Caleb who saw it on the news at a bar? Do you have any idea how worried I was? Then when I try and call you, *both of you*, there's no answer. Like my kids just don't exist. Poof. Gone. Nothing. What was I supposed to think? Huh? Did you even stop to think what?”

Dad steps away, cuts himself off. Before he turns, Dean sees a flash in his eyes, a glint of tears.

Dad brings a big, calloused fist up to his mouth and exhales shakily against it, those tears hovering dangerously, threatening to fall.

“I gotta come back here, all the way from Iowa, not knowing.

Not knowing what I was gonna come home to. What was going on. If Sam."

He looks over at Dean again and Dean jumps this time, startled by the immediacy of Dad's eyes on his own. Dean's heart is beating so loud in his ears he can barely hear the rumble of his father's voice.

"Next time something like this happens, *anything* happens, you call me. I don't care what time it is. I don't care what else is happening. You call me. You're my eyes and ears when I'm not here. I depend on you. You know that. You gotta help me out here, man, because I can't be everywhere at once. I wish to god I could be here with you boys, but I. I just."

"I'm sorry, Dad." Dean knows how desperate he sounds and he hates it but he can't stop it, can't no matter how much he wants to. "I'm sorry I let you down. It won't happen again. I won't let it happen again, sir. I swear."

"You got to him. You got him out. That's what matters. And that he's alright." Dad's big hand claps down on Dean's shoulder and slides up to his neck to cup his cheek. His smile is grim, just like all his expressions are now. "You're both alright."

"Yeah," Dean manages to whisper. "Yeah, we're alright."

Dad just gazes at him, one of those tears finally escaping. He pats Dean's cheek, the weight of it stinging his face but Dean revels in it. "My boys."

Dad steps away just as quick as he'd approached, the trance broken. He wipes hard at his face, at his eyes. "I'm gonna head into town to get some oil for the car. You boys have about half an hour to get your stuff together before we get back on the road."

All the color drains from Dean's face. "What?"

Dad turns to look at him, a little bit of that meanness, that cruelty that Dad only saves for him creeping up along the edges of his face. "Are you hard of hearing suddenly? Get your shit together. We're out of here. You really think I'm gonna leave you two alone in a town with a bunch of psychos running around in it? We're going. Now."

"Dad! It was one guy! It was just one guy and--"

"And they got him. Arrested him. But how am I supposed to

leave you here when I know shit like this can happen here?"

"Dad, this could happen anywhere! It could happen in any town in America! You can't just. Just move us around because you're scared of one guy--"

One long stride and Dad is right there again in Dean's face, the sound of his fingers snapping echoing through the darkening backyard. He's pointing straight at Dean, close and warning.

"You watch your tone with me, boy. And don't you tell me what I can and cannot do. I'm the father here, last time I checked. Am I right?"

Dean shrinks back again, arms folded over his chest. He feels so exposed out here in just his boxers, standing in front of his father who is fully clothed and full of righteous anger. He doesn't sigh but it's a close call.

"Yes, sir."

"Good," Dad says, so fast it's like he didn't hear Dean's response in the first place, sure didn't need it. He opens the glass door again and steps into the house, grabbing the keys to the Impala off the kitchen counter. "Back in thirty. Have your shit outside and waiting."

The front door slams and Dean turns immediately toward the bedroom. Sam is there, still tender from sleep and the muscle relaxer and there are tears streaming down his face.

"Dean." It's one word but it slays Dean, slices him right in two. Almost brings him to his knees right at Sam's feet.

"Sammy, I know t--"

"We *can't* leave. We can't. Holly's here. Sunny's here. We can't just leave them! You. You have friends here. Dean, we *know* people. We can't even say goodbye after what happened today. We'll never--"

"Sam, please," Dean rasps, tired tears in his own eyes. He angles past Sam to get into the bedroom and grabs one of his dad's military duffels, stuffing clothes blindly into it from the floor. "This is hard enough. Don't do this. Don't make it harder than it already is."

"Don't make it harder for who? Harder for who!? Goddamnit, Dean, just look at me!" Sam is screaming now, his voice hoarse

with emotion. He grabs Dean's arm so hard that Dean almost yelps. He turns to face his little brother and he has to bite down on a whimper for the look his face. That look. He never, ever wanted to be on the receiving end of that look.

"Why are you letting him do this, Dean? Why? Why are you just doing what he says? Why do you *always* just do what he says? You never stand up to him. You never *do* anything. Why don't you ever just *do* anything?" Sam steps up against him and shoves him with all his strength, shoves so hard that Dean's knocked back against the bed, almost falls on it.

Dean comes back at him, his chest tightening a little for the way Sam blinks, the way he cowers a little when Dean closes in.

"You think I wanna leave, Sammy? Huh? You think I wanna drag you out of here, you think I wanna see you have to make new friends and be nervous around a whole new group of people? I wish to god I didn't have to take you out of here. I wish more than fucking anything that we could stay here and I could get a job and buy you some sheets and fucking bookshelves and all the books you want and a computer and get like. I don't know, man, a fucking stereo system with CDs and tons of fucking pillows and movies and it could just be *us*, and we could be fucking happy."

