

The Ghosts that sell Memories

Von abgemeldet

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Part 01: ...It's ALL Sam's fault!

No I don't want your sympathy
Fugitives say
that the streets ain't for dreaming now
Manslaughter dragnet
and the ghost that sells memories
Want a piece of the action anyhow.

Let's recall how they had managed to get themselves into this mess yet again, shall we? Hard to say. Well, no, actually it is not. In fact, it's pretty damn easy to explain if he would care to do so. There is really nothing complicated about it by any means, Dean thinks. Oh no, see, there is only one explanation, one tiny, but very effective one:

It's ALL Sam's fault.

No really. It totally is. He's not even exaggerating or anything, it just is. Sam's fault.

It all started with the innocent idea of splitting up. Sam had been the one to bring up said topic, even though it got them in trouble more times than not since they were on the road again. On the most obvious one, it had gotten Dean kidnapped by a Shapeshifter and put one 'Dean Winchester' to his grave. Well, not *this one*—him, but still. Something was rotting down there now, and it carries his name.

Then there are the other times it had nearly gotten one of them – or both – killed, kidnapped, strangled by an evil power cord, electrocuted or God knows what else. So no. Splitting up never really works for them. Still, that giant freak of a brother had to go and suggest it anyway, because duh, what is so dangerous about locating a house in a fairly busy neighborhood? First of all, they'd get it done *soooo* much faster, and second of all, that meant Dean could hit the bars earlier, too.

And when he'd said it like that, well... it had been hard to argue the logic. Totally nothing dangerous about it if you had asked Dean at the time, so he'd agreed. Search the area, come back as soon as you're done with your part; yeah, totally easy. What could possibly go wrong with a plan like that? What indeed.

Famous last words.

But hell, it had been a good idea at the time.

Ha! Even more famous last words.

The problem, well, problems really, had been that 1), Dean hadn't been able to find the damn place, and 2), his brother hadn't shown up to meet him. Which was the

worse of the two evils. After trying to reach him on his cell – four times, and no, he hadn't felt frantic or anything – Dean had had enough and went looking for the guy. Wouldn't have been the first time he'd gotten lost.

Being the awesome brother that he is, he had managed to find the kid pretty quickly. Only what he had walked into had surprised him. A little, but hey, it takes a lot to surprise one Dean Winchester at all. So yeah, that has to count for something. He'd at least given them that.

Them, well that's the next clue to why this is Sam's fault.

He'd found his brother in the middle of a more or less violent brawl with two wannabe Rambos. Dean grins. The two assholes had been out for trouble, that much was obvious, and build very well, but Sam shouldn't have been overpowered by them. Not like this. Sam apparently had underestimated them – which is so stupid given their lifes and training but whatever, – and got busted pretty good for it.

Frankly, he would have laughed if it hadn't been for the fact that by then he had seethed with barely controlled anger. Anger aimed at his stupid kid brother for getting lost – again, – those two bullocks for daring to fuck with said brother, and at himself for ever having agreed to split up in the first place.

He hadn't been heavily armed – the usual gun, some knives here, some Holy Water there – but that had always been enough. 'Cause calling his brother "bitch"?! Definitely not a good move on their part. Nope. They call each other names all the time, but it's in their blood, so that's okay. Those assholes? Not so much. Why his brother had landed himself into such a position had dawned on him when he'd stepped farther into the darkened alley.

Assholes and brother hadn't been alone. He'd spotted a fourth figure, crouching against a wall, all wide blue eyes under a mop of blond hair. He'd looked... not scared exactly, but shocked. Surprised. At what, Dean's still clueless.

Dean had seen a busted lip, some scrapes on the kid's pants, but otherwise he'd had appeared all right. Or, if not that, at least well enough. No puddle of blood on the ground, no missing limbs, no black smoke coming out of the kid's ears; yeah that counts for 'all right' in Dean's books. A split lip and a few bruises and cuts? That had to wait til later. Always later.

First, there had been two asses he'd wanted to kick. Hard.

- *"What do you care?"*

- *"I said take your hands off him."*

- *"The kid's your 'friend', huh. Well, let's see how much he's worth. To you."*

- *"Do you have a deathwish?"*

So this totally does, doesn't it? Make it Sam's fault, that is. Right? If someone bothered to ask Dean now, than yes it does. And he definitely wouldn't kill them. He had just been a bit ticked off, that's all. And a pissed off big brother? Those assholes had no idea what they were getting themselves into.

- *"You don't look like you could take one of us, let alone two. I don't think it's me with the deathwish, pal."*

- *"You have no idea what you're dealing with, but hey! Don't say I did not warn ya."*

- *"Dean."*

- *"Aww, is princess worried about--urgh"*

Wrong thing to say. He'd ended up with a foot between his legs – which hurts like hell, Dean knows – and on the floor wheezing like a racehorse after the race. Yeah, getting kicked in the balls with cowboy boots tends to have that effect on guys, he supposes. He grins at the memory. Had made him feel damn good, too. The second asshole had put up more of a fight, but in the end, he'd ended up on the floor like Asshole Troublemaker Numero Uno. Which is laughable, considering Sam can fight just as well as he can and he had still been playing damsel in distress.

Huh. *Almost as good as I*, he retracts, smirking. It's not that he's bragging or anything, it's just that he has more experience, more *years* on his back, is all. Fine, so he had gotten pushed around a bit, the dude hadn't been so bad a fighter. 'Cause hey, it's not like he's perfect or anything. Dean had won, eventually, and that's what matters. So what if his hand still throbbed a bit when he moves it a bit too fast, too hasty. The guy had a pretty hard jaw, he'd had to give him that. Sam's ego probably even more damaged than the blond kid, they had picked themselves up from the ground, patted off the dirt and gotten the hell out of there.

That is why he is currently sitting in a bar drinking beer with his brother and blond kid. Only that kid?

- *"What about you? Are you okay?"*

- *"I... I'm fine."*

- *"What's your name?"*

- *"Justin..."*

Isn't so much a kid but a college student, albeit looking like being about 15. All right,

not really *that* young looking, but young enough. And Dean still has doubts that Justin's old enough to drink yet, alas, it's none of his business. He snorts in amusement. Considering his own... let's say history in that regard, it's better to keep his mouth shut in any case. Sam eyes him suspiciously out of the corner of his eyes, frowning, and not for the first time. Just perfect!

- *"How the hell did you manage to find this variety of trouble anyway, Sammy?"*

- *"Look who's talking. – And it's Sam."*

- *"Bite. Me."*

- *"Mature, Dean, really mature. "*

So in the end, it really is all Sam's fault. Maybe. Probably.

Ah hell! Who is he trying to kid?!

"For Christ's sake, how did they get the better of you Sammy?!" he grumbles brusquely, demands, really. Now Justin and Sam both look at Dean like... he's grown a second head. Or a third. So he might have been pretty quiet the last few minutes, probably grinning to himself, but come on! It's not like he was bursting out a marriage proposal or a profound way to generate world peace! Then again, he would look at anyone – even Sammy – like they'd gone mad too if they behaved this way.

Or possibly think that said someone's possessed.

But really, can anyone blame him? Sam and he shouldn't be even here! "Stupid.", he mutters to himself. And it's not loud enough to be heard over the background noises, but Sammy, wonder boy that he is, still hears him. *'Course he does!* Dean rolls his eyes, which results in Sammy's almost perfected bitch face. *Oh for the love of...* Not only does the guy has the freaking Shining, no, he has to have ears like a dog, too. Life so isn't fair, evidently.

And... is he actually comparing a good sense of hearing with freakin' premonitions? *Come on, Dean! Seriously?!*

Taking a deep breath – and a huge swallow of his beer – he settles deeper into the chair. He's got to admit, it isn't all that bad. Not really. It's even, dare he say, nice. Considering they are all still in one piece, nobody beside the two fucks is knocked out cold *or* missing valuable body parts, there's no weird or bizarre interferences going on; he would even go as far to say they are good. The bar is a lot better than the shacks they are used to, so there's no reason to be so glum.

After the fight, the kid had insisted on coming here to buy them a drink, or whatever. Dean doesn't really care, and that's not normal. It's just... it still bugs the heck out of him that those two chuckleheads took out Sammy almost with no trouble at all. *That*

is the real catch. *Damnit.*

Granted, not that he's especially pissed that they are sitting in a warm room, a beer in front of them, instead of running around in the cold looking for... Shit. The house. That has almost slipped his mind. Almost. Except that it doesn't matter if they find the place tonight, or tomorrow. If Sam is right – and in 9 times out of ten, he is – they have at least another day until the next kill, and there's nothing much they can do until then. They'll figure it out in time. They always do, don't they? And since they are already here...

'Here', by the way, is Woody's.

Uh, that's what the bar's called. Dean would laugh, only it's not really funny and it's a gay bar, so... whatever. Uhm, yeah. There are loads of guys in here, and they have gotten lots of rather odd looks left and right since they had walked in. See, now they know that Justin's a regular here. Known. Blond, blue eyes, he looks so out of place – innocent, almost fragile – Dean wonders how he ever got to *be* here.

Only he knows appearance can deceive. He knows what to look for, and there's a look in the kid's eyes, it doesn't talk of innocence. He's seen people like that, men with broken spirits, souls, drunk off their asses, but barely a handful as young as the kid seems to be. There's definitely something more to Justin, more than just looks and blue eyes and blond hair.

And a nice ass.

Dean smirks. Yeah. That too.

But him being here, with them, explains the looks they are getting.

Not that Dean cares, not really, he is the center of a lot of attention, and not just of the flattering type either. Not by any means. People have dubbed Sam and him a couple more than once already, so what does he care if it happens again. It's not the end of the world. See, Liberty Avenue apparently is the meeting place of all that is Gay Pittsburg. Huh. Which is good to know for future nightly 'adventures' down here.

If you know your surroundings, you know the people, and if you know them, you already have an advantage since they don't know you. Or your intentions.

But this place, *being gay*, it is the reason the kid got jumped by those punks in the first place. Dean is willing to bet his favorite riffle on that, and he's only willing to do it if he's sure as fuck to win. Which is... all kinds of fucked up if you ask him. But hey, some people don't need good reasons to fuck with – or kill – others, or a reason at all, nor is it always reasonable.

Unconsciously, his hand clenches around the half empty – half full? – beer bottle in barely suppressed anger.

And just like that, completely out of the blue, there's white, hot pain shooting

through his arm like fire. And... *ow, ow, fucking ow!* He's been stabbed before, he knows how that feels, and this? Feels exactly like it. Only he's sitting in a bar, holding a bottle of beer in his hand. Shit.

Wanne know what the tricky thing about adrenaline is? You don't notice a lot of pain when you're working high on it. 'Course it's only *now* that he discovers his arm is throbbing maybe a bit more than just 'a little'. Before he can school his face into the usual indifferent mask, however, Sam gasps, already reaching for him with one freaky long assed octopus arm. It's the wide eyed expression that make him look like an owl, though.

That makes him grin.

It's short lived.

"Jesus Christ!" *Uh-huh*. Not good. "Jesus Dean.", Sam hisses, right before he finds his wrist in his brother's tight – almost painfully tight – hold, fingers closing over it like a vise. Impossible to pull back. He drops the grin fully. "Jesus Christ Dean! What the hell did you *do?*"

Well. *Did* he mention that Sam can be an overdramatic, overemotional *little girl*? If not, here it is. The bitter, revealing truth. Plus, this is still all his fault!

Part 02: ...Noone ever said Winchesters were uncomplicated.

But then again... maybe he's kinda an idiot himself, huh? Or, ya know, blind. Or all of the above, as he didn't see the blood trickling out of his sleeve and on the table like...like *that*. Until he follows Sam's glare to his hand, that is. And... "Oh." Yeah. 'Oh' about sums it up. The little puddle of blood around the bottle is just a little disturbing. Not that it's there, nope, he's seen more than enough of his blood in all these years, but that he didn't notice it.

No wonder that little brother is more or less losing his shit. As for an explanation, well, *'the light kinda sucks'* isn't going to cut it here. Sad thing is, he knows it. And damn. To think what it's doing to his beloved jacket. Dean curses to himself. The jacket, however, is doubtlessly the least of his concerns if he's to guess his brother's reaction to their latest drama. And if he knows one thing in his life better than hunting itself, it's Sam.

He isn't let down. *Here it goes.* "Why the hell didn't you tell me you got hurt?! And don't tell me you didn't notice, Dean. Don't you DARE tell me that!"

"Okay, okay I won't tell you." *Because I really didn't, and you'd throw even more of a hissy fit if you knew that.* "Jesus Sammy, calm down would you. It's just a scratch."

"A... Are you nuts?", Sam explodes. Several guys turn in his direction and he has the decency to look at least somewhat embarrassed, flashing them an apologetic smile. Dean sighs in relief when they turn away. "No, no, of course you're nuts, forget it!", he hisses, voice low yet razorsharp. Dean almost flinched. Almost. *Not a happy camper right now, are ya Sammy?* "I'm not gonna argue about this, there's nothing coming of it anyway. Not with you, you stubborn jerk." Sam stands up. "Stay here, I'm gonna find some stuff."

'Find some stuff' is their translation of 'I get the first aid kit'. No one ever said Winchesters were uncomplicated.

He's about to get up since he's the guy bleeding all over the.. table, - which is not a good first impression to make, Dean knows *that* too, - and the kit is in the car so he might as well get it himself. Drawing attention to them is the least thing on his to-do list. He's about to say as much, only the next second, his brother is right there in his face, finger squeezing his wrist hard to keep him from going anywhere. And shit, that fuckin' hurts!

"Sit. The fuck. Down, Dean. And don't you dare move until I'm back, or I'm gonna tie you to the table."

Well, actually. Dean smirks, whispering, "Kinky." There's no way he can pass up that opportunity. *Sorry, Sammy.*

Sam scowls some more as his other hand - the one that is *not* just about crushing his wrist! – slips into Dean's pocket. Where the keys are, of course. Stupid kid still knows him too well. Looking at Justin, Sam asks, "Would you mind keeping an eye on him?" Amazing how good an actor Sam is despite his claim to despise-- *Wait a minute. What a goddamn minute!*

What the hell?! He doesn't need a babysitter to hold his hand while little brother gets the band-aid to make the 'boo boos' go away, he's a--

"Uh, no..."

--freakin' adult! "Dude--"

"*Thanks.*", Sam stresses, talking right over him. "And if he makes trouble, Justin" he goes on, eyes once again boring into Dean's like laser beams, "feel free to tie him to the table and hurt him." Ha! As if the kid – okay, okay, young man – is capable of doing so much as twist his little finger! Let alone keep him from leaving! Or jumping up and down naked on the bar singing Metallica on the top of his lungs, for that matter. And no, he's not sure where that is coming from. Nor does he want to. *Shut UP!*

That thought is laughable, and it's not the 'naked bar jumping/singing' one. Dean would very much like to tell Sammy exactly that, only it's not worth another argument. Or the possible attention they'd gain because of it. They need to come back here soon enough and the risk of getting recognized so easily, it's not an option. Never is. Keep a low profile, it's one of dad's most important rules. Back when they were kids and in school, or now that they are adults.

Instead, he keeps quiet, eyes closing briefly as Sam lets go of his wrist. And isn't it hilarious that his *kid* brother looks like freakin' Goliath compared to that remarkably massive bikers couple, clad in black leather from head to toe with upper arms like they were practically born on a bench press walking by? Snorting, he can't help himself but rag the kid some more, "Try not to get your ass kicked or get lost, Timmy? Lassie's not up for the rescue." Oh and... "Lock my car!"

Sam doesn't bother to form a reply. Just keeps on walking. Well, all right, so he does reply; no, no, not verbally, nope, but by giving him the finger right before he walks out the door. How very sneaky! Justin chuckles quietly, shutting up as soon as Dean turns, looks at him. The kid hides the smirk behind the bottle. Such a familiar gesture, it's scary. The Finger, however? Is even more familiar. Not the finger per se, but *a* gesture – and this one is no exception – says more than a thousand words and a blown out fight ever could.

Maybe even more.

Dean sighs. He remembers an ugly argument on the side of a dark, empty backroad, somewhere between fields and nowhere and Indiana, cruel words being thrown around like punches but cutting deep like knives. Words they never really mean, and yes, maybe this works better for them.

Grabbing the beer bottle – with his uninjured hand this time, thank you very much! – he takes a good swing of the cool liquor. Can't hurt, might even numb the throbbing. Then again... it's *beer*. Perhaps it's time to order some hard liquor, like Tequila. And preferably an entire bottle. And wouldn't that be a nice picture for Sammy to get back to? Ever since that incident with him almost dying, his brother is constantly in his hair. Even more so than before, and God knows Dean never thought *that* feasible.

Seeing Dean like that, seeing him weak, *dying*, it had without question scared the crap out of his brother. Dean knows. He had seen it in his eyes when he stood there, the first time in that ludicrously white hospital room. Still does, sees the fear lurking in Sam's eyes, the pain. This is another thing they don't – seriously – talk about. That *Dean* doesn't talk about, because *Sam* wants to. Probably. *Ah hell...* He already tried to bring it up, but...

- *"There's nothing to talk about, Sammy. It's over and done with."*

- *"The hell there isn't! You almost died, Dean, and I know that you're still mad at me for drag--"*

- *"Leave it alone, Sam."*

- *"--ging you there and.."*

- *"I said, SHUT UP!"*

...there's nothing to say and enough is enough. In fact, it is starting to get ridiculous, considering Dean is perfectly fine. And very much alive. Okay, so perhaps he is still a tad bitter about that. Not the outcome, the being alive part, no, but the part where others had to die to get him there. And here. In a way, he resents that. Resents Sam for it, but hell. It's not his damn fault. Dean knows he'd done the same thing if it had been Sammy lying there, dying. But he's the big brother, and that's different.

Only it's not and he knows it. Knows that he's a hypocritical asshole for even thinking that way, but he has to take care of Sammy; always has, always will. It's his job, part of his life. Part of his *being*. Inevitable. Like breathing, like sleeping. So what if Sam had apologized for not doing enough research, for not being more careful and the guy being a fraud. For not getting that his wife had been desperate enough to make a deal with the devil, binding a Reaper – a honest to God Reaper – to do her bidding.

And taking a life for another? That's just not right. Not in Dean's eyes, even if it is for his own.

But Dean knows Sam's not sorry that Dean is alive, no matter what, and he's never going to apologize for that. Ever. So why bother talking about it? There's nothing to talk about, nothing they can *do*. For themselves, anyone, or for—for *her*.

- *"Maybe God works in mysterious ways."*

- *"Maybe he does. I think you just turned me around on the subject."*

- *"Yeah, I'm sure."*

- *"I'm Dean. This is Sam."*

- *"Layla."**

She doesn't deserve to die, and Dean will never get how and why Roy LeGrange had picked him over her...

- *Why? Why me? Out of all the sick people, why save me?*

- *Well, like I said before, the Lord guides me. I looked into your heart, and you just stood out from all the rest.*

- *What did you see in my heart?*

- *A young man with an important purpose. A job to do. And it isn't finished.**

...and all the others. He may never understand it at all, despite the Reverend's words. What makes his life so special? Sure, he helps people, but so do others. Dean isn't anything special.

Shaking himself out of his self-endured pity-party, he almost laughs. He's always bugging Sam about brooding too much, and what does he do? Brood. In a bar. Jesus Christ! When he looks up, he catches Justin staring at him. Eyes wide and mouth parted, almost looking like a younger Sammy. Or the current one, really. And isn't that ironic? Still. Cute kid. "What is it?"

The kid actually jumps. Dean smirks. "Uh, nothing." Dean wonders if he tries to find a way to bring up this nothing anyway. He knows that look. It's the 'I want to know but I have no idea how to bring it up'-look, a look his brother plays oh so well. "Do you think, um, it's wise to drink with your hurt arm?", he finally does ask, after a long minute, offering him some tissues to wipe away the blood.

He nods his thanks, saying, "Probably not, no."

"I see." Pause. And he swears he can see it in those blue eyes when the infamous penny drops and he registers what Dean has said. Justin's eyes, they are so... open, for all the world to read. "Wait. Why are you drinking than anyway?"

Dean chuckles, shrugs unconcerned. "Because." Now, let's see if the boy has guts.

"Oh, okay..."

"Breath, kid.", he yields, chuckling, "I'm just kidding." And for the most part, he is. "The alcohol just makes the painpills Sammy's gonna make me swallow later kick in faster."

"Ah. But isn't it just as risky to... Wait. Okay, no. I don't think I want to know." And he's not disappointed. "You're *old enough* to decide what you do."

Dean smirks. Yup. Kid has guts, alright. "Excellent comeback, dude.", he declares, tipping his no longer bloody bottle to Justin's. For the first time since he's met the blond – which, he admits, is not that long; about fifteen minutes give or take some – he smiles. And what a smile that is. Yikes.

Only... His eyes fall upon the boy's hands, and his eyes narrow. "Something wrong with your hand?"

"Huh? What?"

"Your hand.", he clarifies, "It seems like it's bothering you ever since we came in here, and now..." He trails off, pointing to where it's cradled protectively against his chest.

That gets him a strange look, but... "No, no it's... it just hurts a bit. Must have landed wrong. It's cramping up. Happens sometimes.", he vaguely explains, deliberately not looking at him.

Happens sometimes? What an explanation! Not that Dean would know if it does, but he doubts that it happens without a reason. His own hands don't cramp up on him, not out of thin air. Just, no. Would be a major pain in the ass, too, given what they do. A risk even. One they can't effort. He doesn't ask about it, however. Like so much else, it's none of his business. And he knows to respect that. "Well, if you say so."

Justin nods. "I'm used to it. Nothing to worry about."

Maybe, maybe not. *Old injury*, the practical part of his brain provides. The part that got drilled in first aid by his father since he was 5 years old, drilled in it like no one's business and won't ever forget a single word, 'cause it could mean someone's death. Sammy's. Dad's. Yeah. *Mine*. Maybe. It takes about a few minutes, but Sam makes it back to the bar. In one piece and with parts of their first aid kit, all stuffed in the kid's pockets.

Sam glares when he catches him smirking, but Dean doesn't bother to hide his amusement. He never does. "Did you lock the car?", he asks instead, trying to sound annoyed.

His brother rolls his eyes. "Can it, dude, I'm not retarded. Now for fuck's sake, get out of that jacket.", Sam growls. And even though his voice is anything but, his hands are gentle, helping him. Now it's Dean's turn to roll his eyes. There is no arguing with Sam when he gets like this, though. Mother hen complex, that's what Dean has dubbed this mode once upon a time. A time when Dean had still been taller, when nightmares

were just that and could be chased away easily. When there had been no dreams of college and normal and...yeah.

What. Ever.

The term in itself, however, still annoys the hell out of Sam. And that is a good thing. Always a very good thing.

He stifles a groan as the sleeve drags over whatever it is that's oozing blood like a slaughtered pig. They sit well out of sight to do this here instead of their motel room or the bathroom, but Dean somehow still doubts it is a good idea. Then again, what does he care? Justin looks a bit squeazy gazeing at his *somewhat* torn arm. "What did that? Nails?"

"Something like that." Most likely the up close and personal get-together with that fucking sharp concrete wall, but he keeps that insight to himself. For various reasons.

The blond grmaces as his brother finally concludes, "I don't think any of these need stitches.", and Dean can't help but snort.

"Course they don't. Only / could have told you that five minutes ago. Would've saved you the trip to the car, dude."

"Shut the hell up, Dean. You didn't even notice you were bleeding, let alone--Christ."