He takes a breath for the first time in what feels like centuries, surprised as fuck that it comes out as a sob. Tears are burning and pooling in his eyes and his chin threatens to move but he stares into Sam's eyes and begs him, fucking begs him to believe him.

Sam's face crumbles at that, a sob that comes out so loud that Dean knows it had to hurt.

"Don't say that to me. Don't say shit like that to me and then take it away. I know I'll never have it and that makes it worse than anything. Just. Just shut up, Dean. Please, just shut up."

He pushes at Dean again but it's weak this time. Dean wraps his arms around Sam, forcing him to stay right where he is, forcing him into a hug. They struggle against each other, their bare chests pressed and sweaty until Sam finally gives up, all the fight going out of him. He sags in Dean's arms so Dean just holds him tighter, holds him up. Sam cries pathetically in his ear, tears soaking into Dean's shoulder but Dean just holds on, just lets his own heart

break and holds on.

“Sh-shh. Sammy, shh. My boy. God, my sweet boy, Sammy.” He curls around Sam, forcing Sam's body into a deep arch around his gripping arms and he digs his face into Sam's sleepwarm neck and just breathes him in, gives Sam his heart in whispers. “God, I wish I could give it all to you. I wish I could rip out everybody's heart that hurts you and give you the entire fucking world. I would. I'd do it, Sammy. If it'd make you feel better.”

Sam cries through it all, holds on much longer than he should. Dean just lets him, just cradles him, damning the time and Dad's imminent return. Sam grows soft in his arms, exhausted. He pulls away on his own, his face red and damp with tears and snot. Dean picks up a shirt off the ground and wipes his face, brushes his hair back off his forehead. Sam meets his eyes and Dean is shocked by how green they are.

“I'll get the stuff in the livingroom. You finish up in here.”

Dean can only watch as Sam walks out of the room, heading out into the silent house to pack up their meager collection of an inevitably temporary home. It was never meant to be theirs. Dean knows that. He shoves more clothes down into the duffel and wonders when they've done enough, given enough to earn the right to having a home. To live without being constantly braced to have the rug ripped out from under them at any moment.

At least for Sam. He always wanted different at least for Sam.

--

“That it?” Dad squints into the early evening light as Dean shuts the trunk on the car. They all three turn back to look at the house that is now dark and quiet, already forgotten about them. Sam looks away first, just picks up his backpack and throws it into the floorboard in the backseat, getting in without another word.

“Yessir.” Dean doesn't look at his father, doesn't want to see any kind of disapproving scowl for Sam's “unexplainable attitude.” He barely looks up in time to catch the keys that his dad tosses to him, just raises his eyebrows in question.

“I'm beat. Haven't slept in two days. You drive us at least as far

as West Virginia and we'll stop for the night. We're meeting up with Caleb in the morning. Gotta finish the job."

Dean glances over at Sam who is staring down at his knees in the car, not saying a word. Dean knows that Sam had been counting on Dean being in the backseat with him, at least until Ohio, maybe, before Dad wanted his co-pilot back. And Dean had wanted it, too, wanted it so badly. Needed to feel Sam against him again, to be able to wrap his arm around him and smell Sam's dirty hair and feel him relax and fall asleep again. Just to give him a little more comfort, just a little while longer.

Dad shuts the door to the backseat and then climbs into the passenger seat with a heavy sigh, grunting as he gets situated, finally relaxing. Dean's left alone standing in the driveway, the crickets out, fireflies twinkling around him, just getting started for the night. He looks down the street at the warmly lit houses around them, the sounds of an evening of families just getting home, seeing each other for the first time all day. An evening he and Sam were supposed to have tonight, too, maybe. Now he'll never know.

"You forget somethin', son? Get the lead out, c'mon."

Dean looks over at his Dad, at Sam in the backseat and finally sighs. He gives one last glance to the house before shaking it off, walking around to the driver's side. He starts the car and pulls out in silence, the radio off.

He flips on the headlights and cruises down North Vine, headed for Highway 26 to take them out of Indiana. He can feel Sam in the backseat, feel his sadness like a living thing in the car with them. He glances at him in the rearview and their eyes connect for a fraction of a second. Dean looks back down, clearing his throat softly. He flicks the radio on, turning the dial over to the alternative station he knows Sam loves. He sits back in his seat and settles in for a long night of driving.

He's well out of Fairmount when he hears Sam stir in the backseat, when he feels Sam's thin arms wrap around his neck, feels his breath warm on his ear, soft face slide against his own rough one. Sam just hangs there, hugging Dean loose from behind, the seat between them but nothing else. Absolutely nothing else. Dean

covers Sam's crossed forearms with one hand, the other sure on the wheel. He leans back against him as best as he can, tipping his head to the side to rest it against Sam's. They stay just like that, Sam eventually falling asleep, kneeling in the floorboard, breath coming out in little puffs against Dean's ear, Dean's eyes on the dying horizon.

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