Sam drags him to the bathroom after that, leaving a befuddled Justin behind with his jacket and bloodied tissues and two abandoned beer bottles. He has to agree, though, the bathroom sounds like very a good idea; considering. Thank god it's reasonably vacant in here. And the few that are, well, probably too far gone to notice a thing beside drugs or booze or whatever anyway. Doubtless wouldn't even think it strange for them to disappear in one of the stalls together. Dean smirks. It *is* a gay bar after all.

More blood dyes the washcloth – where did that come from anyway? – a deep red as Sam picks a piece of what Dean thinks might be pieces of fabric or something he doesn't want to think about out of the bloody mess. Ah hell, it looks worse than it actually is, but that's almost always the case, isn't it? Remember the washcloth? He isn't even wondering where it came from, just glad that it's here or else his jeans would have found a exceptionally gory demise. Another pair.

Fuck it. Closing his eyes, he leans his head against the wall, clenching his jaw as Sam drenches the wound in antiseptics, slowly washing the blood and dirt away. Next thing he knows, Sam has the butterfly tapes and a bandage in place and, *The Fuck?! "The fuck?!"*

"Shut up and deal with it. It's not bad enough to need stitches but it's still *bad enough*, so just cut it out."

"Dude, I'm the older bro--"

"Yadda, yadda, Dean."

Oh and isn't that just *awesome*? "Fine." Beat. "Bitch."

"Jerk."

They grin at each other, ignoring the "I'd like to be ya bitch, too, seetheart" in mutual understanding as they walk out of the door. When they return to their booth, Justin offers Sam a smile and Dean a look of sincere concern of his own. "He's gonna live.", Sam says, picking up on it. "In contrast to my unfortunate, fragile ego." Talking, he stuffs the rest of the first aid stuff back into his bag and knots it at the end before he sits down. They might need the stuff later.

Preferably much, much later.

"So, uhm, how did you learn to fight like this?", Justin asks, looking equally amused as genuine interested.

"Our dad was a Marine and he...he taught us some tricks.", Sam enlightens the blond before jerking his head in Dean's direction. "Did him more good then me." A tragic sigh, then, "Obviously."

"Nah, they were just lucky, Sammy. Don't worry."

"Like I said, tell that to my poor delicate ego, Rambo."

Justin looks a little stunned, looking back and forth between the two of them. "Wait. Wait. Your...your *father* taught you? You're *brothers*?!"

Dean grins. "Yeah.", he says, shrugging. "Sorry to disappoint, blondie."

"No, no, that's not what I..." But Justin trails off shortly, sighing, his expression turning sheepish. "Okay, yeah, you got me. It's exactly what I was thinking. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you or anything."

"You didn't. In fact, you're not the first to assume we're a couple. Not even close. Don't sweat it."

Dean nods, adding, "Thanks to you, we at least know where exactly in Pittsburgh we are."

"Thanks to you," the kid parrots, "I don't have a broken neck, so I think we're somewhat even." He sounds a bit grumpy, yet, he's smiling. "But what are you doing here than if you're not here for the local... attractions?"

His brother pulls out one of his own smiles. "We are kinda searching for something."

"And because of me, you got distracted, huh?"

"Nah, it's all Sam's fault." He now says out loud what he's been thinking all along, winking. Sam glares, but doesn't say a word. "And it's all good, those assholes were looking for trouble, so I think for once it's good Sammy here has the sense of orientation of a blind chicken." Still, there's no need to say out loud what could have happened to the blond, so even if yes, he still believes it is all Sam's fault, it's okay.

- TBC

Part 03: ...Yup, this has to be 'Brian'.

You know, for now, he's rather sitting here with the kid in one piece and mostly okay than reading about an attacked gay kid in the hospital a few days later. Or worse. God knows people are crazy, there's no need to remind him of that. No, the job could wait for another few hours. Yeah, they might have to hurry up, but what's done is done. They saved at least someone's... well, even if not life, at least they saved him a lot of bruises and pain.

And not just the kid's.

Next to him, Sam glares daggers. "A blind chicken?! Thank you, Dean, thank you so much."

"Aww, don't worry, princess, I'll still respect you in the morning.", he teases, reaching over to ruffle the brown mop that Sam calls hair. Across from him, the blond cracks up laughing. And all of a sudden it sounds all too close to hysteria. All humor goes down the drain, feeling like he got pushed into ice cold water. Sam and he share a look, but for once, it's Dean who reaches out to the kid.

Why, he has no idea. Maybe it's because he's sitting closer. Maybe it's because the kid reminds him of something – someone. Usually it's Sam who deals with this emotional shit, you know, chick flick moments, he's better at it, too, but this time? Dean has no idea what's so different about the blond. They've both seen full out hysteria, nervous breakdown territory, and this is not it. But it's too close all the same.

"Justin...", he whispers, and he almost recoils from the tone of his voice.

Justin doesn't notice. "I'm okay. I'm okay. Sorry.", he wheezes, and Dean has the sudden vision of him choking on laughter. Or something. *Is that even possible?* And why the hell is that even important right now? "God, sorry. I didn't mean to... it wasn't supposed to... I wasn't...shit. Sorry."

He doesn't say 'it's okay', because it's not. They all know it. What he does is keeping his hand on the kid's shoulder, thumb drawing imperfect circles on the few inches of skin exposed on the boy's neck. Keep it up as long as it takes for him to calm down. Couldn't care less that the arm is throbbing like a bitch, and for once, even Sam keeps his mouth shut about it. Instead he pushes Dean's shot glass toward the blond. Which is... actually not a bad idea.

"Drink that, slowly, okay?"

Justin nods, and once he starts, it seems like he can't stop. When he finally does, his hands are shaking, hell, the kid is shaking, period. "Thanks..", he grits out, taking one sip, then another. The glass is shaking spectacularly. "I... used to get panic attacks... sometimes...after... Not...not that often anymore... You must think I'm crazy..."

Panic attack. Of course.

"Don't talk, kiddo, just breath and try to calm down. We've seen people flip out much worse for less valid reasons, believe me."

"Yeah. You're doing exceptionally well, all things considered, so don't sweat it." Sam's using this soft voice of his, the one he reserves for people they meet. Victims. His 'I mean you no harm, I just want to help'-voice, like one would speak to a scared horse, and it usually works like a charm. This time, it's not working like a charm, but it helps nonetheless. The kid's hands are still shake, though, and the glass might be in looming danger of taking a nosedive.

Sighing he curls his free hand around the boys wrist. Justin blushes at the touch, for a reason only the blond knows, flashing him a shy smile. And while the words are never uttered out loud, Dean hears the 'thank you' loud and clear. Once the glass is drained, he puts it down on the table, asking, "Better?" Strange thing is, the moment that the word leaves his mouth it clicks that it's not just another platitude. No. He really wants to know.

Nodding, the kid manages another smile, and Dean leans back in his chair. "Yeah, fuck, I forgot how awful this shit feels. Didn't happen for quite some time." Sam had panic attacks like that, before, when he'd still been a small child. It had scared the shit out of Dean, more than any monster he'd ever faced. Even their dad had been, well, not scared but troubled. He doubts his brother remembers. Somewhere along the way, it had stopped, never to return.

"I was... just on the way over here, I had a snack at the diner... and then I walked over here to meet... someone. So I took a short cut." Justin's smile turns somewhat sour. "And what a shortcut that was, huh?"

Yeah. Dean simply shrugs. *Time to drop the subject, me thinks.* "So, meeting someone?" He smirks. Oh he can just imagine who that someone is he's going to meet, bearing in mind how the boy's dressed. You don't go out like this just for a drink. Or Dean doesn't. He nearly snorts out loud. As if he could dress himself differently if he wanted to! *My, aren't we funny, tonight?* But the subject might be a good distraction.

To say the kid blushes would be way over the top, but his cheeks color enough to be noticeable. "A... friend."

Sammy hides his smile behind the neck of his still overly full beer bottle. Dean doesn't bother. "Friend, as in... boyfriend?" What can he say? Tact never was one of his strong suits. Although, it takes the kid's mind off of tonight's 'adventures', so *whatever*. It's worth it. "Aww, come on, kid, don't go shy on me all of the sudden."

Sam hits him. Hard. "Dean!", he scolds, sounding more amused than offended. Or angry.

Ha! "Yes, Sammy?"

"Back off!"

Justin laughs. "No, it's not that, it's okay. It's just... Brian isn't your typical boyfriend. Hell he doesn't *do* boyfriends, or love, or... anything. So it's just, I'd love to see you calling him that to his face." Justin has to see the confusion in his eyes, 'cause he adds softly, "You don't know Brian. He's... something else."

"Aww, aren't we all?"

It's not so long after that he feels one more pair of eyes on him. No, not really, because in contrast to any others stares they had to endure tonight, this one burns like fire in the back of his neck. It's like someone's breathing fire down his neck. Not a good thing in his job, or it's not most of the time. See, it's because there are things out there that can breath fire down ones neck and legs, literally, and that's fucked. But this is not the supernatural version of fire.

To notice things like that, well, it comes with said job. Dean's done it almost all his life, or what seems like that anyway, so it's no surprise he's good at what he does. Subtly, he roams the bar with his eyes. Not that anyone is paying attention in addition to the now and then Looks. Yeah, the ones with capital 'L'. The rest it either too busy messing with their drinks, their guys or both. But even though he can't quite figure out who's watching him, he knows that yes, someone is. He's not imagining this.

After more maybe not so subtle shifting and turning on his part, he finally catches sight of a tall guy--er, rather the reflection of a tall guy in a picture on the wall.

The first thing that comes to mind to discribe the stranger is stunning.

Only, yeah, he could stand in front of a mirror and say the same, right? So no, that's not really why the man catches his eye. No, it's how he's holding himself.

Moving like a tiger closing in on his prey, and maybe that's exactly what the guy does. The prey? Him. Or, them. Once he's close enough that he can see him out of the corner of his eyes, however, Dean somehow knows. The guy carries himself with a confidence that's got to count for 'impressive'. Imposing even. That is, of course, if he wasn't who he is. Still. Tall, handsome, the smile of a shark, hmm, he looks like someone who draws people in, naturally, but try to get closer and you usually run into a brickwall.

Dean knows. He should, too, right, being somewhat like that? Plus, this guy? Is the textbook definition of 'something else'.

One look at the blond's face confirms his thoughts.

The moment Justin sees who's approaching, his eyes light up like the freakin' Christmas tree in front of the Rockefeller Center. Yup, this has to be 'Brian'. The not really but still boyfriend who doesn't do boyfriends. Which is, kinda, fucked up. The brunet doesn't give them so much as a second glance, he merely pulls Justin in for a kiss that, too, one could describe as something else. Dispite not knowing them, the

two have chemistry to burn, that's for sure. Justin's Brian – *boyfriend!*, *boyfriend*, the not so sane part of his mind shrieks – is, uhm, older. By a few years.

Or ten.

Take your pick. To tell the truth, they look hot. Together like that, kissing and making out like the rest of the world doesn't exist, they burn a hole in Dean's gut - and jeans, if he's not careful. He glances at Sam. Kid's got the goofiest facial expression ever going on, but the small smile tugging at his lips tells another story altogether. He might be thinking the same. Okay, minus the 'hot' part, certainly, but that's one of the things Dean never really talks about. *Duh!*

Brian's darker hands in the blond hair, pale fingers on a strong jaw... yeah. Dean shivers. They look more than hot together, and Dean can't help but react to the show. No wonder that Justin is known around here if they do this every day. Twice a week, or whatever. They fit. Why, Dean has no idea. They just... do. No matter how different they seem from just looking at them. And you can't do anything but stare. Finally they apart, and the dazzling smile on Justin's face is saying more than a thousand words ever could.

Uh-huh. It's a good thing they sitting.

"Hey."

"Hey...", the blond breathes, and his breathlessness makes Dean chuckle. Which promptly draws the attention to him. And Sam. Sharp, dark eyes focus on his face like a spotlight, the eyes of the tiger on its prey. Blatant interest flickers therein, like he's being measured, to what standard, Dean doesn't know. But he can guess. *Terrific.*

Dark eyes look him over from head to toe. Licking his like Dean's the most delicious meal ever and he can't wait to taste him. It's so intense that the look might as well be fingers, caressing his skin, goose bumps raising on the spot they come in contact with. It's blatantly obvious that Brian likes what he sees, he doesn't bother to try and hide it either. In fact, it's written all over his face, eyes shining with lust.

Sammy's next under the severe scrutiny, unblinking. Sure, Sam has been living under a microscope since he was a baby, they all had, so it takes more than this Brian to shake him. A lot more. Same for him.

Then again, his own reaction to the man is for different reasons. It's not uneasiness because he's looked at, quite the contrary, it's more familiar than he cares to admit. No, it's just that he's so easily affected by that stare, he has to bite his cheek to keep from squirming in his seat. And when those inquiring eyes return to Dean's, the... seductive leer that follows, he's pretty sure Brian knows.

Not that he's going to look away or anything. No way.

Never be the one to look away first, it's a law of survival in their world, and there are not a lot of scary things on this planet who can make Dean Winchester do just that.

Let alone people.

Brian is just not *that* intimidating.

Intense, yeah, sure, intimidating, not so much. Justin fake-coughs, clearing his throat to snap his... boyfriend out of this trance. Or staring contest. "Starting to collect toys without me now, Sunshine?", he says, tongue in cheek.

Literally.

Next to Dean, Sam snorts out a wet laugh, choking and coughing around a mouthful of beer. So, he isn't exactly troubled by the suggestion, just sincerely amused. *Huh. Wonder never cease.* Covering his surprise, Dean puts on a smirk of his own, patting his brother on the back. Hard. "Fuck Brian! Could you stop that? Please? Just for a minute?"

"Do what?"

"Fuck them with their clothes on. It's not Babylon, Christ!"

"Again, I ask, what?"

"They are not some piece of meat for you to—You know what? Forget that I said anything. I just had a shitty night, that's all. Don't mind me."

"Sunshine, weren't they entertaining enough?" Dean has a gotten some dirty and leering looks over the years, but this one? Goes for the kill. There's no way not to know what he's saying. "To think someone like that is disappointing..."

"Aren't you just hilarious, sweetheart," Dean deadpans, voice intentionally rough, resting his chin on folded hands and batting long lashes at the man across him. Pouting ever so slightly, he knows exactly what that look does to people and Brian is no omission. *I can play this game, too, dude*, he thinks. "Jealous?"

He sees his jaw tighten, and he scowls, "Of whom? *You?*"

"Hmm, that he might have gotten his very own... entertainment, without you, so who knows..." By now Dean is almost worried that he's going to break his jaw. Or... his teeth, depends. It's not worth it, however, so he snickers. "Come on, dude, lighten up. I'm just pulling your leg."

"Har fucking har." He says, face blank. "How about pulling my dick instead? Or, better yet, how 'bout sucking it to--"

A hand on his mouth cuts him off. "Cut it out, Brian!", Justin tells him. But he's laughing all the same, the blue eyes sparkling with delight. "Nothing happened..."

A perfectly shaped eyebrow climbs up Brian's forehead. Uhu. *This is gonna be good.* "So why don't you introduce me to your new *friends*, then?"

"Uh, Brian, Dean and Sam, they.. well, kinda lend me a hand." The second brow joins the first, and Dean can see the wheels turning behind the man's eyes. Justin apparently sees it, too. "Not like that, you nymph."

"That's me, alright. So... if it's not *that*, how the fuck did they happen to 'lend you a hand' than?"

"Nothing, it was nothing."

The brunet stares at his younger companion like he can look into the kid's head if he only looks hard enough. Like he wants to read his mind. Of course, there's no way for him to do that. Very few creatures can, but that's a totally different story and does so not belong in here. Like, ever.

Justin merely shrugs, looking away and making a grab for his beer. And that's his first mistake. Dean can see it happening, the exact moment Brian spots it. The dark, fuzzy shadow of a bruise on pale skin, almost black in the dim light of the bar even though Dean knows it's not the case. It's just a mild bruise on the blond's forearm, but something in the older man's eyes flashes like a cold thunderstorm, and he takes hold of the very same hand. "Wha..."

"What the fuck, Justin?!"

"What's wrong? I... Brian...?"

"Fuck that." Dragging the sleeve up the boy's arm, Dean scrunches up his face at what comes to the light. *Ouch*.

More bruises, in fact, an impressive set of yellow and blue, darkened by the bar's lighting. It's not obvious, but he knows what he's looking for, he recognizes them as what they are. The rough shape of a hand, fingers, curling around the slender arm; like someone had grabbed him, hard enough to leave marks, too. It's nothing life threatening, obviously, but 'nothing' looks different, alright. By the set of his jaw, Dean thinks that Brian has it all figured out, too.

"Oh." Justin sounds surprised. "I didn't even... notice that. Oh."

"Obviously. Fuck." Brian rakes a hand through his hair. Roughly. "Jesus, would you mind to tell me what the fuck happened now?!"

"I... don't know. I guess I fell last night and--"

"Don't try to fucking bullshit me!", he hisses, and the anger is very apparent now. But it's not only anger simmering right under the surface. No. It's something entirely different. Fear. And concern. "I've fucked you this morning, in fact, I fucked you *several* times this morning, I'm *sure* I would have noticed your arm looking like one of your fucking paintings!"

"Brian, it's..."

"If you're going say nothing, your ass is mine."

"Is that supposed to scare me?", Justin cooes.

"Fuck Justin!"

"Okay, okay. Someone stood me up in the alley on the way here, pushed me around a bit. No biggie, since Dean and Sam came to my rescue.", he explains, leaving out a lot more than just 'something'. But hey, it's between the two of them, so he keeps his mouth shut. "My knights in shining... well, jeans.", he teases an attempt to lighten up the mood.

It doesn't work on Brian. Except that Sam must have come to the the same conclusion that changing the topic would be a pretty good idea, since the next thing out of his brother mouth is a grumbled, "Him more so than me, but whatever."

"Aww, come on, I already said I'd still respect you in the morning, so cut it out."

Justin giggles. "He's right. I was glad that you showed up when you did. Anyway. Guys, this is Brian..."

"No, no, no, don't tell me.", Dean drawls, interrupting somewhat rudely, but hey! Brian's gloomy mood is really starting to bother, so he does what he does best. Making fun of it. "The infamous, unconventional *'boyfriend'*", he smirks at the man's scandalous stare, "in the flesh. Yeah, I kinda figured. Because the kissing and the dazzled smiles? Totally gave it away, dude."

Brian looks about ready to throw up. Or walk out. Or murder someone, preferably Dean. And then some. Yeah, probably the latter. Or, you know, all of the above. Why choose? Dean calmly meets the fiery stare, trying to keep his pose serious and the grin off his face. It's not easy with that brother of his stiffling laughter, sounding like he's choking on something, and Justin not even trying to. Except that it's good to see – hear – that regarding the blond.

Especially after the almost but not quite panic attack. The laughter suits him much better anyway.

For a moment Brian watches the blond with his arms cross on the table, head burried in said arms. Kid's laughing his ass off. Brian looks like he's going to strangle him. When the hazel eyes return to his, he receives a smirk that is not good news. It's the smile of a shark, a shark that is ready to tear you apart any minute now. "Care to let me in on the little encounter? Since this fucking clown here isn't willing?"

Uh-oh.

Sam and he share a look. No, not really. "Uh..."

"Come on, Brian, leave them alone. I was in trouble, they swept in to save me. End of story."

"*'Swept in to save me'*? Geez, Sunshine, we'll have to limit your quota of *Powerpuff Girls* and your being around Mickey again, won't we?"

Whatever he's talking about, the blond blushes like nobody's business, smacking the other man's chest with the back of his hand. And horrified isn't nearly enough to illustrate the kid's expression.

"What? Not gonna tell me *exactly* how they swept in to save poor, innocent you? I mean, them being your *fearless heroes*?"

Justin doesn't seem so horrified anymore after that comment, instead he looks mightily pissed off. Which is kinda creepy if you think about it. Hm. "For fuck's sake, let it go Brian! Nothing happened, well, nothing serious anyway, thanks to *them*, so I ask you to *please* leave it alone."

Dean watches them stare at each other. In a way, it reminds him all too much of Sam and himself and their interaction. Brian is the one to look away first, just like he's the one giving in most of the time where his brother is concerned. And isn't there a joke somewhere in there? Then again, Brian gets to fuck his little blond, so there's a motive right there. And it's no revelation that the next thing out of the brunet's mouth is, "Fine, but you'll owe me more than a fucking blowjob in the fucking shower, little boy. Got that?"

"Whatever you want, Brian, whatever... fucking you want." The inuendo is impossible to miss as he leans in to place a kiss on the man's lips. His cheek is next, his jaw, his ear, his neck; it's kind of hypnotic to watch them. Between kisses, the blond manages to articulate some more, "Whatever... you want... to do... to me... Anything... you... want, Bri...hmmm..." And as chaste as the kisses are, his cock seems to like the show very much, especially when the two dare to move on to french kissing.

Fuck.

Yup, time to get laid. And soon.

- TBC

Part 04: ...And it's without doubt not holding hands.

Pressing his hand against the front of his suddenly all too tight jeans, he swallows a groan. This is not exactly what he'd planned. To get a hard-on from watching two guys kiss? Dean shakes his head to himself. Except. Well, watching them fuck their mouths with their tongues is such amazingly erotic image that it's *so* not going to help the problem in his pants. Especially not if Dean keeps staring like this. *Fuck*.

And how did they get from freaking out over the bruises on the kid's arm to acting and kissing like they were in the middle of a porn movie anyway? Maybe it's all the blood running to his groin instead of his brain, but he can't figure that one out. Not just yet.

The only thing he does know for sure, is that the guys around here – drooling and staring at the couple; and *shut up*, at least he's not drooling! – must go home at night with jerk off fantasies to last for a lot of cold and lonely nights. And that's what he's going to do tonight, too. Since it's too late to go out and get a chick – or guy – for himself and they're have to get up early tomorrow and... yeah. So, yup, he's going to jerk off in the shower, with his brother in the next room. *Like a fucking horny teenager on vacation. Terrific!* Rolling his eyes, he downs another mouthful of beer.

At least it's still somewhat cold. And cold is good, because in here, it's getting more than a little bit warm. Not to say hot. And Justin and his 'something else' Brian? Are solely to blame for *that*.

"Alright. Time for us to go."

Sam's sudden declaration and the scraping of metal against wooden floor makes him jump. Or, all three of them, since Brian and Justin do to. And damn him to hell and back for forgetting Sam's presence, even if it's just for a moment. Now that he does remember, well, it works like a cold shower. Nothing to get rid of a hard-on faster than the immediate proximity of little brothers, at least to a certain degree. Yup. Plus, it got the two lovebirds to pull their tongues out of each others mouths so that he's not... agh! There he goes again.

Biting his lips, Justin is not looking at Sam as he starts to get up, but him.

"You really have to?" He asks and Blondie sounds disappointed. *Huh*. Who would have guessed?

Dean commands his head to nod yes even though he wants to say no. "I'm afraid so, yeah, we've gotta get out early tomorrow, so it's time for some *siesta*." And they rarely ever manage that at night nowadays. Especially Sammy, with those freaky ass visions and dreams and nightmares and whatever the hell else. And damn that to hell and back anyway. Following his brother, he gets off the chair and reaches for his jacket. Manages to slip it on without wincing, too. Perhaps the beer did some good about numbing the pain after all.

Stuffing his hand in his pocket, Dean fishes for some cash, only before he manage to drag something up, a strong hand captures his wrist, stopping his effort short. Long, slender fingers curl around is hand like Sam's did a while ago, but their grip is a lot less firm. Looking up, he meets beautiful hazel eyes, examining him like he's the most fascinating thing ever.

Well, ever since the invention of double-headed dildos, but that's a totally different topic. Or maybe it's not, considering that look. *Ahem*. Dean freezes. "What?"

"Leave it."

"Huh?"

"Geez, are you fucking hard of hearing? I said, leave. it. I'll take care of it."

"Dude, I can p--"

"I said to fucking leave it! Jesus! What the fuck is with people not accepting--"

Dean, annoyed, throws up his hands, effectively cutting him off. "Okay, okay buddy. Fine. If you *insist*, be my guest."

He waits for Brian to let go of his hand, but that doesn't happen.

Instead, he gets another one of these intense, scalding looks, a look that tells him exactly what it is Brian *insists*, and it's without doubt not holding hands. More like holding each others dicks and Dean just about snorts at that; the vivid images his mind comes up with thinking *that* through? Are *oh* so comical, that it's hard to keep a straight face. Except, well, X-rated thoughts should seldom be comical, if at all. And straight and hard shouldn't be mentioned in a gay bar while he's holding hands with a hot guy either.

Cock hardening all over again, it seems like the nerves in his hand or whatever are all wired to his groin these days. *All work and no play makes Dean a very dull boy*. Yeah, and easy to turn on. Oh for the love of... *Christ, get a fucking grip!* The thumb rubbing slow, suggestive circles on the inside of his wrist, however, isn't helping. The touch gives him goose bumps, makes him shiver and sweat at the same time. Dean clenches his jaw against the moan that's threatens to rip right out of his throat. *Fuck*.

Clearing his throat to get rid of the huge lump, he says, "Uhm, dude; my hand?" Not that he doesn't like this, far from it, it's that he likes it *too* much. That's the problem. And the reason he needs it back. Aside from shooting monsters in the face, of course!

And Dean's not gonna walk out of the door like this, not with a major hard-on and his brother right next to him. That would be kinda hard to explain. Pardon the pun. Brian's eyes never leave his the entire time, though. It's like the rest of the bar, the rest of the world doesn't exist while they look at each other across the one, maybe two feet separating them. Suddenly he can understand very well why Justin seems so

smitten with the brunet. He is, no doubt, something else.

When Brian finally does let go, it's not without a knowing smile and a glance toward his crotch. And Dean could fucking kick his own ass for that. There's no way to hide how much this little, uh, 'tete-a-tete' has effected him. And there might have been no reason to if it wasn't for his little brother. *Great*. But – *thank you Jesus* – Sam's still busy messing with... something. Probably the rest of their first aid shit--er, kit.

Rolling his eyes, he takes a step back and adjusts his jacket. It's better to get far, far away from Brian before he does something he might regret later. Looking at Sam to distract him, he says, "Keys?" Sam throws them at him without looking up. "Thanks dear."

"Shut up Dean."

"Yeah, yeah. So, try to avoid the dark alleys in the future, blondie. Wouldn't want that sweetheart of a boyfriend of yours to go nuts, would we?" Oh yeah, payback is a bitch, he thinks, willing his dick to *please calm down*, and one does good to remember that. Apparently the guy can take as good as he gives, because he merely shrugs, tongue firmly in cheek.

Justin laughs, too. "No, better not."

Sam says his goodbyes as well, but as soon as Dean's turning to leave, Justin calls after him. "Dean." The blond waits for him to turn around before he goes on, "Thank you. I mean it."

They stare at each other for a long moment, the surroundings fading away once again, before he murmurs, "Nah, don't mention it." The kid's smile follows him when they set out. On their way to the exit, though, it's very amusing to see how many guys watch Sam and him – or their asses anyway – leave, but not one makes a move to approach them. If Sammy notices the looks, he's good at not letting it show.

Outside, the air is cold but clear and that helps to clear the haze in his head, as well as the semi hard-on between his legs. Taking a deep breath, he thinks it's very good to be out of there, otherwise who knows what could have happened. They both walk in silence, the street buzzing around them with people and noises and colors and lights, and it's almost too much. It takes some time before they get back to where he'd parked the car hours ago.

Only when they get in the car, Dean about to drive off, does Sam break the mutual silence: "Like a blind chicken?! Dude. *Seriously?*" Dean opens his mouth, but he closes it again when he discovers there is nothing to say. Instead, he laughs, shrugging sheepishly. Sam laughs too. "Yeah that's what I thought. Now get us back to the motel, I want to sleep. And look at your arm again."

"Sam."

"I don't want to hear a word from you."

So Dean shuts up.

~~|~~

The next night finds them back on Liberty. Or close by anyway.

It is stil bizarre to see how different the same street can look depending on what time of day it is. Or night. In the daylight, when they had been back here checking out the place and the house they'd finally managed to locate, it hadn't looked so gloom. Now? Halloween Special came to mind. However, they've been out here stalking the streets for far too long, his hands feeling more and more like ice sticks than body parts. And no signs of their supernatural beasties either. *Terrific*. To think that those people in their homes or bars had no idea what was going on this second just outside their backyards.

What's even worse is that they have no idea what is going to happen. They know they are hunting a ghost, a malevolent spirit, but it's not enough. Dean hates to walk into something as blind as they do tonight, but they have to try or someone's going to die tonight and they'll never figure it out. See, it's like this. Ever since this killing spree had started three years ago in Colorado, once a month - the night of the new moon - a person would disappear, only to show up a day or two later. Dead, of course. Some were stabbed, some strangled, other bled out from wounds he doesn't want to think about.

A few were almost ripped to shreds.

Yeah, the way they died was never the same, not once, but all of them, died of violent deaths. And without a doubt, were terrible excuses of human beings. Ironically, the way they died, the way they were killd, always resembled their 'sins', the way they wronged others. Which was the second thing all the victims had in common. The word SIN. Writing in blood, on the body or the place the corpse was found, engraved or burnt in flesh or whatever, it didn't matter. There was always the word.

And the investigation their father had done on the killings, well, to say it painted a gruesome picture was an understatement.

But then, a little over a year later ago, the pattern suddenly changed.

The word was still the same, but ever since the headcount doubled; went from one up to two a month. And it weren't exclusively the bad guys anymore either their ghosty went after. The difference was, from what their father had been able to figure out over years and distance, that the other victims had already been a 'victim' *before* they were murdered. Lots of them had a past of abuse, sexual abuse, rape, murder and horrible things like it. They always die the week after the bad guy kicks the bucket.

And that is exactly what Dean can't get his head around. It's nuts. And say about spirits and demons whatever you will, but there is always, *always* a logical pattern behind what they do. This? Is not. It is everything *but* logical. The whole case reminds him more of the actions of a wacky serial killer, a human one at that, than a ghost on a killing spree. Whatever the reason is, it gives Dean a headache. A nasty one.

Rubbing his cold hands on his jeans, he knows that it's driving his kid brother just as mad. No matter how long and hard they stare at the research, no matter how they turn what they know over in their head, they can't figure it out. Their dad guessed that the rapant spirit is somehow tied to an object someone is howling all over the U.S., maybe even on a roadtrip. It would explain the different cities and towns those killings happened.

But the reverse killings? 'Do ghosts follow each other around?', Sam had asked one morning, only half joking, and yeah. As strange as that had sounded, it's a possibility. Or, better said, that it's more than one ghost. Whatever it is, they're going to figure it out before that ghosty slips out of their reach yet again.

How exactly the ghost picked its target they had no idea. There's enough violence in the world, so no telling where it's going to happen next. They only know the when. Then again, it's always the same neighborhood, often even the same street or block. And that is exactly how they find themselves where they are now. Had been last night, too, until Sammy had gone astray and found the pretty blond kid. Ah well, new night, new chance. The last victim of the ghost had been found around here. With pieces of flesh missing. Literally. Like it had been ripped or bitten out.

It makes his skin crawl just thinking about the picture he's seen at the morgue. Shaking the disturbing memory off, or trying to anyway, he looks at his brother. "This time, we're not gonna split up. Got that?"

Sam grins. "Yes. Once was enough."

"Once?! Dude, we get crushed every freakin' time we decide to split up! Why the hell do we still do that anyway?"

"Ignorance? Lack of common sense?"

"Right." Dean holds up his hands. "Hey, you're supposed to be the smart one, college boy, why ask me if you can't figure it out yourself?"

They grin at each other, until the flickering of the streetlights gets their attention. The streets are empty, quiet, but Dean tightens his hand on his shotgun. The sudden noises coming from the EMF Meter make him jump. "Sorry." Sam's grin is everything but.

"Yeah, I'm *sure* you are."

But there's no time for more banter, because they have a ghost on the run and the blare of the EMF increases while they hurry down the fucking street. He still has no

idea how they plan to find the one spirit in the middle of the neighborhood, but they have to as there's no way someone else is going to die now that they have come this close to tracking it down. So they hurry and--

--Sam grips his arm, yanks him to a stop. Hard. Which just about results in him falling right on his ass. And, dude, so not nice. "What the hell, Sammy!"

"Dean."

"Dude. What?!"

When he doesn't answer, Dean turns to look at whatever his brother is staring at and... stops. Just stops. On the other side of the empty street, a shabby corner where the glow of the lanterns don't quite reach, two figures stand. Two someones. And from the soft silhouettes, it looks like two kids. At first, he thinks they are normal, you know, like him, like Sam. Human. *Alive*. Wants to call out to them, ask what they are doing out here, alone, that it is not safe and they should head back home.

But Dean's done this long enough, has seen things often enough to know it's not like that.

That there is no reason to call out to them, to warn them. They are not alive, not anymore and probably not for a long time. And never again will they be. Already dead eyes lock with his and he can't help the shiver running through him. Faster than his eyes can see, the two figures are gone. He expects an attack, something, but nothing happens. Habit makes Dean raise his shotgun in defense. A habit that saved his ass and a lot of others on numerous times, and he's not sorry for reacting to it on instinct. He's not going to risk letting his guard down.

But when he can see them yet again, they are further away down the street, still watching. They're switching position again and again, back and forth, back and forth, never approaching either him or Sam, so fast he's getting dizzy. And Sam normally is a magnet for all things supernatural, especially ghosts *and* malevolent cords. If it was anyone else, even a dog, Dean would think these two were trying to get them to follow. He and Sam share a brief look and Dean knows they're thinking the same thing.

Why not? It's worth a shot.

So here they go again, running through the darkness, chasing they go after them. And they are NOT splitting up damnit, not again. Oh, hell, no!

But who ever said it was goddamn difficult to chase someone corporal – *thank you, Sammy* – through dark streets clearly never had to deal with following two ghosts – paranormal and *not* corporal – through the same scenery. Flashlights and all. Duh. *Obviously*.

They chase them for what feels like hours, but can't be more than a few minutes – chase them until they suddenly disappear. Standing at the mouth of another dark

alley, and Dean has a sudden flashback to the night before; blond hair and blue eyes, and geez, this is so not the time to go down that road. They need to find the ghost, and they need to do it fast. *If it's not already too late.* And anyway could that annoyingly voice of reason shut up for a minute? Now, that would be great.

Without a word, Sam raises his gun while Dean gets the flashlight to work. It almost slips from his hand when the EMF comes alive, louder than before. So, yeah, definitely in the right place. Nodding to each other, Sam and Dean slowly walk forward into the shadows, they've done it a million times before. A couple of steps into the alley, where the light doesn't reach anymore – and isn't that a déjà vu? – the beam of the flashlight catches on—something. Something red. Liquid.

Oh fuck. No need to actually check it, Dean already knows it's blood. A lot of blood as it is, little drops leading deeper into the darkness. The giant knot in his gut tightens. Something already happened here, he knows it for sure when the beam catches on a shoe. A single white sneaker, now dyed red with splotches of blood. Not blinking, he keeps on walking until he finds the other shoe. It's still attached to a foot, but it's not white anymore for it lies in a puddle of more blood.

Behind the large dumpster, half sitting, half lying, they find the body of a young man, lifeless, dead eyes staring into a darkness behind them that might even be darker than the night itself. The kid looks like he was beaten with a leather belt or something like that, and to his absolute horror and disgust, Dean realizes that he's right, that the boy was actually beaten to death. It resembles the other guys dead.

They way he looks, there's no need to check for a pulse. Dean does it anyway. There's nothing but cold skin and flesh and blood, no sign of life whatsoever. He's been here for some time now. Kid breathed his last breath hours ago; alone, afraid and in pain. The thought almost brings Dean to his knees. Instead, he briskly rubs the hand that is not covered in blood and God knows what else over his face, violently scrubbing his short hair. Why this surprises him, well, that's a good question considering how the other one had been killed.

Or, no, slaughtered might be a better term for that bloodbath.

He shudders involuntarily. Better not think of it.

"There's nothing we could have done, Dean. We didn't know."

No, they didn't, they couldn't know. And you know what? It still sucks.

Turning away, Sam calls 911. It's all there's left to do now.

The drive back to the motel is made in silence, both busy with their own thoughts, while Dean tries to not drive them into a tree. He's tired, but he knows the nights not over yet. They need cash and even though he'd rather sleep for the next 24 hours, he knows it's not an option. At least not now. Not yet. When they return to their room, Dean gets the first shower just because, and at the time they're both done, Sam offers to drive him to the next bar so he can have a few more drinks than usual.

So he can let go, is what Sam doesn't say but for once, Dean accepts without protest. They need money, and he'd like to forget the last 10 hours ever happened. Once he's dressed, he throws Sam the keys and Sam takes them without a word. They leave the motel room like they arrived.

In silence.

- TBC

Interlude #1: ...You flinch.

[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]

Part 05: ...Did he say that out loud?

A/N: This continues from where Part 4 left off... For all of you who can't access the 'adult' chapter, don't worry. There's absolutely nothing of substance in it; nothing that is important to the storyline anyway.

By the way, the little tale of "Dean & the 'forgotten' bottle" [you'll see ;)] in this part is actually true. It happened to one of my friends when we were in college.

Hours later, middle of the night, really, he's sitting at the end of a bar, not alone since the bar is crowded, but he might as well be. Not even the bartender is trying to make conversation anymore and that's good. Dean doesn't want to make conversation. If he wanted, he'd go talk to his brother. No, this is all okay. Besides, he's long past ordering a glass of whiskey. Instead there's a bottle with the liquor sitting right there on the bar, a shotglass in his hand. Sighing, he presses the glass against his lips, draining it.

And then something strange happens. And frankly, he can't be that drunk. *No way.* One moment he's sitting there staring at said bottle, and the next there's a hand on said bottle. Moving it away. From him. Out of his sight. *What the...?* Blinking, he slowly follows the bottle, you know, to find out what's possessing the freaking bottle or to face his very own new arch enemy who took his new best friend away from him. And *then* tell them off, but, it's... "You."

And he's far too confused to tell him off. Him being Brian. Who promptly smirks. "I could say the same fucking thing." He sing-songs, finger playing with the label of the bottle that he's half peeled off, "And I'm not even drunk. Like you."

"I'm not drunk." Off Brian's look, he says, "Okay, 'kay, a little, but not really."

Eyeing the bottle in his hand – my bottle – the brunet raises a single, perfect brow. And isn't that his move?! "How much of this shit did you have?"

"Not enough. Not nearly enough." That's about right. Dean can still think about this... kid... and that's the last thing he wants to do tonight.

"Bullshit."

"Not."

"Yeah, it totally is."

"Dude. Ya don't know me. Ya can't know if 'm drunk or not."

"After this? I fucking can."

"Cannot."

"I so can." Brian snickers, and Dean can't help but laugh, too. This is one of the most stupid conversations he's ever had, even with the excuse of being slightly tipsy. And that's saying something. "Seriously, though, your kid brother is looking for you all over the fucking place," he finally says, waiting. For what, Dean has no idea. Obviously Brian gets the memo, too, because he goes on with: "He said you were going to meet him at a bar, and you weren't there when he came to get you."

Right. He did say he'd wait for Sammy, but, "I got bored." Easy reasoning, right? Wrong.

"You got bored? Doing what? Drinking? You're doing the same here." Pause, "Even though I guess the view is better than breeder central."

Breeder...central? He doesn't have to understand that right now, does he? His brain seems to agree since his hand reaches for the bottle again. Brian, that sadistic fucker, keeps it away from him. "Huh...?" And damn it, that is so not fair. It's his fucking bottle and--

"Ah, ah, ah, I think you got enough for tonight. And probably tomorrow and next week," he mutters, waving to... the barkeeper. Probably. Most likely. He says something to the guy, too, but Dean isn't really sure what it is. Then his eyes are back on Dean. "It's fucking time for you to go home."

"Don't have a home," he mumbles. And that's right. He doesn't. Motel isn't home.

"Right, than back to your hotel."

"Motel."

Brian rolls his lips into his mouth, sighing profoundly before he responds anew. "Fine. Motel, then. Come on, let's get you outside. Your brother should be here any minute."

"How's that?"

"Justin went to—uh, you remember Justin, don't you?" Dean nods. 'Course he does! "Good, well, we saw you in here, so Sunshine went to fetch him. Guy was pretty fucking worried."

"Kid's always worried. Even though 'm not dyin' anymore, 'm fine now." The brunet looks at him like he's speaking Latin. Ooohhh right, he said dying. No, no, no, "...not really... dying. Ya know?" Brian probably doesn't, hell, Dean doesn't know, but gives him some credit for nodding anyway. "'S just got boring to play pool."

"Pool?"

"Yeah..."

"You any good?"

Dean shrugs. "Hm. Okay, I guess." The bunch of cash in his wallet is proof enough. Brian doesn't have to know that, though. Nope. Than again, there was the story with him and dying and...

...A voice calling his name. Since he's pretty sure he's not dead, well... "Dean."

That leaves... "Sammy..." Right.

"Don't Sammy me, man.", he furiously wags a finger at Dean, stabbing his shoulder. "Jesus, you said you'd stay at the bar..."

"Boring..."

"What are you? Four?! And since when is... oh fine, whatever, but you know how to use a phone, dude! Would it have killed you to--" He cuts off like someone cut his throat. Oops. Wrong choice of words, there Florence Nightingale, eh? "Forget it. You're wasted."

"Not really."

Brian snorts, but Sam shakes his head, suddenly smiling. "I know. I saw you wasted, remember, and this is not it." He hears someone chuckle, and he knows it's not him, or Sammy, nor is it Brian again. Turning left, he comes face to... with blond hair. Blond hair, blue eyes, Justin. "You, too."

Said blond smiles at him. "Hello to you, too, Dean," he grins.

"Yeah."

Sam snorts. "Come on. Let's get you back to the motel."

"Aww, already?"

"Already? Dean, don't be difficult."

"M not."

"Then get up and follow me out of the bar. To your car."

He perks up at that. "Car? She okay?"

A sigh, and man, Sam makes it sound like it is the most ridiculous thing he could have asked. Maybe it is. *Maybe*. "Of course she's okay. What do you think, drive her off the road into a tree? No, wait, don't answer that. So, can we leave now?"

"Sure."

Getting off the barstool, he wobbles somewhat, but really just a little before he finds his feet again. "Is he okay to walk?" he hears Justin ask. Probably talking to Sam.

"Yeah, he's not as drunk as you think." Then Sam says something to someone else, probably the barkeeper, too. And why the hell is no one talking to him these days anymore? Then he's pushed rather rudely toward the exit. And oh, yeah, he's definitely somewhat smashed. Not too much, he can still *think*, but *not* too straight. Which is incredibly ironic, Dean thinks, considering where he's at. Get it? Straight? Gay bar? Yeah. Sooo funny. Or not. Then there's a door, and cold and outside and yeah.

Cool.

Stumbling down the few – all too many – stairs into the street, he more or less blindly follows that ugly beige jacket in front of him. Because, see, even though it is ugly, it belongs to his brother. And Sammy holds his car hostage. The thought makes him giggle hysterically, he admits, which causes Ugly Jacket to stop and Dean to run into him. "Ugh. Why'd ya stop?" And did he mention the jacket tastes even worse than it looks?

Then someone is laughing and... did he say that out loud?

"Dean?" Brian.

"Huh?"

"Shut up and walk." Guy doesn't sound pissed, more amused.

Oh. "Okay." The longer he's out in the cold, the better his head feels. Or not really, it's just not that drowsy anymore. Maybe that had been the smoke and the heat in the bar. Yeah, probably.

And then his body decides this is a good time and place as any to get rid of the content of his stomach and show him otherwise. Which is... yuck. Yuck. It takes a while to, you know, settle down again, but when it finally does, suddenly there's this annoying buzz drilling his ears, and he knows it's not the blood rushing in his ears. Nope. It takes maybe another minute or two 'til it clicks that it's someone's voice. And not very quiet, which *ouch*. Does the fucker have to cuss so... loudly?

Only then it dawns on him exactly who it is he's talking to. And fuck.

All right, Dean is not exactly sure what's going on, why such a loud asshole is ripping on his brother and... the two... dudes – *Brian and Justin*, the more rational part of his brain provides, *oh yeah, right* – but one thing is for damn sure. No one talks to or about his Sammy that way! No one. Before he can lose his balance, he grips the guy's shoulder and shoves him against the wall. It's dark here, dark enough not to raise suspicion, and if he does? Dean shrugs. He so doesn't care. That asshole, however, is gaping at him like a fish. Mouth hanging open and... huh. Looking kinda dumb.

That is incredibly funny, too, so he's giggling. Again.

The dude just looks dumber. ...*that a word*...? Hmmm, maybe. Probably. At least that shit looks like it, so if it isn't a word already, it should be. Hell, he makes it one. Yup. There. But now he's something more important to take care of... because the fucker is going down. "That" he says, "'s my little brother you are talkin' about, ya fucking piece of shit. And that's *sooo* not accat....accapa.... Is so not *cool*, dude! Thank ya lucky stars that 'm too fucked in the head right now, or you'd wake up missing more than jus' ya teeth!"

He pushes one forearm harder against the man's throat, cutting of precious air supply, making the very simple act of breathing a very hard thing to do. And that's even more funny. From far away he can hear his brother talking. All that actually registers with him is his name. "Dean." *Yeah, that's my name, Sammy, I know that.* "Dean!" Huh. So he finally noticed the guy wasn't spewing bullshit around anymore. Fancy. And he's still saying something.

Dean.Dean!deandeandeandeandeandeandeandeandeandeandeDean!

Over and over. Ugh. *Fuck! Stop that!*

Shaking his head, he slams the guy one more time into the rough brick wall. And the muffled grunt of pain is incredibly pleasing right now. "If at all. I'd a pretty shitty night, and I don' have the... the... 'm not in the mood to break every single bone in ya body, but dude, I so would if I was." Pausing, it doesn't really matter if what he's saying still makes at least some sense. But he has to breathe, so yeah, *breathe is good.* "Jus' so ya know, I'll only break ya jaw."

And than, before the asshole can even open his mouth to spew out more garbage, he brings up his fist, punching him in the jaw. It doesn't sting a bit. *Huh?* Dean thinks that maybe it should. Punching someone *always* stings. Even with as much alcohol in his bloodstream as he has tonight. Only that's not what happens, 'cause see, he still has the beer bottle from before in his hand and now... yeah. Not anymore. He... forgot that it's there? Does that work as an excuse? Maybe, maybe not, but hey! Drunk here, so that *so* doesn't count!

So now you're drunk? Oh shut up!

He watches in stupid fascination as the liquid trails down the side of the wall, staining it a dark shade of brown where it's left wet. Dean looks down at the unconscious man with a sigh. Adds a condemning frown. "What a waste," he murmurs. 'Cause it so is. Once he finally manages to drag his eyes away from the poor image of spilled beer, Sam, Justin and Brian are looking at him like he's lost his mind. *Wha...?* Didn't mean to knock out the guy with the bottle, so why are they... Oh. Oh!

Well... "The... the beer. 'M talking about the beer," he clarifies, as best as his tired mind is capable of.

Sam tries to hide the amusement, but it's a lost cause. Even drunk Dean can still read his brother like a book. *Well, most of the time*, ya know? Stepping closer to him, he

takes whatever is left of the broken bottle out of his hand, - and oh, that is still there? – throwing it away as far as he can. Which is pretty far. Dean watches it bust into a shower of a million tiny glittering shards, glittering in the glow of the street lights. *Pretty....* And, yeah, maybe he is kind of grinning like a loon, too.

"Yeah. I know," Sam says softly, and he's sure that if he wasn't so smashed right now, he'd say it is disgustingly sweet. "Come on, I'll get you another one. Tomorrow."

He goes on like his brother never even opened his mouth. "What's it with everyone getting fucking violent tonight? Is not even the full moon," he grumbles. "And then there's las' night, too. Fucking fuckers."

"Come on Dean. Let's go." Dean stares at his brother. "You need to sleep it off, dude. Hence, back to the motel, with your bed?"

"Right." Okay. So, his car. Left or right?

"I parked a block from here..." Right, Sam had his beloved car. *Thanks for the reminder, dude.* Grinning stupidly, he starts to follow his brother.

"Is he really okay to walk?"

Am I okay to walk?! Well, yeah, what the hell does the kid think? He can very well walk on his own, 'cause... 'cause he's been walking feeling worse than just drunk. He's walked with concussions, walked with a broken collarbone, bleeding all over the fucking highway... so yeah, he can very well walk, even if he might be dragging his feet over the—

"Yes. And like I said, he's not half as drunk as you think."

"Aww... Sammy, you really, really... worry abou' me that much?" His brother flips him off, but keeps walking next to him. "Mother hen," he murmurs quietly, grinning. Sam glares. From behind them he hears Brian snicker. He doesn't have the energy to argue, so he keeps on walking.

And walking.

And they are still walking.

And how long can one freaking block be? Where did his brother park? In Indiana?! Kicking some loose pebbles out of the way, he already regrets agr-- "Stop dragging your feet or I'm going to carry you." He grins. "I'm not joking." The grin fades. Dean knows that tone. Uh-huh. It's the 'I'm being deadly serious, so you better not fuck with me'-tone. And it means business! Yup. He knows from experience.

He stops dragging his feet.

"Good boy."

“M not freakin’ four!”

“No, you’re just acting like it. Come on we’re here.”

And he barely avoids asking ‘we’re where?’, but that would be a very childish reply and... and... ‘Cause dude, he’s NOT four! He’s not even *acting* like he is! He took out that... that asshole back there on his own and... and—He’s drunk! Yeah. That is the answer to everything right now, because it’s all his feeble mind can come up with.

But here she is! His beautiful, reliable baby. She even looks good under the glaring street lights. “Baby...,” he coos, running his hand along her side.

Brian whistles. “Nice car.”

“Yeah,” he says, smirking, “and if ya put a scratch on her, Sammy, ‘m gonna kick your ass!” ‘Sammy’ just rolls his eyes, guiding him around the car and... No. Nononono! This is the wrong door. He might be the drunk one here, but... “‘Tis the wrong door Sammy.”

“No it’s not. Not for tonight anyway,” he adds softly.

That sobers him up somewhat quickly. “Dude. You’re not gonna drive my car!”

“Dean. You’re in no condition to drive. Hell, I doubt you could walk that much longer. Besides, I already drove it – her – over here to collect your sorry ass, so get over yourself and stop being a petulant toddler.”

For a long moment, all Dean can do is stare at his little brother, stifling the urge to punch him. He has no idea why his mouth is suddenly dry. No, really, he doesn’t. But, okay. Fine! It’s not like Sam’s so much off with what he’s saying or anything. It’s just him being an ass. That’s all. Falling back against his car, - sorry – his shoulders slump in defeat. Sam knows it, too, so he resigns himself to watching the guy just because.

Then again, it’s too much work to keep that up as Sammy walks around the Impala to unlock the doors. Instead, he leans his head back until he’s staring up into the night sky. It’s beautiful. Barely a cloud. He can see a million stars twinkling up there, winking at him as he stares from down here. Uhu. Er... he didn’t just think that, did he? Snorting a choked laugh, he’s sure he must have been channeling Sammy right there for a second. It’s *so* something his brother would say, too. Or think.

Whatever.

- TBC

Part 06: ...The drive to the motel is, well, blurry.

A/N: ~~This is a mostly un-beta'd version of this chapter since I didn't want to let you all wait so long. I'm gonna replace this with the proofread version as soon as I get it back from my beta. :)~~ **ETA:** Done. Just replaced the former text with the beta'd version. Beta by LJ's wonderful *mayalaen* She's an angel. :)

----*

Then, Sammy's back at his side He's even talking, only Dean thinks he's not talking to him, since there are other voices interacting with Sam's and it's not his own. He'd know, right? Is he sleeping? Dead? Coma? Hm... well, can't be, 'cause he can still see the stars up there, so his eyes aren't closed. Right? Certainly. And he wouldn't be leaning on his car. Dead or not, there's no way is he going to risk ruining his baby's paint.

After some time the three voices around him start to *sloooowlyyyyy* blur into one, making it very hard to follow the conversation. Oh Christ, who's he trying to kid?! Making it nearly impossible to follow the freakin' conversation. And him fucking dizzy on top of it all. Maybe he shouldn't have had that last drink. The... the... uh, the last one, the... Whateverthefuck it was called. Doesn't matter anyway. Maybe. Just maybe.

And maybe it would be a good idea to sit down and not stare at the stars anymore. Right. Sit down. You know, like, right the fuck now.

"-nd he's that bad-"

"-ke that--still managed to-"

So he does. Not that anyone notices him slipping to the floor.

"-shouldn't even be-"

"-ng upright-"

No, they keep on making *noises* - shrill, buzzing noises - and he's kinda switching from hearing to not hearing and something in between. Ugh. He presses his head harder against the car.

"-s not that bad-doesn't bother-"

It's cold and quiet and that's bliss.

"-lone-ck out of-loft's closer-"

"-on't think-good idea-Dean-motel-"

"M is still here," he mumbles. Or he thinks he does. He isn't sure. His lips feel kinda numb. Like rubber. But then! Then three heads snap around to look at him. Or down at him. He gets even dizzy from watching them move so frackin' fast, and his stomach seems to actually agree with his head on this one. *Yuck*. Dean feels like throwing up all over the pavement. Again. Double yuck. *Usually I can ho—*"Id my liquor better... mmm, strange..."

Sam stares at him some more, or no, maybe there are two Sams now. And wouldn't that be cool? Nah probably not. Clenching his hands into fists, ripping at some weed growing in the gaps, he tries to force the drunken haze back. To push it away. "Dude----ottle of whisk----nd god knows wha—wonder you're shitfaced."

Shitfaced. Right. Only he's not really. The 9--"11 call", right. He had wanted--"to get drunk..." ...because of the kid. Yeah, okay *now I--*"remember." Somewhat. There's this white noise again, and his head rolls forward and onto his knees. Hitting his nose on solid bone. *Ouch*.

"—ong drive's not—motel and staying—getting sick on the way to—good idea—"

Huh?

Getting sick? Driving? *Wait, wait, wait!* What the fuck?! What the hell is he talking about. Oh hell! Now that thought makes the idea of throwing up a lot less welcoming. And... Oh hell no! "Dude! I'm not gonna puke in my car! I'd rather choke to death on it!" he snaps, receiving a small smile from his brother.

Who's currently kneeling in front of him. *When did that happen?* He might have blacked out there for a moment somewhere. Oh well.

"See? He's not gonna die," Sam teases, and just then he realizes that the young blond is crouching right next to his brother and – in turn – him. Kid's looking... worried? Yeah, worried. Huh. He's used to his brother looking at him that way, even more so lately, but a stranger? Weird. Maybe it's him being tipsy, or whatever.

Dean tries to smile. It might end up like a grimace. "M good..."

A pale hand comes to lie on his arm, troubled blue eyes watching. "You don't look good, Dean."

"M always looking good..."

From... somewhere, he hears Brian snort, saying, "He needs a fucking bed and a nap, that's all. It's not going to kill him, Justin."

"Uhu." He holds out a hand to his brother. "Up," he orders. "He's right."

Sam sighs profoundly before he pulls Dean to his feet without a word, letting him get into the front seat all by his lonesome, drunk-but-not-really self. *Thank you*. Only...

Fucking dizziness. He jumps when the door slams shut with a bang. "Dude. Not so loud..." he mumbles, head lolling against the cold window. And oh, isn't that nice? *Coldcoldcold...* Such precious, beautiful cold!

Dean smiles contently, patting the Impala's dashboard. His baby always knows how to take care of him. And no, he doesn't care that he's talking about a car. Why the hell do you ask?

*_*_*_*

The drive to the motel is... well, blurry. Sounds and touches – not *that* kind of touches, come on! – and lights, and... Okay, okay, so it's missing. Not. There. Completely nonexistent. Probably passed out for a minute or two again, or something. He has no idea. Next thing he knows, he's standing in the middle of the street, and when the hell did he get out of his car anyway? He can't even remember stopping somewhere.

But they apparently did, because he's not there. *We're not in Kan*—"sas anymore..." Shit.

"Dean?"

That's not his brother mumbling into his ear, is it? "Hm...?"

The voice sounds 12 different kinds of amused when it says, "Are you conscious?"

"Hm..."

Someone else chuckles.

"Your brother had to go and park the car", the former voice explains, warm breath tickling his cheek. He sighs. The warmth in front of him is really not that bad, not bad at all. Sharp contrast to whatever it is that's cold on his back. "We'll just wait for him to go in."

"...hmmm..."

"You look fucking stunning, all flushed like this, Dean," the voice drawls, low and even and--

Heavy eyes snap open... to reveal awfully familiar hazel eyes. *Pretty*. And how can they be familiar after only *one* meeting? But... what is Brian doing here anyway? Hmm. And why doesn't Sam park in front of their room? There's fucking--"parking space enough right infr..."--ont of their freakin' motel room, so why park so far away?

"You look fucking hot, Dean", he whispers, lips against his ear. And why didn't he notice the hand on his waist or another on his shoulder? *Must be going numb...* "If you could just see yourself," the voice goes on, teeth nipping at his earlobe. One hand. "So fucking hot like this, I'd like to--"

"Brian!"

Ah, Blondie. Wow. What'd his brother do now? Hopefully nothing expensive. He's so not going to pay that. Oh but hey, getting ... by that pretty, er hot brunet isn't so bad if that how—Uh. Wait.

"What?"

"Don't say shit like that. Fuck, he's drunk he..."

"M not drunk."

"Fine.", the kid snaps, "You're tipsy then, better?"

He offers a grin, head bobbing in a messy nod. "Yeahhh..."

"O-kay, then."

The blond stares at them until Brian sighs in defeat. "Fine Sunshine." Dean feels him tightening his grip on him pulling them closer together. He's sure he's able to stay upright on his own, but why not just stay like this? It's not like this is a particularly bad position to be in, you know. Someone snorts softly in his ear. "Hear that, Sonny Boy?" Brian murmurs moments later.

Talking out loud again. *Great.* Dean can see Justin rolling his eyes over the brunet's shoulder, but he's smiling, too. "Shut up, Bri."

Lips touch his ear, warm breath tickling his neck, and he sucks in a shaky breath. Wow, that feels... great. Really, really great and... *Oh shit!* His knees buckle a little as Brian kisses the soft flesh, and that's so not cool! Well not the kissing part, that's actually mighty fine, but his knees feeling like Jell-O? Nope. Not cool. He's not-- "Tell me to fuck off, and I will," Brian whispers. *Huh?* Dean doesn't say a thing.

Before he knows how to articulate that, however, Brian covers his lips with his own.

And shoves his tongue in Dean's mouth.

It's the last thing he remembers. Everything after that is hazy and blurred, but he remembers a hand on his face, another on his waist, hard body pressing him against what he thinks might have been a wall. He remembers feeling wonderful, just wonderful and... that's it. If he passed out or just fell asleep, Dean has no memory of. The only thing he does know is the feeling of lips on his, the cold and hot shiver it sent down his spine. Ah well.

He comes out of his numb haze rather abruptly, jumping at a loud bang all too close to his ears. "Shh, Dean, you're okay," he hears, all too close to his ear. "It's okay."

And that is so not Brian, thus, it has to be Sam. Which begs the question of *what the fuck?!* "Dude. Hands off the merchandise!" he snarks, or at least that's what he wanted

to say. It comes out a little, well, let's say slurred. One word tumbling into the next, but the soft laughter makes it clear that he got the message across. *Good!*

"Sorry, dude, but you were kinda asleep," it's so nice that he doesn't say passed out, he almost wants to hug him, "and nearly walked into a wall, there."

Did I? Well, where the hell are they now anyway? "'s not that bad."

"What? Walking into a wall?" Sam murmurs, clearly amused.

Then again, it looks like Brian actually managed to kiss him until he *passed out*, huh? His lips tingle at the thought, and he has to fight the impulse to touch them, run his fingers over them. "Hmmm." Sammy wouldn't understand, and-- Shit! Something clicks and... *Oh. Shit!* Sammy! That's what his mind is trying to tell him with its frantic running a mile a minute. He forgot all about him again. Fucking shit!

"I disagree, so there. Just wake up for a second, Dean. You can go back to sleep in a minute, okay?" But Sammy doesn't act out of the ordinary. In fact, he acts all motherly again, which is... quite normal these days.

And that fucking tone? Gets him every single time. Drunk or not. *And 'm not really drunk.* Yeah, that too. "...hmmm..." Got him ever since the stupid kid uttered his first words. Opening his eyes – and hey, that's probably the reason why everything is so dark in here! – he takes in the motel room and blinks. Blinks again. Shaking his head to clear his vision, because this can so not be. He blinks a third time, - which, all at once? Not a good idea – but nothing changes other than the room is now spinning like merry-go-round.

"I... could have sworn the motel didn't have polished hardwood floor and a... naked guy on the wall when we left yesterday."

"And you notice that now after we took an elevator up here?"

An elevator?! "I was... kinda napping on the way for a minute...?"

Sam chuckles. "That's a good excuse as any. Come on, let's get you back to sleep." His little brother manipulates his body over to the white – Jesus, that's not good – couch and him out of his jacket and—

A soft pillow hits him square in the head. Huh. Blinking a few more times, his vision clears to reveal a smirking... Brian.

Right. "Listen to your brother, sleeping beauty. Otherwise you'll look like shit."

Why, thank you! And that from the guy who kissed him like the devil moments ago. Or maybe an hour. He wouldn't know the difference. Ah hell, he's too sleepy to care right now, falling face down on the couch, and oh. Oh! Dreamland. That thing is comfy. Not that he particularly cares about *that* at this point, - he'd sleep on the floor right about now – but he slept in beds less comfortable than this couch. And all right.

He'll find out where exactly they are when he's sober. Now he's going to sleep. He should sleep. Sleep off the alcohol. But there's a hand on his calf, another on his ankle, and, "...fuckoff..hm...sam'y!", he mumbles into the pillow, already half asleep.

"--can't sleep in your boots, Dean..."

The fuck I can't. "...leave 'em 'lone..." Tomorrow he's are gonna find out what's going on here, why the motel is not the motel anymore and what the hell his brother did, and why this, this Brian is here, but now? He couldn't give a rat's ass. It's warm and soft and it feels like heaven. He doesn't want to move. And he won't move.

He'll deal with tomorrow, well, tomorrow.

"Let him be, it's--"

And Brian's voice is the last he hears before 'sleep' finally catches up to him.

In other words: He's out like a light.

*_*_*

It's a smothered scream that wakes him up, minutes, hours later, he can't tell. It's still dark outside as well as inside. He's so used to this by now – so used to waking to muffled screams – that the first thing that pops into his mind is *Sammy*. Only that it isn't Sam, and it's not the ceiling of their motel room that he's staring at. So yeah, it's... really not Sam and it's definitely, really *so* not their motel room. What it comes down to is that they didn't go back to the motel. *Thank you Sherlock*. For whatever reason.

Before he can sit up to look around some more to figure out what's going on, he hears muffled voices from somewhere close. *Brian and Justin*. That, however, is the only thing his poor, still somewhat scrambled brain can come up with. It's familiar and that's the point. Not that he actually understands a word of what they are saying, not really. But it's okay, it's none of his business anyway.

Yadda, yadda.

Since they are both sleeping here, this place might be their home. Now sitting up for real, there's a soft glow coming from... the bedroom. Or he thinks it is, since he thinks it's a bed he's seeing in there. It's all kinda blurry. The rest of the apartment, though, is open space. *A loft*. Nice. He drags his eyes away from huge windows to find his brother lying on a pretty comfortable-looking futon, more or less sleeping on the floor. And for once the nightmares and visions seem to leave him alone. He smiles. It's about time.

Lying back down, he listens to the soft voices coming from the other room, whispered words soon turning into soft moaning and whimpers. Dean smiles softly. Let them have their privacy. Soon, the noises are lulling him back into a deep, peaceful slumber.

----*

The second time he wakes that night, er, morning, whatever, he knows something is... off. Not right. And that? Wakes him up like a cold shower, throbbing head be damned. Energy's buzzing in the air, he feels it crawling on his skin, in his bones, the air freakin' *vibrates* with it. His fingers itch for his weapons. Any weapon. And then, without so much as a warning, the lamp on the far end of the cupboard explodes in a whirl of light, flying glass shards and sound. Before he knows what's going on, he's on his feet, his first glance going to his brother.

Sam's awake, of course - how could he not be, - eyes wide but obviously not hurt. *Thankyouthankyouthankyou*. Dean knows what this is before the lights even start to flicker and the room gets chilly. They stare at each other, and in the next instant, they aren't anymore. There, in the middle of the few feet separating them, two ghosts are hovering. Children, really. And if he isn't still drunk, he'd say those are the same two ghosts from a few hours ago. They must be, because how likely is it to find not two, but four ghosts that actually are not trying to kill them? Or not yet, anyway?

Yeah, not very. And he doesn't have to be a math genius to figure that one out.

One of them, the little girl, can't be much older than six, maybe seven. The boy is older by a few years at least. Both of them have their throats cut, dark red – black – blood gushing from the cuts like water from wrecked pipes dropping to the floor. *Dropdropdrop*. The girl's head is hanging in an awfully unnatural angle. In other words, Dean's pretty sure her delicate neck's broken. Possibly what killed her, too. And damn. It just about *hurts* to look at them.

Their hair appears to be wet, drenched with water, possibly blood and god knows what else. Dean isn't even sure black is the natural color.

Shocked gasps from his left remind him yet again that Sam and he are not alone, that this is not their shared room at that shabby motel, that they have an audience. *Fuck*. However, they have to deal with their hosts later. *Much later*. First they have to get rid of their nightly visitors. When the kids suddenly move, again too fast to follow them with his eyes, he goes rigid like a brick wall.

Oh shit!

- TBC

Part 07: ...He just barely remembers not to slam the door shut.

He's expecting... something.

It happens... nothing.

It's just instinct that makes him anticipate the worst, he thinks. Experience.

But all they do is grasp each other's hands and... that's it. They hold hands, or no, they are clinging to each other, looking at him and Sam, waiting. Just waiting. For what, Dean's not sure, but then the boy's lip move. There's no sound coming out of his mouth, but he's good enough at reading lips that he gets what he's saying. Or wants to say.

"You want... *help?*" and fuck if he isn't surprised at how befuddled he sounds, "*our help?*"

The boy nods, jerky movement squeezing more black, blubbery blood out of the cut. That is something new. The help part, you know. "You two were leading us to the other--" Dean stops himself before he actually says it. But they did lead them to the kid in the alley. He's sure of it. The boy mouths a few more words, and Dean shakes his head. "No, it wasn't your fault. It would have been to late anyway."

Dead eyes stare at him, sad, and so much pain in them that Dean wonders if he's still drunk. Or maybe he's going nuts. Or both. Dead eyes can not look sad or pained or anything else. Nope. Only he's not. Not really.

"Hurts."

Dean's eyes snap to the girl. She's not looking at him, head bowed, and he can't be sure if she really said it. "Hurts?" he questions. The boy nods. "What hurts?"

"Her. Killings. To punish."

"Who?"

Oh right, Sammy's here, too.

"She."

He looks at his brother. "You killed... Someone... *uses* you to kill these people? You killed that kid?" Sam asks, baffled.

"Yes."

"How?"

The ghosts stay silent.

"You don't know." No, of course they don't, how could they?

"Others."

"You killed all the others?"

This time, it is the girl who shakes her head no. Her head wobbles like one of these odd bobble-head dolls, and his stomach does a little flip flop. "More. Of us." More ghosts, of course. Even though his heart beats loud in his ears, he doesn't miss the soft noise coming from across the room. It's barely a whisper, more like a sharp intake of breath, but it echoes louder than a clap of thunder in a storm.

Just standing at the top of the stairs, the blond looks like he's about to cry, a dozen emotions flashing through shining blue eyes. Maybe he already is. Dean can't tell. In spite of being dark in here, he very well notices that the boy trembling like a leaf, though. If it's fear or something else, well, Dean has no way to tell. Conversely, Brian looks as expressive as a stone wall. Approachable like Fort Knox, and for Dean, it's almost like looking into a mirror. At himself, and Christ, that's a scary thought, isn't it?

Considering he's facing two ghosts, not to mention everything else that came before, it's a very queer thing to say.

Or even think.

But hey! It's his job, something he's done almost as long as he can think. So if you look at it from that angle, it's really not. Strange, that is. But now that he thinks about it, neither man flinches or screams their head off at the two spirits flickering in and out of existence in their very own living room. And yes, Dean has to give them credit for that. There are not a lot of people who wouldn't run screaming from a ghost or two or faint.

Dean clears his throat "So, uh..."

"Do you know anything about the woman who controls you?" Sam cuts in, cutting *Dean* off in the process. "Why she does it? Something that could help us find her? Uh, help you," Sam adds, and yeah, that is probably a good move considering they asked for their help and all that...

The two children look at each other, then back at them. "Hurt."

"Daddy."

Dean frowns. "What?"

The girl's eyes shimmer with unshed tears when she whispers, "So much pain." *Huh? Can ghosts cry?*

"She's in pain? Someone's hurting her?"

The boy nods, blood freely pouring from his mouth now as well as his cut throat. Dean wonders if there is a puddle of blood on the floor by now. Which is insane, of course, but the whole *thing* is insane. Ghosts do not come to them for help. They usually try to kill them or manipulate them – *thank you Dr. Ellicott*. Friendly ghosties, well, that happens every once in a blue moon. In fact, he can count those rare occasions on the fingers of his two hands and still have fingers left.

Plenty, at that.

"Someone... hurt you too, didn't they?"

Dean turns to look at his brother and what the hell is he talking--wait. Oh shit. He can't be serious. He can't be talking about what he thinks he is talking about. But the kids nod and some wheels start to turn in his head. And he comes up with something. Something that burns in his chest. Something he really doesn't want to examine more closely. He doesn't want to, but he has to. Licking dry lips, he asks, "Who did this to you?"

The lights start to flicker harder yet again, the boy's eyes almost glowing. "Mommy."

Dean closes his eyes. This just can't be. "And this chick, she's using you to kill other victims because..."

"...You got away," Sam finishes for him. "To punish you because you died and she had to live through it all."

The boy merely stares back, calm and cold and not moved at all. It's all the confirmation they need. Dean can't hold back a shudder. It's gotten freakin' cold in here, freezing even, and it's good to have that as an excuse for his reaction. He wants to ask how she did it, how that chick got them to take her orders, but Dean knows that they don't know. They have to find out how it started to know how to end this. The only thing he does know for sure is that there are ways to do it if one just bothered to look close enough.

Apparently, that chick did.

As did Sue Ellen LeGrange.

She had found a way to bind that Reaper, something so many people didn't even believe to exist. But desperation can push decent, everyday people to do things they'd never consider under normal circumstances. Forced to go down a road they don't think exists, just to discover that, yes, it so does. Maybe this chick has been just as desperate. The motivation for such desperation was surely different, no doubt about that, but that's all the difference there is.

He wants to say something to those poor kids, to comfort them or something, -

anything really - only there's nothing *to* say. They are dead, and there's nothing to say or do to make that all right ever again.

Then he blinks, trying to force away the hot burn in his eyes, and they are gone.

Oh fuck.

This little encounter, though, explains a part of this freakin' puzzle that gave him the never ending headache from hell, and with it one set of the killings. Now they just have to figure out what the rest means, who the chick is, how they can stop this madness once and for all... And isn't that the *oh* so simple part? *Ah hell.* Sighing, he briskly rubs his hand over the back of his neck. *One step at a time*, he tells himself. One step at a time.

And the next step brings him to yet another line he really doesn't want to cross. Not that there is much of a choice. They saw too much already, the million dollar question merely is: How *exactly* are they to explain the two late-night visitors to their hosts?

Brian oh-so-gracefully gives them an opening: "That wasn't a fucking dream, was it?"

Dean's gaze involuntarily snaps to his brother, though, and the two share a long look. "I wish," they both mutter. And oh yeah, this is going to be a long, long day. Dean has no idea if he should laugh or cry. Only this is nothing to joke about so laugh is out of the picture. He doesn't do crying either, so might as well opt for door number three.

Anger.

Because, hell, it could have been different. The two ghosts *could* have been their typical vengeful spirits out to kill them or whatever and... "Why the hell didn't we think about bringing shit up here?" he growls. All of a sudden extraordinarily pissed, he stalks over to the designer stools in front of the fucking designer kitchen, starting to put on his fucking not designer boots.

"Cause we're not in a motel? How the hell did you want to explain it?" Sam reasons. "And you were drunk out of your mind *and* we had no idea they were gonna show up here? It's not like they go around killing each night, Dean."

Dean angrily waves the excuse away. "Doesn't matter. I should have fucking remembered that."

"Dean."

"Shut up Sam. I'm gonna get our shit up here." He's already half out of the door, when he adds a curt, "You stay here", as an afterthought, pissed at himself and the world.

Justin's quiet voice floors him a bit, albeit it does nothing to stop him. "Should you, I don't know, just go out there? Alone?"

"I can take care of myself," he snaps, opening the door.

"You don't even know where I--"

"Damn it, Sammy. Just freaking *stay* here," he barks.

He just barely remembers not to slam the heavy door shut like he wants, 'cause duh. It's still early, and he doubts the neighbors would take very well to that interruption of their sleep. And why the hell would they?! He takes the stairs downstairs, two at a time, burning off some of the anger clawing right under his skin and turning his stomach. His trusty car is waiting for him, that is after he finally finds it one fucking street over. Making sure no ones is watching, nosy neighbors and all, he pops opens the trunk.

Dean works effectively as always, hands moving fast and direct, putting together a mix of what they need. Shotguns, salt, the EMF meter, two guns, their dad's journal. Just to be on the safe side. He goes for some holy water and silver bullets, too. It might come in handy, you just never know with this job. Some clothes can't hurt, either.

All done, he's back inside the building and up the stairs before he knows it. The heavy door is still open enough to slip through and just like he left it. Brian and Justin are sitting on the barstools. Or rather Justin is sitting, Brian is more or less leaning against the counter next to the blond. On the further side of the loft, back against one of the poles, his brother is inspecting the floor. All three turn when he shuts the door. Not loud, but loud enough to get their attention. Not one of them looks especially pleased.

He tosses one duffle bag at his brother. "I take this side," he offers promptly, knowing it's not the time to fuck with him. Dean nods his thanks, not looking up when he throws the other bag onto the floor right next to the white couch. Then he starts lying out salt line after salt line. The traffic outside is the only noise in the loft for quite a long time.

It's Justin who finally breaks the silence. "So... ghosts?"

"Yup, ghosts," Dean says, putting on a false smile. Not that he's actually looking at the blond.

Brian is – *surprise, surprise* - not as tactful as Blondie, though. "What the fuck are you salting my fucking windows for?"

Dean almost smirks at how scandalous he sounds. The freaking *salt lines*, are what's bugging him, not the ghosts or whatever. Nope. Guy got balls, all right. "It keeps them away."

"The ghosts?" Justin says again, sounding, well, either amazed or disbelieving. Dean can't quite decide.

"The ghosts," he parrots curtly, "yeah." Oh it's not the questions that bother him -

even though they totally do – it's the fact that they were never supposed to find out. Not ever. They, him and Sam, and dad too, they don't work like this. In the background, that's where they do the job, drawing only as much attention as needed. "Try not to disturb them."

"But... but..."

"Salt repels ghosts", Sam explains softly, a lot calmer than Dean feels and... that's good. Good, 'cause Dean? Anything but calm. No, see, he wants to scream at his own foolishness. How the fuck could he have forgotten to do this when they came here earlier? He was not that drunk, for fucks sake! *Dad would rip me a new one.* he thinks, and he would be damn right to do so. Jesus Christ. He knows better. "They can't cross the lines. That's why you would do good in trying not to mess them up."

Out of the corner of his eyes, he sees Brian scrubbing his fingers through his thick hair. Hard. "I need a fucking drink. Fuck that. I need a shitload of fucking drinks," he grumbles, already reaching for a bottle filled with amber liquid. And yeah, even though he knows alcohol is not the answer - can't kill problems with it after all – he gets it. He totally gets it.

*_*_*

Some time later, all four of them hang out around Brian's breakfast bar. Brian, Sam and himself sitting, the young blond furiously cutting away vegetables and whatever else that isn't fast enough to escape the wrath of the sharp cooking knife he's wielding. What they are going to do with the mountain of food, Dean has no idea. Except that if Brian has no problem with what the kid's doing, why should he?

Talk about Brian. He eyes the guy out of the corner of his eye. A half empty, half full, *whatever* glass of Beam in one hand, a lit cigarette in the other, he's staring at the sharp blade ripping into yet another innocent cucumber. Jaw clenched to the point where it's starting to hurt *Dean.* by looking at it. The brunet looks - despite his efforts to appear nonchalant and doesn't give a fuck – quite a bit shell-shocked.

Sam is sitting on his other side, mutely fumbling with the water bottle the blond had fetched for him. Before turning into Jason Vorhees, that is. Dean? Well, personally Dean is just trying not to fall asleep sitting here leaning on the bar in the dark – middle of the night, really - all silent and... well yeah. Silent. It's still some time until sunrise, so he'd like to get some more shut-eye before he really has to start the day.

"I still can't believe ghosts are real."

They all jump at the sudden break in the thick, stifling silence. Justin never once stops cutting away at the stupid food, attacking it viciously - one after another after another. It's at that point that he sees it, the fine tremors that run through the kid's hand and arm. Looking closer, it's not just his hand. Hell, his whole body is trembling, almost shaking.

The knife soundly clatters to the floor with a loud band, Brian's hand already reaching

for the pale wrist before he can move away and pick it up. "Shit. Fuck. Sorry," Justin mutters harshly, trying to pull away anyway.

The brunet doesn't let go, though. Not even when he gets up, around the counter to stand behind the younger man. Free arm curling around the boys waist, pulling him flush against the taller man. Hugging him close, nose buried into the blond mane. "It's okay, Justin, it's okay," he whispers. The words are whispered so softly, so quietly, he's damn sure they are not supposed to reach their ears. Only Justin's.

Averting his eyes, he finds himself observing Sam as he twiddles with the label of the bottle yet again. As intensely as he's focusing on this terribly complicated task, Dean thinks he may be doing the same. Giving the pair privacy, that is. Well, as much as it is possible in a place like the loft. You know, no doors to close, no rooms to hide in. It's hard to find seclusion in such settings.

Then again, Dean and Sam share a motel room not much bigger than the bedroom day in day out, so privacy is a word they don't write in capital letters. Can't write in capital letters, it's not feasible. The brothers cannot afford the luxury of two rooms, let alone the risk of opening themselves up to danger on a job. The loft, on the other hand, would be like bliss. They could go out of their way if they want to before blowing the other's head off.

Sadly, nothing gold can stay and all that. Hence they will leave come morning.

Once he thinks it's all right to risk a glance, he smiles at what he sees. The mask Brian is usually wearing so tightly, it's almost nonexistent right here. Holding his young lover to him, lips gracing the blond curls and one hand still holding the kid's right. The other arm curled around him protectively. The affection in that small gesture alone is so freakin' obvious it's almost physical. Dean's sure all he has to do is reach out and he can touch it. Why people still say it's wrong, or a sin, he doesn't get it.

After a second or an hour or a week, it doesn't really matter, they finally notice him watching them. Smiling softly, Dean snags a piece of carrot from the mountain of food resting on the countertop and, not looking away, stuffs it into his mouth, grinning mischievously while he chews it. Thoroughly. It makes Justin laugh. Yup, that's exactly what was supposed to happen. They need to lighten the fuck up. So getting rid of this damn gloomy mood resting upon them like a wet, weighty blanket is the first logical step.

"Uh, sorry," Justin says, blushing slightly. "I just... I tend to cook when I get nervous. And this kinda... uh, sorry."

"I may feel like a broken record after this is over", Sam chuckles, finally putting that water bottle down, "but we've seen people flip out a lot worse and with a lot less grace than you two, Justin. It's all right. It's not like it's an everyday thing to have a ghost show up in your home in the middle of the night, so we understand."

"I just, I can't believe they are real. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes...", he trails off, shaking his head. "And even though I did, I still don't really *believe* it, you know?"

"We know."

"Yeah, don't we know..."

"How? I mean you don't learn about... stuff like this in school and shit, or whatever..."

"No you don't. It's, well, family business."

Brian's eyes burn into Dean's. "What, like becoming a cop or a firefighter or a doc like your daddy and mommy?"

Sam scoffs. "Yeah, something like that." Oh yeah, that's a question one should ask little, normal-craving Sammy. *Ouch.*

Justin shakes his head again. It's written over his pretty face that he just can't believe it. Like all of this is so far out of his grasp. And hell, it is. It really is. Dean doesn't blame the kid. He can't. "And that's your... job? Getting rid of these... these *things*?"

"If you leave out that the pay is crap, then yup. Pretty much."

"And it's always like this?"

"Nope. Usually that's not how it goes."

Dean snorts. "That's right." Getting up and wandering over to the sofa, he elaborates. "*Usually* we walk into a house, a cave, whatever, get thrown across the room into walls, do research, get thrown around some more, do more research, get strangled, cut, stabbed, bitten, drowned, burnt, shot at – take your pick – just before we manage to torch those fuckers. Literally." Spreading his arms wide, he says, "The. End."

Sam nods, visibly biting back a smile. Okay, so what if he's rambling?! He's tired. "Right. *This* was particularly harmless."

"Yeah, a freaking walk in the park."

Later, they all go back to bed, or in his case, the couch – make that a sofa, thank you, Brian. Dean's not sure if Brian and/or Justin are able to go back to sleep after what happened, but it's worth a try anyway. And as far as he's concerned, hell yes he's going back to sleep. And this time, he got rid of his clothes before he crawled under the sinfully soft blanket. Snuggling – and no way in hell is he ever going to admit to even think that word – into the welcoming warmth. Taking a deep breath, he lets his eyes fall shut.

Later, oh so much later, when the sun is finally up, when the day starts to wake up along the rest of the city, he and Sam will go out to do research, do what they always do. They will sort through numerous files and tips and probably get thrown into some walls along the way. Only for now he is okay with just lying here. For now he'll just listen to the soft voices murmuring somewhere around him, streetlights painting

dancing shadows on walls and ceiling. He'll watch the sun come up from the designer cou--er, sofa that must have cost a fortune, but no one complains about him sleeping on it.

Yeah.

He'll worry about the case in a few hours, when he's not so damn tired that he's dead on his feet or his whole body feels like it weighs a ton, sinking right into and through the soft upholstery. Sam will mess with the laptop, drag him to libraries, they will call some people, ask around and whatever the hell else, but for now, he's just happy to just... lie here and breathe. Just breathe.

Everything else can just go away or hold its breath until they're blue in the face.

For now, that's perfectly fine for Dean.

- TBC

Interlude #2: ...You knew you wanted him.

[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]

Part 08: ...Coffee. He figures they'll need it, too.

A/N: The chapter was supposed to be online last week, but work is eating me alive at the moment and I'm sorry for the delay. On the other hand, I hope the new year goes well for all of you up to this point and continues to do so.

For those of you not able to access the 'adult' chapter: let me explain that - despite of not planning on it - Brian invited Sam and Dean to stay at the loft until they finish the case. That's the only important bit that came off the last chapter; at least plot-wise. Now, carry on... ;)

Remember what he said about the not so easy figuring out part of the puzzle being ahead of them?

Yeah? Good.

Only he was wrong. Yup. It's worse.

Why, you asks? Well, let's see. Considering that these two kids are almost certainly from Colorado and died there too, 'cause how else would they be connected to the other killings, the place it started, and the chick that controls them? Which is great, just great. Given that the state of Colorado is not *exactly* on their doorstep, there's no way they can just go and ask around. But! Thank God for the internet and Sammy's mad research skills. *College paid off after all, huh, even in this job.*

After endless time of wading through websites and news archives and police recording and what the hell not, Dean's eyes felt like there were about ready to come out of his head, bounce across the floor to kill themselves jumping out of the window. Or something. And Dean is not so far behind. He's about to say something not so nice, curse really, when Sam sits up just a little bit straighter. Oh-oh. Dean knows that.

And he jumps at the opening. "Found something, college boy?"

"Uh yeah, as a matter of fact, I did."

"Thank God." He pushes the chair over to where his brother's sitting, earning himself a disapproving glance from another visitor. Oh hell, the freakin' chairs got wheels, for God's sake! Why do they have that if you can't push yourself around? Which is, he admits, a lot of fun. Yeah, yeah, yeah, kid at heart and all that shit. Dean, for once, just offers her his charming trademark smile, ignoring her otherwise. "What you got?"

"I found the two guests from last night. Or at least I think I did. Anyway. They are from Colorado Springs. Died a little over three years ago, which fits with the start of the killings. Somewhat," he relents, and Dean nods. "Article says they both died in their home, the neighbor had called the police, reporting that she heard horrible screaming

coming from the house. When he cops arrived, the police found both kids with their throats cut, the girl a broken neck, too."

"There're pictures?"

"Uh, yeah, wait a second..."

It takes a little more than a second, maybe another minute to pull them up, but when Sam finally shows him, Dean has to close his eyes and look away. *Oh fuck*. When he can breathe again without feeling like throwing up, or punching a wall for that matter, he forces them back to the screen. "Jesus. Jesus!"

"My sentiments exactly."

"What are their names?"

"Uh... Stevens. Matthew, age fifteen, and Elisabeth Marie, age seven," he cites from the article. And isn't that just wonderful? "'Neighbor, Janet H., reported mother, Julie Stevens, three times in the last years to the officials, but 'no one ever did anything,' the lady told a reporter, 'and now see what came of it. Those poor kids.'"

Poor kids indeed. "She in jail?"

"No, actually, she's not. Although, her then-boyfriend is." Off his confused look, Sam clarifies, "She hit them black and blue and what not, yes, but those injuries didn't kill them. Police report said those injuries were not enough to kill them. The way the girl's neck was broken..."

Dean slams his hand on the table. Hard. "Shit. Fuck." And the kids don't even know. But does it really matter? *Fucking hell*.

Sam doesn't say anything, but if his clenched jaw and the hard look is any indication to his mood, then Dean is tempted to say he'd have some things to say to that as well. His eyes focus on the one picture that doesn't make his gut curl, one picture that's not screaming of 'death' and 'violence,' showing the siblings playing with a dog in front of a frozen lake, both laughing.

They look so very different like this. Blond and brown hair not covered by blood and dirt and... *Christ!* Dean swallows hard against the lump forming in his throat, coughing a bit to cover his coarse voice. "So we're gonna check the weeks after and before this then, huh?"

"Yeah, strange happenings?"

Nodding he reaches for his jacket. "Yep. And we'll find it." He gets up. "Get started, I'll get us some coffee." He figures they'll need it, too.

When he returns with two paper cups, the chick a few tables over is glaring at him again. Why, Dean has no idea. He didn't even flirt with her or anything. She scoffs

when she notices him holding her eyes, not looking away. Oh for the love of... Enough is enough. He shoots a glare of his own before sitting down. "Here. Now, let's see what we got here."

"Lots and lots of work."

"Figures."

"Yeah."

It always is. It doesn't come as a surprise, not really. The only difference is, they do it long distance. There's no way to go back to Colorado. They don't have the time for that shit. Since the night of the new moon is weeks away, they'll look for a few smaller cases around Pittsburgh while trying to figure this out. No, not trying, he corrects himself. They will figure it out. They have to. There will be another killing during the new moon, always at least two per city. Dean doesn't believe the MO is going to change all of a sudden.

If it would, they'd be fucked. And not in a good way.

But. With enough time on their hands, they'll figure it out.

Thing is, the answer to all their questions is here somewhere, got to be in the weeks between these unfortunate kids' death and the first killings. It simply doesn't make sense any other way, so the key has to be right here in front of them. Something must have happened, involving a young woman and her father, possibly a violent death. Not much to go by, true, but it has to do; they did it all before. Talk about looking for a needle in a haystack.

After some more time - and a lot more coffee on his part - his brain is about ready to commit suicide alongside his eyeballs by jumping right out of the window or stabbing itself with a dull pencil until it's soup. And then escape the situation by dribbling out of his ears and down the drain. And... *Yuck*. What a nice picture that makes for. Oy. *That's it!* It's time to stop *right NOW* or go crazy. Since Dean's not so keen on the latter. "Let's get out of here. My brain feels like it's about to explode," he gripes, flinging the pencil away from himself.

"There's a brain in there?" Sam teases, tapping the side of said head. Innocent look and all that, and oh yeah, definitely his bratty little brother. "Really?!"

"Oh, shut up, dude. Can we just get out of here? This place is fucking depressing me, and I need to get away from this chair. My ass is falling asleep as we speak and another hour and I won't be able to get up."

"Yeah, yeah, okay. I have to print the pictures at...", he cuts himself off, shaking his head softly. There's a small smile tugging on his lips and... *The hell?!* "Uhm... back at the loft anyway, and there's nothing we can do here that we can't back there. We might as well leave." They shuffle the papers together and lucky them! This time, they both get glared at from the chick. What's her problem anyway?!

"What's her problem?" Sam asks once they're out of earshot, unknowingly echoing his very thoughts.

"I have *no* idea."

"Huh. You didn't even hit on her."

Dean barks out a laugh. Yeah, sure, as if that required glaring. Ya know, like, at all. Instead of telling him that, Dean just shrugs and shakes his head. "Yeah, whatever," he chuckles. "Come on." They leave the building quickly, walking out into daylight or what's left of it, seeing the gray sky, rubbing his hands together. It's all too cold for his liking.

*_*_*

Far too many hours after they left the place, they find themselves back at the loft with Brian and Justin gone. It's not a bad thing per se, and it suits Dean just fine. Peeling himself out of layers of clothing, he throws his jacket over a barstool passing the kitchen and the rest onto his bag when he drags a new pair of socks that aren't wet out of it. The light is low, grey sky making the city look depressing, but he doesn't need it anyway.

In the background he already hears the printer working. Dean smiles. They can still work hand in hand without so much as talking things through; sometimes it's almost like Sam never left for Stanford, being out of the job for those four years. *Almost* being the operative word, 'cause he did and he was, but it doesn't matter now. He's back now, and later, well, he'll deal with later when it knocks him right over the head and says, 'Hi, you know later? I'm here!'

Until then, ignorance is bliss.

Or it can be, when he thinks about the reason Sammy is back with him. About fire and blond hair and the Smurfs. And fuck if that doesn't put a damper on his already not-so-freakin' jolly mood. Sighing he gets up from the floor, closing his bag.

The second he returns to the living room area, Sam hands him a folder full of prints; pictures, newspapers articles, police records, and everything in between. Or so it seems, by the sheer quantity of it. And no, not just one folder, but two. And with a weak smile, Sam tells him that there's a lot more to come. Terrific. Sighing again, he takes a seat next to the couch table. There's a lot more room down here than on any other table or whatever in the loft.

He's still kinda speechless about them staying here. "Why do you think he is letting us stay here?"

And isn't it just great? Now Sammy boy isn't just Haley Joel, now he has good hearing and he can read his freakin' mind?

"Huh?" Very eloquent, but come on! You can't seriously expect him to come up with a witty reply now.

Sam shrugs. "I just... Brian doesn't seem like the guy to just have people stay over. I'm not saying he's a bad guy, I just think he's not very..."

"Trusting?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Neither are we."

"Yeah, well, when you put it like that..."

Dean smiles. "I don't know. I think maybe he's more freaked out about the ghosts than he likes to admit."

"Probably, yeah. Plus we--er, you saved his lover."

"Right." Not that it matters. "Or maybe it's just my charismatic and endearing nature, you know, my stunning looks? My witty sense of humor, my--" A ball of scrunched up paper hits him square on the shoulder. "Dude. What?" He smirks.

"Don't forget your spectacular modesty, Dean." Sam scowls. The effect is ruined when Dean looks up to see his brother fighting off a grin. "That one is overwhelming, I tell you. But seriously. Maybe it's a lot of things, not just one, huh?"

Dean shrugs, going back to the open folder. "If that makes you sleep better at night, dude."

"Hmm."

And maybe it's a little about what happened this morning, he thinks. Misplaced guilt, maybe, something. Looking at Sam, well Dean knows a thing or two about misplaced guilt, yo. Whatever. He doubts Brian invites a lot of people to stay with him, let alone people he doesn't really know. Plus, he so wants to get in my pants.

Yup. Definitely. And, well, not that Dean would object to that exactly, mind you. The guy's obviously smoking hot. As is his blond. It's just not, well, practical to mix work and fun as tightly as this. In particular with his little brother right here. Well, okay, not this kind of fun. Leaving with a cute girl or two gets Sammy to roll his eyes and grumble for a bit, but he seriously doubts Sam would be as forgiving picking up their host. That's like wanting to have his cake and eat it, too. Not a good idea.

And then there's the little detail where said host happens to be a hot guy.

Nah, that's a good secret as it is. Namely, a secret.

Sammy doesn't have to know every little thing. Dean doesn't know everything about

his brother either, so that's pretty fair. Right? Besides, it's none of his business since it doesn't affect Sam's life in any way at all. Or their job. And that's the most important thing, isn't it? If this can't be turned against him – them – then it's okay to have secrets.

Well, fuck me.

That's a route he doesn't want his mind to take right now. Or ever. And he's still thinking about it. Groaning softly, he furiously rubs a hand over his eyes. Stupid. He rolls his eyes at himself. How about stop daydreaming and get on with the job? Would be a good idea. Sighing, Dean takes a sip from the oh-so-nicely hot coffee and then does just that. The gruesome pictures alone should take his mind off the current thoughts in a heartbeat. There are bigger problems to conquer.

Only the door opening and closing makes him look up again. It feels like years later. A little confused, he takes a short look at his wrist. Well, time apparently really moves fast these days. Not years, but already over an hour since they came back here. Brian is dressed in a suit that Dean is sure costs more than anything he owns. In clothing or otherwise, sans Impala and guns, of course. And my God, can the man work a suit! Justin is dressed in slightly less formal clothes; nice blue button down shirt, dark gray cotton pants, and fitting sneakers. They look like they walked right out of one of the commercials for designer clothes.

The blond smiles as he sees them. Brian, on the other hand, frowns. And the first thing they hear out of the brunet's mouth is, "The fuck are you doing on the floor?" gesturing to the bunch of papers lying around. "You might not be familiar with the concept, but you sit on a sofa, not on the floor."

"Hilarious, smartass," Dean counters, "but since all of your *designer* furniture looks like it's made for a doll house, well, it's easier working down here. Room and all that, ya know."

Not missing a beat, he replies, "And what exactly are you working on down there, Dean?"

"My, wouldn't you like to know," Dean says, offering one of his own smirks, but no explanation.

Brian raises his brows, never breaking eye contact. "So, what are you doing, *Sam*?" Well, sure, if he can't get an answer from one brother, he might as well try the other.

And gets lucky. *Not in that way!* "Uh... research." Sammy and his good manners. Figures.

"Oh, yeah? And you're being so secretive? What's it on? Porn?"

Dean almost laughs when Sam *blushes*. Oh God! The kid's going to be his death, in more ways than one. Brian merely smirks once he turns and looks at his brother. But no. No, it's not porn, albeit he wishes to whatever deity there is that it was. Sam is

already reaching for the pictures as the man – sans suit jacket and coat now – finally walks over. “I don’t think you want to see--”

“What?” Brian fakes shock quite well. “Is it *straight* porn?” But it’s already too late. The look in the man’s eyes, the way they ‘shut down’ when he looks down at the picture in his hand, it says it all. No further mocking comebacks, no witty replies, no ill placed innuendo, just plain old shock.

“--this,” Sam finishes quietly, lowering his eyes.

He has seen it, too. The amused sparkle went out in those gorgeous eyes so fast, mask firmly snapping in place. It’s startling. Disturbing, even. It is, however, not truly surprising.

And Dean swears that he honestly doesn’t notice the blond until he’s standing right there. *Shit*. “Brian, fuck, you’re white as a sheet, are you--” Blue eyes turn wide when he sees what his boyfriend? Partner? Whatever, is holding. “--okay? Shit. Oh shit.” Sinking down on the sofa, almost falling down, he buries his face in his hands. Brian’s hand finds the kid’s shoulder like a vise, never taking his eyes off the picture.

He can't blame the kid for not wanting to see. Not really. It’s disgusting, but even more than that it’s sad. Two children murdered in their own home by their mother’s newest fuckbuddy. A mother who hit her kids on a frequent base, like a sport, a hobby, a few broken bones and bruises day in day out being nothing special. To live in a home like that? Dean shakes his head to himself. He doesn’t really want to think about it, but it must be cruel. So okay, their home hasn’t been ideal - duh! – he knows that, but this?

So much worse.

Perhaps it’s a different kind of hell than the Winchester men have been through, but it’s still hell. And in contrary to these poor children, Sam and he are still alive.

The silence that follows is loud. So loud he can barely hear his own breathing or the traffic downstairs as light as it is. Looking over to his brother, he finds him looking right back. There’s a familiar look in the kid’s eyes, a look he knows he’d see in his own if he was to look into a mirror right this second. Schooling his face back into indifference – or trying to, anyway – they both go back to sorting through the research. There’s nothing they can say.

And truth be told, it takes an incredibly long time until someone finally does say something, piercing the silence like a needle would a balloon. He’s not really surprised that it’s Justin. “It’s the... They are the... From...,” he begins, not knowing how to go on. Dean takes pity on him.

“The ghosts from last night, yes,” he agrees. Gentle.

It takes another minute or so of silence, but Justin finally utters the question Dean knew he – someone – would ask sooner or later; he still dreads this moment, though.

"Wh—what happened to *them*?" And he's almost impressed at how the blond's voice doesn't tremble too much, doesn't break. The answer, however...

"You don't want to know," he assures firmly, eyes focused on the young man sitting there. "Trust me, ya really, *really* don't want to know."

When he looks up, blue eyes meet his, locking gaze, and he swears he can see the wheels turning behind them. Dean hopes that the blonde gets what he's is trying to say without actually saying it, something Dean can't – doesn't want to – name. That he's merely being honest, and that it is better not to ask any more questions. Questions he doesn't want to answer. He could, in this case he could, he read the reports – it's around here somewhere – but he doesn't want to.

There is simply no reason for the kid to know.

"Okay," Justin finally says, very softly and very sincere, swallowing hard. "Okay."

Dean nods, once, twice, then he's back to work. The sooner this is done, the sooner they can move on and get away from these fucking pictures. 'Cause don't you just *love* that? More freakin' death, more violence, and even more pictures he so doesn't want to look at. What's wrong with people, anyway, that they hit their own kids? Beat them black and blue? How can a mother or father or whatever do that to their own flesh and blood? Isn't there enough bloodshed, evil in the world already? Fucking stupid.

Just thinking about someone hitting Sammy... hurting him, it sends his blood pressure and stomach right on a roller coaster ride. Involuntarily, his tired eyes move from the papers in his hand to his brother not three feet away. It's stupid, he knows that, but can't help the feeling to make sure he's okay. Of course there are no bruises, no cuts. *Yeah, yeah, how freakin' foolish is it to actually expect something different?!* But old habits die hard, don't they? And looking after Sammy is what it all comes down to.

He did it his whole life, or so it seems. And he wouldn't change it for the world.

- TBC

Part 09: ...Dean shuts him up with a pillow thrown at his head.

Sam frowns when he catches him staring, looking confused and a little worried. Dean shakes his head at him. It's nothing, the gesture says. 'Cause it really is nothing, *plus* Sam'd probably laugh his ass off if he knew what he is thinking. So. Yeah. The shake of his head, the shrug. It all comes down to a 'forget it' answered by Sam's confused, little smile. All this without so much as uttering a single word. They could always communicate like this – with a shrug, a nod, a shake of the head. Hell, even a smile or a simple hand sign. In their line of work, it's necessary.

And freakin' talking is overrated anyway. As plain as that sounds, it just is. *Take that, Dr. Phil.*

"Brian?"

The soft voice cuts into his contemplations, getting him to look up and away from his brother. Justin is sitting on the sofa, eyes focused on his lover. Brian is still just... standing there. The brunet looks like he's made of stone. Just, standing right there, and Dean only now becomes aware of the fact that the guy is still standing – shut up! – and holding that picture in his hand, staring. It's not a pretty picture. None of them are. Dean can barely stand to look at them at all.

As sad as it is, he's used to it by now. It doesn't make it all right, though. Or better. And God knows it's just a little bit harder to take, a little bit more difficult to deal, a little bit more upsetting to watch whenever kids are involved. *Everything* is a little bit harder then, not just looking at those pictures, but—

"The fuck can anyone do that to their kids? I don't... How?"

Sam startles so bad at the quiet, harsh spoken words, that papers and pen slip from his grasp, toppling to the floor with a dull thump. If he's honest, he's a bit startled as well. For a moment he's forgotten that Brian is actually real and not made of stone as it seemed just seconds ago. Justin doesn't seem surprised. In fact, Dean can swear he sees his face soften, a warm look entering the young man's eyes.

"It's not Gus," he whispers, curling pale fingers around the hand that still holds the picture, tugging on it, pulling him down onto the sofa. Never letting go. Not even when Brian sits next to him, so close that it looks like they're touching from knee to shoulder. "It's not you. Let it go."

Dean isn't sure what he's talking about, the picture or something else. Memories, maybe fears. Hidden or otherwise. It's something dark, no doubt, but he has no right to ask. That he does know. Sam and he share another look. This is a private moment they shouldn't be part of, shouldn't witness. So they do what they always do.

Be invisible. As far as that is possible.

"I know," Brian sighs, turning into the blond by his side. "Fuck, I know. But..."

He finally lets go of the cruel picture when Justin slips it out of his grasp. Justin doesn't ever look away from Brian when he holds it out to Dean. Like he doesn't want to look at it, can't stand to look at it a moment longer. Maybe he can't. Dean takes it and puts it away, into a folder, face down. Dean doesn't blame him. The dead kids, the other victims, they look like a broken dolls.

Tossed away like it didn't matter, they didn't matter. A life taken, a life hurt, pained, and it doesn't seem to matter. Never did, never will.

No matter how long he will do this, no matter what he's seen, he knows it's always going to be harder to do the job when kids are involved. Dad knew that, too. Because children really are innocent, come what may. It makes their ghosts so much angrier, so much more dangerous. And their anger rightful. It doesn't take a lot to picture a clumsy, dark-haired boy – *Sammy* – in their place. And that's why he knows he's never going to get used to it.

For all he knows, it could have been Sammy. Could have. Only there's no power in the world strong enough that would – or could – have stopped him from killing every son of bitch who dared to lay a hand on him. On his little brother.

Hell would look like freakin' paradise. So would the devil.

But that didn't happen, did it? No need to dwell on it then. *Thank God*. He takes a deep breath, rubbing a hand over the side of his face, wiping the sweat away. They are silent again until Brian clears his throat, saying, "The police have no fucking clue about who killed that fucker last week," he says. "Even less about the kid last night. There are no leads, no nothing."

"They are doing the best they can, Brian," Justin soothes.

Dean and Brian both snort. For different reasons, obviously. "*No*. These idiots are trying to do *our* job," Dean snaps, and if he sounds a little petulant. No one goes out of their way to tell him. "And making it harder to get a clue on what's going on in the first place."

"So, you're gonna tell me that these two murders...?"

Sam nods. "Were killed by ghosts you met last night and the woman who controls them. Yeah. We're still not sure about the rest, of how it all fits together, but they are definitely connected. We checked."

"Double checked," Dean corrects, and Sammy smiles.

"Yeah, and we got a hint of the supernatural kind."

"Cue in ghosty music and the ghost themselves. You've seen it before in a lot of

movies, I'm sure. Now comes the boring part – research, shuffling through papers and more papers on the hunt for it."

By now Brian and Justin are looking at them like either they think Sam and he are crazy. Or lacking sleep, depends on how you look at the situation. Which, thinking about it, could very well be the case. Maybe not the crazy part of the equation, but the lack of sleep? Yup. Could be. Dean grins to himself. Then again, some people wouldn't necessarily disagree with the first part of the sentiment either.

"So what are you looking for, then?"

Shrugging, he doesn't have to play stupid this time. "We'll let you know as soon as we find it, dude."

Sam laughs. "Yeah. We try to find a connection to those ghosts, or rather the murder of the kids that now are ghosts and the killings that started not long after. Somewhere in the middle of this whole mess we'll find the woman who's responsible for it, too. It just might take us a while."

"Oh. You've been doing this *how* long exactly?"

Again, he shares a look with his brother, saying, "A while."

"Oh," Justin says again, "So, uh, I was thinking. Before. Where... Where do you live?"

"Live?"

"Yeah, as in home. Where do you go when you, I don't know, are done with a case?"

Sam laughs, but it's such a bitter sound that Dean wants to cover his ears and sing-song, 'I don't hear you! Nu-uh'. If his chest clenches a little painful at it, too, he's sure it's just him sitting folded on the floor like this for too long. "The hunt is never over, Justin. Not for us. In other words, there is no home."

"But... Where do you live?"

"Motels usually. The Impala."

Dean can't help but smile at that. Yeah. The car is like a home, more than any other place along the way.

Justin, on the other hand, looks like he's seen another ghost, maybe he has. Like this is something – a life, a mindset – he doesn't get, no matter how smart the kid is – which he is. Maybe he doesn't get it. A lot of people don't get it, but a lot of people don't get to *hear* it either, hear their story, so yeah.

"In other words, your life is one fucking road trip," Brian murmurs, and he's serious, too, but not in the 'I'm fucking with you, humor me' way, no. It's just a statement.

So Dean smiles and points his finger at him, saying, "Yahtzee."

"Well, fuck."

"Nah, it's not that bad," Dean reassures. And it isn't after two decades, not anymore. Sam doesn't say a word to this, which in his case, actually says a hell of a lot. It's not that he agrees with Dean. Oh hell, no, but he does agree that this is none of their business. Justin and Brian have nothing to do with this – the hunt, the consequences, or in his case, Sam's dislike to how they grew up.

They sit like that for a while, them going over their papers and Brian and Justin just watching them work in silence. It's quiet, and quiet is always good. When they finally move again, Brian goes to do some work on his computer while the blond does some of his homework. College, he says, and Dean sees Sam tense. Apparently Justin is nineteen – wonders never cease – and a student at PIFA. Which turns out to be the Pittsburgh Institute of Fine Arts, after some probing and prodding by his brother.

Fancy name for an art school, huh? Ah hell, artists and their shit, always talking about something fancy, so it's no wonder a school has such a name. Yeah, Justin is an artist himself, you see, and he and Sam get into a discussion of artists and styles and shit like that; famous or not, Dean wouldn't know one way or another. So he keeps himself busy with his job while the kids – ha! – talk.

Every now and then, Brian throws in a comment of his own, either met by laughter or bashful sputtering and more laughter. Even his brother is laughing, and that is when he tries to pay a bit more attention to the conversation. Because every person who can make his brother laugh? Has earned somewhat of his attention at any rate, all right. At least for a while. Turning over to the next page, he knows he can do both.

From listening, he learns that Brian is in advertising and that he's supposed to be one of the best – THE best, if you go by the man himself and how Justin talks about it – and huh, maybe he can present hunting in a way that makes even Sammy like it. Or at least not despise it outright. But then again, maybe Brian can talk pigs into flying, too, because that would be much more likely to happen. Oh and Justin is an intern at the same firm Brian works for, which, huh? Weird.

Oh hell, what does he know?

And one thing is even more obvious than before, if that's possible: Justin has it bad for the older man, but Brian? He's got it bad for the kid as well. The way he looks at the blond? *Unconventional, undefined boyfriend, my ass.* That's right. If someone else looks at another person the way Brian keeps steeling glances at Justin, Dean would say they are head over heels with that someone. Totally smitten. *In love.*

And now he's picturing Brian as the lovesick lover with hearts and flowers floating around his heads, like in those Japanese cartoons, singing ridiculously cheesy love songs and what not. And no, that's so not a picture he wants in his head for long. If it was, he'd laugh every time he looked at the man. Pushing the image aside, he forces his eyes back to the fucking police report in front of him on the floor.

The next time he looks up is when Justin announces he's done with his homework and is going to take a shower. Totally low-key, Brian shuts off the computer and states that he's in need for a shower, and seeing as saving water is an important thing to do these days for American citizens, they might as well share. Yeah, and he might as well come right out and say 'let's fuck' and it couldn't be more obvious.

Obviously Justin gets that too, since he's snickering when Brian is pulling him to the bedroom by the front of his pants; Brian's index finger hooked securely through one of the belt loops. Dean and Sam have to be cramping their style, after all. "Oh, don't mind us," he yells after them as they vanish into the room, just loud enough so he's sure they can hear him. "We'll just look the other way, and ya know, won't listen in. Have fu-un!"

Sam laughs, really laughs, but the only response he gets from the other two is the bang of the bathroom door. Shortly after that, the shower starts. He smirks, throwing a pencil at his brother. "Oh come on, you thought that, too, Sammy. You're not *that* innocent."

"Of course not. But God, Dean..."

"Yeah, God, that's me all right."

"You're a stupid, arrogant jerk, that's what you are!"

"Aww, and you still *loooove* me, don't you little bro?" he mocks, chuckling.

Sam doesn't. "Yeah, yeah I do.", he murmurs softly, serious, and shit. That's not cool.

"Shut up."

Sam holds up his hands. "Okay, okay, Mr. No Chick Flick Moments, but it's still true, you know."

Dean glares threateningly. You know this is slipping right into chick flick moment territory and fast – and tries not to smile like an idiot at the same time. Hey, what can he say? He's got a reputation to uphold after all, thank you very much, so, "Shut up," he repeats with a little more force, and Sam cracks up laughing. "Dude. What?"

"I can't believe saying this to you actually gets you flustered!" he wheezes between laughter. And yeah, okay, he knows it's true, he can feel the tips of his ears burning like whoa, but it's still no reason to laugh. "You can be the most blunt, outgoing, person ever. You are anything *but* a prude or bashful, but telling you *this* actually makes you blush?! Oh god, that's hilarious! You're unbelievable, you know that. I can't believe I didn't--" Dean shuts him up with a pillow thrown at his head.

Sam catches the pillow when it bounces off his face, hugging it to his chest as he lets himself fall backwards to the floor, still laughing his ass off, snorting and wheezing like a total lunatic. "Asshat...", he grumbles, more to himself because he's not sure

Sam's hears a word of what he's saying. *If* he had been saying anything. Dean throws a pencil, another pillow, and his shoe at his brother, but he only laughs harder. Even though that, yes, he grunts when the shoe makes contact with his shin. *Ha! That'll teach you, little brother.*

Only it doesn't, because when Sam pushes himself up on his elbows and looks at him, he bursts out laughing anew. And, okay, that's enough. Pushing himself off the ground he doesn't bother to warn his little brother, he's a fucking hunter and he's his fucking little brother. He knows Dean doesn't fight fair; not always.

And sometimes – especially – not when they are sparring. Thing is, little Sammy doesn't know that they are. Yet. He knows it however, as soon as Dean bounces onto him, hands going to his neck. Sam's hands come up like the head of a snake if you step on it tail, which is, well unfortunate since that's what kept him up in the first place. The back of his head hits the floor hard, but the carpet is thick and soft, so Dean doesn't lose one thought to think Sam is hurting himself.

He's not, or not seriously anyway. Kid had almost had his finger cut off trying to sharpen his dagger back when he was barely a teenager, so this is not going to kill him. They are used to fighting with a mild concussion, and he's fairly sure the hit is not hard even enough for one. They are even more used to roughhousing, sparring like they had done as kids, when they were teenagers and still when Dean wasn't anymore. It stopped when Sam left for Stanford, of course, but it was still the same when he broke into his brother's living room all those months ago.

At least it felt the same, though it wasn't. He has to admit that, and he can, but never out loud, and never to Sammy or whatever. That one time, in the dark, it almost felt the same. But only almost. The place has more open space than any motel room or freaking apartment they ever stayed in, so there's no fear of breaking something, namely Brian's designer furniture and whatever the hell else that's expensive and standing around.

Or in the way, if you were to ask Dean. Of course no one does, so it doesn't matter. He notices he's a little, well, let's say distracted when he finds himself on his back, instead of his brother, wheezing for air. *Figures*. Sammy doesn't play fair all the time either, and Dean's not thinking about those damned puppy-dog eyes his brother is too damn good at. Oh no. That knee between his legs? Yeah. Fucking hurts. But he's been kneed in the nuts almost as often as Sam strangled, so he gives back just as good as he gets.

Pushing and wrestling and even pulling hair; which is easier for him, since Sammy still has that freakishly long bangs hanging all over the place and he doesn't. Maybe it'll teach him to cut them again. And soon. Before he looks like a yeti or a girl. They fight a little bit more, and after another minute or twenty – Dean isn't sure – he finally has his brother on his stomach face down, one arm under him and the other twisted on his back. Dean's straddling the back of his thighs, both a little bit out of breath.

"Say uncle", he orders, twisting his brother's arm just a little bit more when Sam huffs out another, breathy laugh. It ends on a strained groan. "So?"

"Okay, okay, Jesus, I give! Okay? You win! Now, let me up." He pets his brother's shoulder and gets up, combing his fingers through his short hair. And almost jumps out of his skin when he sees Justin standing at the top of the bedroom stairs.

Not that he lets it show, but whoa! Clad in nothing more than a towel, long, wet hair falls into a beautiful face, cheeks rosy from the warm water and probably getting fucked. The hair looks darker than the light blond now that it's wet, but it's hot as hell in any case. Justin blond looks a little, uh, confused? surprised? shocked? How his wide blue eyes are staring at them from across the room. Maybe it's a little of everything. And a dozen things more.

"Uh... Hey," Sam finally says, as he pulls himself up, brushing ruffled hair out of his eyes.

"I... I'm sorry, I didn't mean to, uh..." He makes a vague gesture with his hand, and Dean's not sure what that means. The kid lives here, well practically, so why does he look like he feels completely out of place?

"Oh it's nothing, we were just sparring, Justin," Sam says, and oh! Right. "Don't worry."

"Oh."

Dean grins, gathering the pillows and putting them back onto the sofa. "Yeah. So, how was you're 'shower', kiddo? Enjoyed the scenery? The water pressure?" Yeah, yeah, it's a little evil, but he can't resist teasing. He's almost as easy as Sam.

"Uh... Yeah, but..."

"Ignore him," Sam grouches, pulling himself into a sitting position, attention going back to the folders. "He's just jealous that he didn't get laid last night."

"Oh shut up, you..."

Justin laughs. "Well I can't help with that but maybe some time off would help? Having some fun?"

That gets his attention, all right. "Uh... What'cha mean?" he presses, sitting down now, too.

"Well, Brian and I are going out tonight. So, uhm, you wanna come with us?", the blond asks, looking back and forth between Sam and him.

"Come where?"

"To Babylon. It... It's a dance club," Justin says, smiling. "A gay dance club," he clarifies.

Dean snorts. "Of course it is. Kid, I wouldn't have thought you going to... what did your not really but still unconventional, unusual boyfriend call it back at that bar? Breeder..."

"...Central," Justin finishes with a startled laugh. "Yeah, that's Brian, all right. Sooo... are you coming with us? I promise we fight off every guy that comes too, you know, *close*."

"You think we'd need the help?"

Eyeing them closely, he sighs. "Hmm... the way you look? Sure. But you're right, you can most likely scare off your admirers all by yourself."

That is definitely true. "Yeah, but I honestly don't think that's such a good idea..." he starts, only his little brother? Cuts him off. That is right. He cuts Dean off. And Dean almost swallows his tongue when he says:

"Well, actually..."

Those two words should never come out of his brother's mouth in this context. Not ever. They both turn to look at Sam. Where Dean feels plenty confused, Justin looks just a little hopeful.

"Yeah?"

"Well, I wouldn't mind. Not really." Then, to Dean, "We could use a break, right? Why not go out and relax some? I mean you said your brain was gonna kill itself if you didn't get a break and away from all this," he says, making a sweeping gesture with both hands. And dude, this is freaky as hell.

"*Christo*." Dean whispers, head tilted, eyes narrowed, but Sam, again, laughs at him. And kicks his shins.

"Bite me. What I mean is, we could have some fun, you know. It's not like we need to do this right this moment. And I know you are itching to go out, so--"

"Whoa there, Francis, wait a sec. Did you just say what I thought you said? Did you just suggest that we go out and relax a little? And – dare I say – have fun? You? My geeky little brother who always thought books were the most entertaining things in the world and libraries the answer to God's prayer? Who always had his nose buried in a book instead of some girl's--" Another kick to his shin shuts him up perfectly fine. He's going to have a bruise there soon enough as it is. "Ow," he deadpans.

"Yeah, right, because I kicked *sooo* hard."

And what do you know? He can actually hear Sammy rolling his eyes. "Meanie."

Smiling – and totally ignoring him – Sam turns to Justin. "Sure. Yeah, we'll go with you."

Justin beams at them. *Whoa, careful where you turn that smile, buddy*, he thinks.

- TBC

Part 10: ...Babylon - loud, colorful, packed.

Author's Note: I'm so sorry for the long wait. Lots of work and family drama, and the former could make this the one and only chapter this month, too. If it is, I apologize in advance. Anyway.

Happy Valentine's Day, and enjoy!

Babylon is everything Dean hoped and feared it would be.

Loud, colorful, packed with lots of hot guys – and did he mention loud? Okay, so no, that's not the problem. The problem is the hot guys. Yup. Temptation is a tricky, dangerous enemy, with claws and teeth and not shy of using them. It's a monster, and the tingle in his gut isn't helping fight it off, either. He's on the way back from his fourth or so trip to the bathroom, avoiding the bright eyes of half a dozen guys giving him The Look and wiping sweaty palms on rough, worn jeans, when he thinks that it's time to leave.

Either that or he's going to give in and follow one of the willing onlookers into the backroom, his brother's watchful eyes be damned.

Pushing himself through the crowd of half-naked bodies, he ignores the onslaught of touches, most of them accidental, he's sure, but plenty of them not. No one really made a move on him. Yes, there are looks and they are more than enough to broadcast the message. A few dared to even invite him on a drink, some of which he accepted. Sam, Dean thinks, smirking, well, he had his own lot of come-ons, most of them taking off when Dean so much as glared in their direction.

Oh he's pretty damn sure that Sam can hold his own, but come on, it's fun, and in the end Sam's still his little brother. Those few inches of height be damned. That aside, they both had a lot of fun, which in turn, surprised him more than a little. Brian and Justin are fascinating people to be around; funny, witty, sharp, it's a lot of fun to watch them interact, too. With others and with each other. When he finally reaches the bar after removing an exceptionally persistent pair of hands, he's not surprised to find Sam alone there. Yet he has no problem figuring out where their companions went.

Justin loves to dance, hell, the kid lives dancing, really, and Sam's eyeing the dance floor, which pretty much confirms his suspicion. There's no need to turn around to validate it for himself. Dean just knows what his brother's looking at. Who he's looking at. Half the club is watching them. He turns anyway.

Brian and Justin kissing is erotic, yeah, but it has nothing, *nothing* on watching them dance. Out there, in the middle of the dance floor they look like one body, one single human being, pressed so close together he's sure there's nothing you could fit in

between. Moving in the flashes of lights, their skin is glistening with sweat, dancing shadows stroking their faces, hands, their bodies while they turn and kiss and touch, never missing a beat. Never stop moving.

Dean watches closely, watches as Brian guides a hand from the blond's waist, moving it up to his shoulder and into the kid's hair. Justin moves his head then, looking up. Staring. Staring into each other's eyes, the way like there's no one else around. Like the other is the only one around. Like there's nothing but them and music and feeling and dancing. And kissing. Even though the dance floor is freakin' packed like nobody's business, they could very well be alone in the world. They probably wouldn't even notice.

A quick glance over at his brother leaves him a little queasy. Sam is staring at them like he never saw them before. Maybe he didn't. Not like this, anyway. Mouth hanging open, eyes wide, his skin is more than a little flushed even though the kid's been drinking nothing but Coke and water and nonalcoholic beer. That intense look, that soft frown between his brows, it makes his gut churn a little. It's not a picture of revulsion or dislike, oh no, it's more like he's watching something he can't take his eyes of. And not a bad thing at that. Like he figured something out.

Dean should be glad about that, and the sane part of his brain tries to tell him just that, but that persistent, suspicious part flashes warning signs so brightly that they leave the flashing spotlights in the dust. Warning him of what? Well, he's got to figure that one out. Later. Right now the nice buzz of alcohol racing in his blood, the beat of the music as well as the heat in his belly overshadow his rational thinking. Once he's getting out of here, that shouldn't be a problem so much any longer.

Moving his attention from his brother to the dancing and the crowd of bystanders, there are a lot of guys watching the pair as well. Sans the small frown, but with a lot more heat and hunger in their eyes. The same heated looks he collected more than his fair share of all night. And who would blame them for looking? Who could? Deliberately or not, the couple draws attention like whoa.

It's them. How they move, more times than not at their own pace, their own rhythm. Hearing a wholly different song. How they touch. Four hands seem to stroke, pat, caress everywhere at once, neck, hip, ass, back, chest, face - *everywhere*. So close, touching from their legs right up to their chests, sometimes even forehead to forehead. And Jesus Christ, it's a beautiful picture. A piece of art.

Something stirs in his groin, heat crawling lower and right between his legs. He doesn't even notice the fingertips tracing the growing erection in his jeans, the weight of his own hand between his legs. It takes a soft, needy moan, overly loud in his ears, to snap him out of it. Biting his lips, he silently curses himself for drinking enough to lower his inhibitions like this, lowering his defenses. Snatching his own hand away like it's burning, he turns away. Away from the temptation that is Justin and Brian and the danger that are the alert eyes of his brother.

If this is Sam, then the eyes are green à Brown eyes change from confused to worried in a heartbeat, he can make that one out of the corner of his eyes, but he acts like he

doesn't notice. Jumping at the hand on his arm, at the unexpected touch, the worried frown deepens. "You okay?"

"Uh, yeah," he croaks, licking dry lips and signaling the bartender for another drink. "Yeah," he tries again, sounding a lot surer than he feels. "No worries, Sam. I just, ah, turned too fast."

Sam doesn't look like he believes him, not even close, but he keeps his mouth shut, and that's what counts. A few guys burst out laughing close to them and when he turns back, his brother isn't staring at him anymore. Thanking the bartender when he refills Dean's glass, he keeps his eyes firmly on it. He's not going to make the same mistake again. *Repeat after me: I, Dean Winchester, am not going to make the mistake of staring at Justin and Brian for too long and getting a major hard-on again. I am not going to make the mistake of staring at them and getting a major hard-on again. I am not.* Right. He nods to himself, he's so not, nope.

Got it!

Maybe he had a bit more to drink than he thought when he's talking to himself. Or worse, trying to talk himself out of something. Checking his watch – and yes, he can very well read the tiny figures, thank you – it really is time to go. Not because it's that late or that early, depends on your point of view, but 'cause if he's going to drink much more, it's not going to take long until all of his inhibitions go to hell and that's never a good idea. Okay. Usually it's not. Only at times. He feels Sam keeping throwing looks his ways. Dean doesn't think it's so much suspicious or anything, just curious, maybe? Searching? Probably. Worried? Definitely. He doesn't get why, and maybe that's not so bad.

At least right now.

He jokes about how much guys hit on he and Sammy in the last few hours, but his brother doesn't seem into it when they throw joking insults back and forth. He doesn't really know what to make out of that, and it's hard to explain.

Sam seems to be waiting for something, maybe for him to throw up. Yeah, well, that's not gonna happen. He's nothing near that drunk, and Sam of all people should know that. Perhaps he's projecting, seeing things that aren't there, but fuck, it's annoying. Makes him nervous. He hates being nervous. Oh, how he hates being fucking nervous! Like he hates planes and flying. Or... ya know, almost as much. In the background, he hears the music changing again, the blinking of the lights changing in tune. A slower rhythm, yet hyper enough to get the crowd going.

Sammy is watching the dance floor again, sitting there like it's the most normal thing to do. For a straight guy. Somehow they still managed to keep a fairly low profile all night despite being here with Brian and Justin. They are something akin to celebrity around here.

Everybody knows them, everybody has a story to tell about them. No matter if you want to hear it or not. Apparently, Justin met Brian when he was seventeen years old.

Brian took him home, popped his cherry - so to speak - and sent him on his way in the morning to never meet again. Or so he thought. Only Justin came back, again and again, despite Brian having a policy of fucking every guy only once. Yup, that's right. The exception – obviously – being blondie. Some say it's because he's a good fuck, others say it's because it really is love – on both sides - and the rest, well, they want to get it on with one or both of them.

Dean had nearly laughed out loud as he had a guy telling him that on his second – or was it third? – trip to the bathroom. Anyway. Those two, obviously, have a history. Lots and lots of it, too, as it seems. "They... look good together, don't they?" Sam says, and Dean tries not to startle too bad. Turning, he quirks an eyebrow. Sam sighs like it's such a burden. "I didn't mean it like that, you jerk, and you know that!"

"I don't know. How *did* you mean it, little brother?"

"Nothing! Jesus, Dean, forget about it. I don't even know why I try!"

Huh? "Try? What try?"

"Forget it! It's not worth it."

"You're in a mood, Francis. PMS'ing much there?"

Bitchface firmly in place, Sam doesn't bother with a reply. He just glares. Glares like Dean's the fly on the wall he wants to crush. With a sledgehammer. Which, *ouch*. Scowling, he holds up his hands saying *okay, you win*, and goes back to his drink. After he's done with it, they are leaving. And there's nothing anyone can say to chance his mind. Nodding to himself, he finds himself frowning. *What's your deal, little brother?*, he thinks, watching him watch the couple out of the corner of his eyes.

They give each other the silent treatment for a few minutes, long enough to drown half of his drink. He can't get shitfaced tonight, not like the night Brian found him at Woody's. "How about we call it a night?" he finally speaks, right before he takes another large gulp from his glass.

"Already?"

"Yeah, well, it's not that early... and we have work to do, too."

Sam shrugs. "I just thought you'd like to stay longer, you know."

No, I don't know! Don't say things like that to me, Sammy, it's freakin' me the hell out! Of course he doesn't say it, it would just sound fishy, and he knows it. Because it is. Instead he says, "Nah, I had enough for a night." He could go for some shut-eye right about now. Plus, there's the temptation to just say, 'fuck it' and get a hot guy to...to--

He cuts his thoughts off when he notices Sam watching him. Again. Only more closely, the way he does when he thinks something is going on. In other words, wrong, and big brother is not telling. Most of the time, Sam right. Yet Dean doubts he is right now.

Whatever it is he's thinking. "Okay... I'm kinda beat anyway," he finally states. Sam doesn't look beat, not as bad as he sometimes does with the nightmares and the visions and... yeah.

"Lightweight," he teases, smiling to take the sting out of the word. "Okay, so I'm gonna go and let the lovebirds know that we're leaving." When he turns to face the dancing crowd, Brian and Justin are nowhere in sight. Dean frowns. Huh? "Where'd Blondie and Brian disappear to?"

Shrugging, Sam half turns to face Dean. "Over there," he says, pointing to a doorway in the back.

Uh-oh. Of course they'd be in there the moment Dean decides to leave. But Sam isn't finished yet. "Why don't you let me do that and you finish your drink, Dean?"

Nope. No way. "I don't think that this," he says, nodding in direction of the door, "is something for those pure, naïve, puppy dog eyes of yours, Francis." He's not really sure how to say this and that sure as hell says something, isn't it? Dean isn't ever shy to talk about something.

"Huh?" The look of confusion is not unexpected. "Why's that?"

Go for the kicker, why don't you? "That, my dear little brother, is a backroom."

Frowning now. "So?"

"So?" He tilts his head and regards his brother with a skeptical look. "Sammy, did you ever do something besides studying in college? Like, I don't know, have fun?" Then again, do a lot of not gay nightclubs close to Stanford have backrooms? He kinda doubts it.

"*What?* Cut the crap Dean, what, exactly, is a backroom?"

Well... if he wants to know? Dean smirks, raising his brows. "Let's say it's for the entertainment of the clientele a special kind of entertainment, if you get my drift." It's true. Sex definitely is a form of entertainment, and a popular one at that. It's not called 'favorite national pastime' for nothing, you know. Aside from baseball, football and all that jazz, of course.

"So why did you say it's nothing for. Wait a minute. You've got to be kidding me. Dean, are you telling me? I don't believe--"

"Believe it. I don't kid about sex, dude. Ever." Frowning, he adds, "I though you knew *that*, too."

"You mean you actually go in there to..." He makes a vague gesture with his hands and Dean snorts.

"Fuck? Yeah."

Now, Sammy doesn't blush, and Dean gives him credit for that, but he looks vaguely, uhm, stunned. Yeah. "Uh... that's..."

"Don't worry, little brother, I'm gonna sacrifice myself for you and go to find them. We'll leave this much 'fun' for another day, shall we. Or, ya know, never." Patting Sam on the back, he slips from the barstool. "Sure you can defend your virtue without me for a few minutes?"

"Dean!"

"Okay, okay. Don't get your panties in a twist, princess. Alas, good to know that some things never change. Like the lack of a sense of humor in your nature." Chuckling a little to himself, he yet again makes his way through the crowd toward Babylon's backroom. He doesn't flinch when he walks in. He knows what to expect. So, yeah, he's been here before. Not here as in this exact backroom, but other. And no matter where you are, if you've seen one, you've seen them all. In the ways that count, it's nothing new. He can ignore the sounds by now as well as the stench of sex and semen. Doesn't register with him anymore.

He digs graves on a regular base, burns human bones, exorcises demons, etc., which ultimately boils down to the fact he's used to a lot of things. And compared to that, this is a picnic. Walking by chains and shackles and what-not on black walls later, he finally finds what he's looking for in a vaguely secluded alcove. They still look beautiful, even in here. And he's so not staring at them. Not gonna happen.

Clearing his throat to get their attention, they all but freeze in kissing and groping each other – *sooo not going there, buddy!* – they, or better said Justin, has the decency to remove his tongue from the other's mouth. Brian grumbles something he can't make out when the blond turns to look at Dean.

"Hi Dean!" the blond chirps, sounding all too chipper as blue eyes slowly focus on him. It takes far too long for Dean's taste, pupils unnaturally dilated even in the low light, which can only mean one thing: drugs. Given the surroundings, it shouldn't come as big as a surprise as it does.

"Hi Dean!" Brian echoes him, not cheery at all and not bothering to look up. "Nice to see you." He sounds as sincere as a politician during his election speech. Justin giggles nevertheless, but there's no humor in the brunette's next words: "You actually dared to walk into the lion's den? Fucking impressive, I admit. I didn't think you'd have the balls."

Dean's chuckle is only a little forced. And a lot annoyed. "Dude. I'm not as innocent as you'd like to think," he half-jokes, "not even close."

"Yeah." Brian drawls, fingering the collar of Justin's shirt, half open and showing. "I bet." And all of a sudden, a dozen alarms go off in his head. This is not good, what ever 'this' is. "So what are you looking for? I can recommend some pretty good fucks around here."

I'm sure you could. "Uh, no, thanks, I actually came to tell you Sammy and I are leaving."

"I doubt it."

"Sorry?"

Brian lets go of Justin and turns to face him in one swift motion. Hooking his fingers onto the front of his pant, the guy jerks him forward a step. "You didn't *come*, at least not... just yet, did you?" He smirks openly, all teeth and wide eyes, and Dean abruptly realizes that Justin is not the only one high.

"Dude..."

"Brian..."

"Oh come on, he likes it, *you* like it", he says, stroking his chest. And the thing is, Dean does like it. Dick stirring under Brian's knowing touch, and yeah, the poor thing didn't get all that much attention in the last weeks due to work. It's no wonder it's so fucking quick to respond to someone touching him. But... Wait. Did he just refer to his dick as 'poor thing'? *Ouch*. "I think you'd like a good, long fuck, too. Or maybe two or three." Well, he's not wrong. But this is neither the time nor the place.

No, strike that. It *is* the right place, but not the right time. Taking a deep, calming breath, Dean curls his hand around the hand grabbing his jeans and takes a step back. He needs space between himself and Brian's all too warm hands and he needs it badly. The bastard has the nerve to actually snicker. Fucking moron.

"A nice, tight ass, huh, Dean? Or maybe," he pauses, once again closing the gap between them, hand traveling to his ass, squeezing. "You'd like getting fucked better. What do you say?" He leans in closer, too close, until they are cheek to cheek. Breathing his aftershave and feeling the stubble on his chin. "I think you do. A warm, wet tongue getting you ready down there, nice and slippery, rimming you *sooo* good until you can't take it anymore, *begging* for a nice hard cock to fill you up. Fucking you hard and deep. Get rid of some... pressure." Brian bites his neck and Dean swallows a hiss. "You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

And... Jesus Christ! Yes, for fuck's sake, YES he would, but. Not now. Not right now, and not with Sam so close by. As horny as he is, no. No way in hell. It's too risky. Brian moves even closer, his front pressed to Dean's side, effectively pinning one arm between them. He feels those lips move against the shell of his ear when the man whispers the combination to the alarm of the loft to him. A combination he very well remembers from the other night, before he goes on to tell him that he's much better ideas and that he's sure Dean would like them as well. "You don't want to go there", he's told.

Burying his nose behind Dean's ear, rubbing it against the sweaty skin there, Dean is vaguely reminded of long forgotten make-out sessions in the back of cheap movie theaters. Girls and boys. Brian does smell good. It would be oh-so-easy to just let go,

to give in and let Brian live up to his promises. Only he can't. And if he got one thing from growing up like he did, it's self-control. The moment clever fingers start to unbutton his pants, Dean knows it's time to leave.

Not gonna happen. He turns the grip he has on the hand into steel, squeezing tight to the point where it has to hurt. Brian barely blinks. "Uh-huh. I don't think so, dude."

Brian looks at him, amused. Like he doesn't believe a word he says. "You want it. Don't even try to fucking deny it."

"I don't."

"Liar," he murmurs, laughing softly under his breath and with a twinkle in his eyes. "Your cock pretty much agrees with me, so I don't think you're in a position to--"

"No. I mean, I don't deny it. But I have a job to do. There's no time for this," he explains, which he almost regrets. Oh who is he trying to kid? He definitely regrets it. "And certainly not with Sam waiting out there."

"Geez, you've got to be fucking kidding me! Don't you think the guy can fucking take care of himself for ten minutes while you get your dick sucked?"

"What?"

"I mean, are you just blind or are you really that fucking stupid?"

Huh? "What?" Yeah, very eloquent.

"As if he can't tell what's going on." Brian snorts and Dean straightens. "He fucking cares about you, I'm sure he wouldn't object for you having a little bit of fun in here. I'm sure that's why he came here in the first place. What the fuck do you care what he thinks about you sucking cock every once in a while? Or who you fuck?" Pause. "Or who fucks you?"

"That's none of your business." His voice is as hard as the grip on the man's wrist.

"It's not, just don't expect me to lie for your little charade."

Justin comes up to stand closer then, hand on his lover's arm, "Brian. I don't think..."

"Fuck off, Justin."

"I thought you wanted to fuck me," he says, wriggling his brows, and Dean can't help but laugh. It's almost sweet that the kid tries to save him this time.

Unnecessary, but sweet nonetheless. "I'll leave you to your late-night entertainment then," Dean says quietly, offering the blond a smile before he finally turns to leave. Only he's not getting far. There's a hand on his own wrist, curling around his finger, effectively stopping his exit. Stopping him in his track. Dean groans. *Great.* And isn't

that a freakin' fantastic deja-vu?

"What now?" he snaps, and this time, the annoyance isn't an act.

-- TBC

Part 11: ...Oh no, see, I don't really like guns."

A/N: I'm so sorry for the long wait, but my life is a little crazy right now. I just got back from Australia, and am already heading for Kuala Lumpur tomorrow, but I'll try to post the next chapter as soon as possible. That said, enjoy. ;)

"This is not about work," Brian declares, voice gravely low. "You're just scared *shitless* that your little brother's going to find out what you do when he's not around. That *little Sammy*," and he makes his brother's name sound so dirty that Dean wants to clock him, "sees someone different than his fearless, straight-as-an-arrow big brother. Getting every fucking girl he wants and bragging about it, too. That's it, isn't it?"

"And you're so brave doing what? Fucking your undefined, unconventional boyfriend in a backroom every night? Give me a break!" He laughs. And my God, that's what it is, isn't it? Laughable.

Brian shrugs. "At least I don't pretend to be someone I'm not. Do you think he'll be disgusted when he finds out you like cock, too, beside pussy, that you like to take it up the ass like the little slut you are, anyway? That he's going to look at you differently when he finds out you jerk off to picturing two guys fucking and sucking? That Sammy will look at like you're a freak?"

Dean snorts, saying, "I *am* a freak, dude..."

"You shoot monsters in the face, Dean, but being fucking gay, *bi*, whatever, sucking cock, fucking cock, you're terrified that it makes you even more of a freak than that, right?" Brian looks absolutely cold, like a stone wall, but Dean knows this all too well. If he's trying to scare him or get him to crack, well, he's in for a long wait. "More than he is. It has you terrified. It's the reason why this is your dirty, little secret, isn't it? You're so afraid of what's going to happen if your kid brother finds out."

Maybe he should try this on the next poltergeist. Maybe it'll get them distracted enough so they won't throw knives at him and strangle Sammy with lamp cords. Or whatever is close at hand. You know, dirty talk? Or maybe not, considering that it might land him in a cozy white, padded cell. Dean winces. Well it's either that, or Sam's going to think he's possessed and then try to exorcize him. So, either way, not a good idea.

Maybe, he thinks, he should walk away. Just turn around and walk away. There's nothing good that can come out of this. Dean Winchester is not a coward, though, never walking away from a fight. You have to pick your fights, he learned that pretty damn fast, but he has never ever walked away with his tail between his legs. "Are you trying to convince me or yourself?"

That gets him another cold stare. "You have a comeback for everything, don't you?"

"Don't *you*?"

"You're a fucking liar. A hypocrite, too."

Dean nods seriously. It's true. "Yeah, that's me, all right. And I'm freaking good at it, too," he adds with a satisfied smirk.

"What about lying to yourself, Dean? Any good at that?"

It's a low blow, but no, he never was and he never wanted to be. As much as he lies to strangers, to the police, or whoever needs lying to to get a job done, he's always been honest with himself. Brutally honest sometimes, has to. Otherwise he might lose himself in all the fake identities and credit card frauds and roles he takes on. And that's a price he isn't willing to pay. Only Dean's not good lying to Sammy either. Not because he doesn't try, but for the reason that's Sammy's just too damn insightful for his own good.

Which has always been the real issue, really. This? The whole fucking chicks and guys thing? He doesn't try to fool himself. He can't ignore the stirring in his gut when he sees a good looking dude. Or Brian and Justin together. But it's not something Sam has to know. It's a secret, a side of his being, which solely belongs to himself. Has nothing whatsoever to do with his brother or his father or the monsters they hunt. It doesn't influence anything at all that involves them or the 'family business'.

Nor would it do anything good for them to know. What would they gain? Nothing at all.

So, bottom line is this: it's none of their business.

And it isn't Brian's either. Not even close. Considering that, Dean shouldn't even been bothered with having this discussion.

It's not like he has forgotten where they're having the conversation, either. Brian doesn't seem to care. Surrounded by groaning and moaning and skin slapping on skin, wet sucking noises and what the hell not, he seems completely at ease. Or, hell, at home. The drugs play into that, obviously, but still. Dean couldn't care less if it wasn't for the fact that all of this is not any of Brian's business. And why doesn't he get that already, for heaven's sake?!

Sighing, he takes comfort in the fact that Sam's not anywhere close. Looking Brian straight in the eyes, Dean tells him, "And all this shit about lying and being scared coming from the guy who doesn't have the guts to admit to having a boyfriend? Who's afraid of 'love'?" he taunts. "All the bullshit you throw around all the time? You have no right to call me a coward, a liar, or anything else. Not when you're not better."

"You don't know me."

He steps closer and Brian tenses. *Jackpot.* "And you know me *sooo* well? Get real,

dude.” And that is when something snaps in the brunet’s eyes. Something he knows well, but somehow can’t quite name. That little, persistent thought in the back of your hand you can’t put your finger on? Like having a conversation within a conversation in a language he can’t quite follow. Words he can’t comprehend. Yeah. Gives him a headache, too. *Ouch*. And it’s not control that snapped, no. It’s far more complicated than that.

Fisting a hand into his shirt, Brian roughly yanks him close. One arm curls tightly around his middle, the other comes around his neck, locking him in place against the other man’s body. It’s not like he couldn’t get loose. As rough as Brian plays, his touches, his hold, it’s oddly intimate. Given their surroundings, that’s a very surprising thing to say. Erektion poking his hip, he can feel him everywhere, body heat melding right through their clothes. Brian breathes hard and shallow, moist breath puffing against flushed skin behind his ear and his neck and... Dean inhales sharply. For God’s sake, he’s just a guy, okay?

Under different circumstances, he’d be willing to see where this was headed. Where he could take it. If he’d walked in here, like he’s walked into a million other clubs and bars in the past, he wouldn’t waste a single thought on what to do. But he didn’t and it isn’t. Yet, he doesn’t move. If one would ignore the wandering hands and the lips and teeth and tongue on his neck, one could say they’d be hugging. He’s not the hugging type. God knows he’s not, and if he knew how to find his voice, he’d make a crack about it, too. Something witty and sharp and funny. But his voice is missing right along with his restraint. His control.

And that? Is bad for so many different reasons.

Dean just stands there, body apparently refusing to follow his brain’s orders. Who is he kidding. It’s nice, great even. Maybe his body’s a lot more touch hungry, *skin* hungry than he thought. Craving the contact, soaking it up like a desert dry sponge does the water. When he opens his eyes– he doesn’t remember closing them – Justin is watching them. Not just him, *them* and he wonders for a moment what he’s thinking. What he’s seeing. His smile is soft, and fuck, Dean can’t think of a reason why he’d look like that.

A moan slips past his lips when Brian finds a particularly sensitive spot on his neck, right above his collarbone, and the passion, the fever burns even brighter inside the older man. A hand slips under his shirt at the same time a tongue slips between his lips, both feelings pulling him in tight. Been a while since he’s been with a guy like this, before dad has gone missing and Stanford and all the shit that came afterwards. It would have been pretty problematic taking all of this in. If he had been looking for it, that is.

Yet, it’s still familiar. The feel of another solid body against his own, kisses not tender, but hard and needy and just like he likes it.

It’s hot and good and it burns deep down. He doesn’t bother to label this one thing or the other. Probably couldn’t if he tried. Still, it’s almost shocking how much he likes it. How much it actually surprises him to like it. How little he’s forgotten. It shouldn’t be

surprised, though, he knows. It is, after all, like riding a bike. You never forget how to do that, either. Or that's what they say at any rate. The rough stubbles on the man's cheek burn the sensitive skin, back hitting the unforgiving, solid wall. It's then that the fog starts to clear, leaves him with the strange and panicky feeling to get away. Necking like teenagers and how the hell is he supposed to explain burn on his cheeks and teeth marks on—

His eyes snap open like he's been shot, hands finally obeying his will as he's pushing them between them. *Game's over.* "Stop." That word, that single word spoken quietly and calm, is like a gunshot, too. Brian reacts on instinct, head back and up to meet his eyes. Confusion twirling in the drug induced blurry gaze. He's smirking at first, thinking he's playing a little game, that it's a joke. He catches on quickly, though, that Dean's not and it isn't, that he's serious. Confusion turns into disbelief so quickly, Dean barely catches it.

"Don't try this again," he says, voice calm but firm when at the same time a voice in his chest screams *do*, and *please*, and *soon*. He swallows those words. Thinks of battered bodies, dark alleys and death to calm himself down. Literally. Clearing his throat, he hopes Brian understands. At least a little. Otherwise, if he tries again, he's not sure he's strong enough to say no again. And he can't say yes until this is all done. Or go back to the motel. But that would bring up a whole lot of questions from Sam Dean's not ready to answer.

Brian laughs, but it's not a happy sound. Not at all. "Right." He doesn't buy it more than Dean does, the one work makes that crystal clear. "You're a fucking tease, you know that?" Dean doesn't say anything. Nothing to say. Since, yes, yes he might as well be. Right now. Any other time he wouldn't be, at least not like this. Instead he shrugs, smiling. He doesn't say, *I'm sorry*, even though he is. A little.

Brian's chuckles yet again, still without any trace of humor. "Fuck. Fine. Remember the code?" Dean nods. "Good. I don't want to be called back to the loft by the police when I'm in the middle of something."

"Course you don't," he laughs, relieved. Offering Justin a sincere smile, and a "Have fun," he says his goodbye. He's sure the twin calls of 'Later' that follows him down the hall are not his imagination. And maybe, maybe there is a later. There's always tomorrow, after all. When, when there's no upcoming apocalypse and no one tries to take over the world, that is. Otherwise, sure there is a tomorrow and a later. And maybe even a time for this.

Smirking to himself, he makes his way out of the dark environment, Sam meeting him as soon as he walks out of the backroom's door. "Found them?"

"Yeah, yeah, they are pretty easy to spot."

His brother offers him a grin and a glare over his right shoulder as someone brushes past him way too close in what can only be an invitation. In other words, rubbing himself all over his backside. He grins inwardly. *My aren't you protective, Sammy.* "Ready to go then?" he grumbles, still glaring at Dean's admirer.

Dean nods, chuckling. But... "Tap?"

"I tried to pay, guy said Brian already told them he'd take care of it."

Oh. "Huh. Well, then. Let's get out of here. Come on."

The night outside is cold. Like really, really cold, or maybe the club was just overly warm. Doesn't matter. Dean's pretty darn grateful for having his gloves with him either way. They walk in silence. And they're the only ones. The car's parked a few blocks away – who knows what could happen to his poor baby out here all alone – but it's not raining or snowing and the few minutes of fresh air is kind of welcome.

Probably halfway to the car Sam finally breaks the silence with, "I've never been to a gay nightclub."

"Obviously." He snorts.

"No, I mean... it was kinda weird."

Huh? "Meaning?" he prompts.

"It felt weird. Not like bad weird, just different weird, I guess. But you? You took to it like a duck to water. Looked pretty comfortable out there."

What the fuck? Take in his comments from before, that's something he so doesn't want to hear from his brother. Not tonight, not in the morning, not ever if he can help it. Dean stops walking. Just stops. "What is *that* supposed to mean?"

For just a second, Sam looks hurt. It's gone the next. "Nothing, man." He says, "Nothing, just... Okay. Look, it's probably just that you're better at adjusting to new surroundings than I am. You always were, so..."

"So?"

"So nothing, I guess. Forget I said anything."

Oh, to drop this shit sounds oh-so-appealing, so when he opens his mouth to tell him that yes, that's a pretty decent idea, and out comes, "no, no, no, what the hell are you implying here, Sammy, because I sure as hell don't get it"? He pretty much wants to eat his tongue.

"I'm not implying anything, Dean. Why can't we just have a normal conversation? Why do you always have to look for hidden traps in everything someone says to you? And I'm not a even stranger, you know, I'm your brother--"

"Sam." *Shut up.*

"--and I care about you. Is it so hard to be honest with me for once? I mean, I'm not the

little kid anymore, I don't need to be protected from shit." *I beg to differ, little brother.* "I don't need to be coddled. I'm just saying that I wouldn't care if there was--" And fuck him, he's never been so grateful for a distraction in his life then he's here and now.

A loud crash cuts off his brother's words as the iron gate they walked past moments ago bangs shut. They whirl around so fast that he gets dizzy for a second, hearing Sam swear next to him. Dean doesn't know what he would have done if Sammy had gotten to finish what he thinks he was about to say. Bolt, maybe, he still wants to run. And isn't that just fucking pathetic? That he wants to run far, far away from his little brother? Yeah, he thought so.

Only he can't even if he dared to give into the childish impulse, 'cause there's someone standing there, clad in black and half covered by shadows. Not. Good. Dark clad strangers in an even darker alley in the middle of the night are never a good thing. Even if they're female. And yup. Dean can clearly make the gun cradled in the chick's hand. Figures. After all the shit of the last few days, now they are getting mugged?! Oh for the love of--! He makes to take a step forward, but Sammy grabs his arm holding him back, and what's that about?

"Dean, no."

"Dude. What?"

"Just don't."

"Don't what?!"

A soft, quiet chuckle makes him turn back to the chick. "I guess he means you shouldn't do anything stupid," she says lightly. "Pretty good advice, if you'd ask me."

"That's okay. No one asked you, sweetheart."

She shakes her head, and if they were standing closer, Dean's sure he could hear her sigh. "See, I knew he's the clever one of your dynamic duo." Dean watches her turning her gazes to Sammy. It's still too dark to see clearly, but he's pretty sure of that. "You'd better make sure to keep that brother of yours on a leash if you want to keep him. I mean, we wouldn't want anything... bad happening to him, would we?"

"What do you want?"

"Oh, nothing in particular," she says, and the bitch actually has the nerve to point the gun at him. Finger against the trigger. He can see it in the little of light that's there. "And just in case you wondered, I'm not going to mug you. It's just... I've been looking for you. You're asking too many questions." She nods to herself, like she's having another conversation with herself in her head. Which is a little wacky, Dean thinks. "I think it's better to stop with that, wouldn't you agree?"

"Because you're gonna blow our heads off?"

"Oh no, see, I don't really like guns," she admits, eyeing the shiny chunk of metal in her hand with disdain. Almost wary. "They are so... dirty, unclean, you know. But sometimes you need one just to get your point across. Like now." Okay, correction. This isn't wacky, this is nuts.

"The point being?" Sam counters, and he silently applauds his little brother.

"Leave town. Never turn back. Forget about everything you know about what I did and I'll do the same."

"Sorry, can't do, sweetheart," Dean sing-songs, tilting his head from side to side. "Hmm, what do you think? I kinda like the city."

"You think you're so clever, don't you?"

"Nah, Sammy's the smart one. Said so yourself." Dean says, "Me? I'm just pretty."

"Well, then, let me see what I can do about that." She's mumbling to herself now, gripping something to her chest, and Dean gets a bad feeling about all of this. A very bad feeling. Oh ha. It doesn't really come as a surprise once the air around them gets colder. "It's a shame, I thought that we'd maybe could talk it out, like adults, but if you'd rather play. Oh well. My babies like to play after all."

The one streetlight he can see from where they stand starts to flicker and... *oh shit, oh shit!* That's not bad, that's fucked. *They* are fucked.

Hand on his elbow, Sam says, "Dean," and, "shit."

Dean says, "Run." And they do. But it won't help, won't get to the car in time. He knows.

"Maybe you'll wise up a bit after our little game. Enjoy." The last thing he sees before his world implodes in cold and pain, is a translucent, malformed face heading his way, sneer firmly in place.

This is when the night starts to go downhill.

Like, *really* downhill.

*__*__*

Didn't even split up this time! Fuck. The loft door slides shut behind them with a dull bang, abruptly tossing them into darkness yet again. Obviously Brian and Justin are not home yet. *Good.* Covered in black and red and whatever, they are a sight to behold and Dean's very glad that no one cared to stop long enough to take a closer look at them back on the way to the car or just downstairs. Sam doesn't pause after typing in

the code and turning the lights on before he's dragging Dean up the stairs. Sam's not bleeding like a strung up pig, so it's just natural that he's got no problems with balance or dizziness. Has no problem not stumbling over the three steps or anything.

Dean so would complain about all the dragging, he just can't get his mouth to work. And oh how he hates it. Dragged around like a doll. Like a bother. And if there's something Dean hates more than those evil sons of bitches out there, it's to be a bother. To depend on someone else, least of all Sammy. Sadly there's no way of taking care of the cuts himself without putting too much strain on his shoulders. And that's not a good idea at all. Hurts like hell, too. Muscle strain, he supposed. *Terrific*. Somehow he gets into the bathroom, right up to the sink, when Sam vanishes for a second or three before appearing at his side again. Red stained fingers dig into the edge of the sink, holding on as the room spins around him.

Must be the blood loss, he thinks stupidly.

And how stupid could they be anyway? Going out like this? Being so damn reckless? That's something that could have happened ten years ago, but not freaking now. Not after everything that happened. There's not even a good excuse at hand. He opens his eyes again when Sam start cursing softly under his breath. It takes a moment to focus. Sam's fumbling with the previously thoroughly polished faucet, hands too slippery with blood and sweat for stainless steel.

But oh, hey, somewhere between cursing Hell, Heaven and whatever else, the water finally comes on. Which shuts Sam up. Dean would be happy to make a joke about that, it's just, well, he isn't so sure he's not going to throw up all over them instead. And that would pretty much ruin the punch line. Also, *yuck*. Before he knows it, the pressure on the cut is gone and he winces at the abrupt strain when his jacket comes off. Along with a lot of blood.

Oh and there's nothing that compares to seeing countless twinkling stars in a closed room with no window. Nothing whatsoever.

Sam lets the flowing water wash the blood away, a shirt – *and where'd that come from?* - going where even the lukewarm stream isn't helping any. Once the dried blood and all are gone, it doesn't actually look so bad. Well, that's something. But as always, being the overdramatic little brother that Sam is, he's huffing and puffing and making an easy task of cleaning a flesh wound look like heart surgery. Sam glowers at him. Which, what? "I didn't say anything."

Sam's glare deepens, jaw clenching. "Oh, no need to, dude."

It says a lot about them - and him - that he keeps his mouth shut after that. Thinking about the blood, he wonders what Brian will think when he discovers blood stains on his shiny hardwood floor. Maybe nothing, who knows what the guy's into. He can't imagine him being into that shit, but a grin tugs on his lips nonetheless.

"What's so funny, asshole?"

Uh-oh. "Nothing, I was just thinking—ah, know what? Never mind."

Sam scoffs, face crunched up in concentration. "There might be something still in there," he murmurs after a while.

"So get it out."

He barely hears the door over the water and the blood rushing in his ears. Open and close again. Then voices, and as far as he can tell, it's not just Brian and Justin. There's third voice. Soft murmurs and the rustle of clothes follow, and *they brought someone home with them?! Knowing exactly that Sam and Dean would be here, that's either kinky or miserable. Maybe both. Miserably kinky? Hmmm...* He starts a little when Sam pulls his arm from under the faucet, shutting the water off. Either he didn't hear, or he didn't care.

Then suddenly it's Justin's voice, loud and clear, and he sounds... stunned. "Brian."

He'd be stunned, too, if there were bloodstains all over his floor, not knowing how they got there. Or maybe he'd be more alarmed and get a gun. Considering what could jump out at him from the darkness. Whatever.

"What the..."

A sharp intake of breath, then, "Get out." Brian. Of course.

"*What?*" The trick.

Door open. "I said, get the fuck out. Show's over."

"Fuck you."

"Yeah, yeah. Dream on." The door bangs shut and there's silence again.

It takes Brian and Justin approximated two and a half minutes before they walk into the bathroom. Two and a half minutes in which Sam prepares to dig into his arm to look for leftovers of the wire. Brian's still in the most expensive jeans Dean's ever seen – and no way in hell would he dig a grave in those – Justin in his club outfit. He ignores the gasp from the latter. He can't, however, ignore the, "Jesus fucking Christ, what the fuck happened to you?" The *fabulous* scene they walk into? *Must be awe inspiring.*

Brian stares at them. And... oh yeah, answering the question might be a good idea. "Got slammed into a nice, sharp fence," he gets out between clenched teeth, "Barbwire is so not a good thing to get thrown into, let me tell you. Hurts like a bitch to rip it out of your flesh, too. But otherwise? Nothing to worry about."

"Yeah, if you excuse the extensive *blood loss* all over the place," Sam snarks.

Dean rolls his eyes. "Oh yeah, that," he jibes with a smile.

Justin isn't looking so good as he offers Sam the first aid kit. They've got their own, even though Sam has no idea how it got here. Into the bathroom with them, that is. Sam tells him just that, summoning a pair of tweezers and gauze from out of nowhere. Maybe he got it when he vanished before. Yeah. Probably. He asks for a magnifying glass, however. Dean can guess why Sam doesn't get theirs. It's not likely that Sam wants to leave him alone, not even for a few minutes and despite the fact that he's not gonna die in the meantime.

Sam's curt "thanks" gets lost on Dean when he's pushed onto the closed toilet. A bottle with clear liquid is handed to him a moment later along with two white pills. Dean swallows them without a fuss.

"Shouldn't you, I don't know, go to a hospital?" the blond inquires soon, "I mean, that looks kinda nasty."

There's an ironic little smile tugging on his brother's lips whilst he prods and stabs at the cuts. "Nah, it's not so bad."

"I think he's...uh, going to need stitches, Sam."

"I know."

Confusion leaves the blond's eyes as Sam produces a pair of needles. "You're gonna do that by yourself?"

Sam doesn't answer, but Dean does: "Yeah. He's done it before. We all did. Hell, we'd bleed to death a million times if we didn't know how to stitch each other up."

There's got to be a joke in there somewhere, right?

-- TBC

@moko-chan: Thanks for the comment. In the beginning I wasn't sure how to make this work, either, but I hate to let a challenge go, so it grew and grew and in the end it ate half of my brain. ;) Glad you like it, though.

@Freak1395: Wenn ich die ganze Story fertig habe, vielleicht nehm ich mir irgendwann die Zeit das Ganze zu übersetzen oder jemanden zu suchen der es macht. Ich bezweifle das zwar stark, sorry, aber wer weiß.

Part 12: ...Up close, barbwire is rather unpleasant.

Given that this must look like right out a horror movie, that might not be so far off. It's always amazing how steady Sam's hands are when he threads the needle. He swallows more of the colorless liquid in the bottle, preparing for the dreaded part of this. Brian's quiet the whole time, silently watching when Sam pats his arm dry with one of the fluffy towels. It's a shame, really, but Dean isn't sure he cares. "Think that's enough, Sammy?" he asks, quietly.

"It's Sam." The response is curt, automatic, but it's there. And that is never going to get old.

"Course it is, Sammy boy."

Brian snorts, looking as relaxed as could be leaning against the wall - as if there is nothing wrong with this scene. Or the world. Totally not like a guy who was about ready to get lucky in a threesome a minute ago. Before he noticed two lunatics in his bathroom, bleeding all over the place.

Sam ignores Brian and him, no doubt finding nothing funny in any of this. Well, nothing new there. Instead, the bottle is removed from his hands and put down beside them on the floor. Dean watches it tumble for a second, feeling eyes on him. He knows Sam's watching him. The same look he's been watched with ever since. Since they told his brother his heart was giving out, told him he was gonna die. He doesn't like to think about those days, hates the fact that Sammy can't just let go of them.

He's fine, damn it, perfectly fine. And still, Sam sometimes looks at him like he's gonna vanish into thin air. It makes his heart hurt, just a little. And not for himself, but for Sam. They don't talk while Sam stitches the ripped open skin together. He's too busy biting the insides of his cheeks against the pain of the threading needle, Sam's too busy clenching his jaw shut as he works, hands gentle as they ever were. The movement of the needle is close to mesmerizing: in, out, tug, in out, tug - steady as the ticking of a clock, the pitter patter of the waves at the beach.

He almost jumps when Brian breaks the silence, voice overly loud in the tiled room. Silence covering them like a wet, heavy blanket. "So," he says, taking in the bloody mess, "this is how it usually goes. With the ghosts." When Dean opens his eyes to look at him, he looks calm. Almost cold. Like this is just any other night. Like he'd been spending at least one night a week watching guys stitching each other up. If he does, Dean's not sure he wants to know.

"Yeah, more or less," Sam murmurs when he keeps his silence. Dean's not sure anyone but he notices when he flinches just a bit as the needle once more breaches broken skin. The little over half a dozen stitches already in are even and smooth, like they always were. Sam was better at this, ever since their father taught him how to do it so many years ago, and Dean was always happy when it was him. He has the suspicion his

dad felt the same way. Oh Sam doesn't like doing it – hates hurting Dean, and come on, this is Sam, so it has to be part of the why – never did – but he does it anyway because it's important. And because it's Dean.

Because as much as Dean worries about his little brother, Sam worries just as much about him. He's always known this, you know, deep inside, but the disaster with the raw head made it obvious. Painfully so. There's got to be a joke in there somewhere, but he's too busy trying to keep the pain at bay that he can't spare the power to figure it out. And he hates it. One of his defenses and it's compromised because of the drugs and the alcohol and oh yeah, the concussion he probably has, too. Concentrating hard on his breathing, he barely hears Brian's voice, questioning and Sam answering.

"Up close, barbwire is rather... unpleasant," he hears himself say, slurring just a little. "But! We had worse!" And, yes, that's true. They had.

Sam says nothing after that. Which says a lot, mind you. But Justin does. Dean's pretty sure it's Justin. "Do you need anything? Are you hungry? I can make something to eat, we have..."

"Justin--"

"...something here, I am sure we--" He stops rambling so suddenly that Dean involuntarily turns. And blinks. Brian's kissing him. *That's one way to shut someone up*, he thinks. When they part, Justin's looking a little flushed and a lot confused. "What?"

"You're rambling. Go. Heat up some soup for the two Ghostbusters over there. We can fuck later."

"Oh, yeah. Yeah, okay."

Free food is always great. Only Dean isn't so sure he can get it down right now. Or no, getting it down isn't the problem, it's the keeping it down part that is. But it gives the kid something to do, and he remembers the mountain of cut vegetable from the other night, too. Considering it was partly their fault, it's only fair they help to get rid of them. Justin leaves with a small smile. Once he's gone, Brian steps further into the room. He's eyeing the sink, the artful pink splashes of watered down blood on the mirror.

"How did you end up tangled in barbwire?"

"Got tossed around for a bit and I managed to shred my arm in a heap of that shit," he grits out, digging blunt nail of his uninjured hand into his palm. "Now, three guesses as to who did the throwing. And the first two? So don't count, dude."

"Fuck."

That poker face? It could be one of his own, Dean knows. Somehow it doesn't surprise him when the other man turns around and stalks out of the room. It's one thing to be

told about these things, but another to be shown. To see. And if this isn't pretty graphic, Dean doesn't know what is. He can hear the clutter of dishes from the other room, the trickle of water on metal, and he can't help but smile. It's comforting somehow, a reminder of a time long gone. At time that might have been just a dream.

And that right there? Must be the alcohol talking.

The second Sam's done patching him up, Dean sends him to take care of himself. Or attempts to anyway, since Sam doesn't deem his injuries as severe enough. No open wounds, but even the bruises he must sprout have to be taken care of, too. Just with some ice, but Sam has to move tomorrow. So he might as well get it done. His little brother snorts, an ugly snarl marking his face. "Funny, Dean. If you ever start following your own advice," he hisses, "I'm gonna remember this conversation with fondness. But now, not so much."

"Dude. Stop being such a worrywart. I can take it from here, time to lick your own wounds." He waves his uninjured hand – make that less injured hand – toward the open doorway. "Get out of here, I'm gonna shower." Sam doesn't move. *The hell?!* "Oh come on, Sammy, back off."

"But..."

Dean's already shaking his head, nope, not going to work. "Nuh-uh." He wildly gestures towards the door. Again. "Out. Now. Before I shove your ass out of here myself."

"You shouldn't be alone, you're--"

"Oh for the love of!" He takes a deep breath. "Dude. I'm fine. I'm good." He's not really, but what's new? Sam doesn't need to know. "Do what big brother tells you, and fetch yourself ice okay." He smirks. That said, "Besides, I took showers before you even knew how to go pot--"

Sam slams a hand over Dean's mouth, eyes blazing. "Don't you even think about finishing that sentence, man. Don't you dare."

He snorts – wetly – and gets a kick out of the fact that Sam squeals like a girl, as he's snatching his hand back as fast as humanly possible. Wiping it on his scrubby pants. "Oh come on, spit won't kill you."

"You're disgusting, Dean."

"Yeah yeah, now get out of the room so I can take my shower in peace." And just for the sake of baiting his brother some more, he adds, "That is, if you don't want to stay." He wriggles his brows suggestively, and the next thing he knows, something wet smashes into his face and a door slams shut. He pats himself on the back as the wet towel hits the floor next. Not his fault that Sam is so easily distracted, but it's pretty neat.

Oh so slowly removing the rest of his clothes, he turns on the water... and oh God! It's actually hot! Stepping under the spray he sighs half in pleasure, half in pain. The pleasure wins. The pressure is *just right*, needling his all too tired muscles and – *God* – it's heaven. Heaven! Who needs a house with a white fence, 2.3 kids and a freaking dog? He'd move into the shower, hell, he'd *marry* the shower if Brian only lets him.

So... *probably not*.

Jarring himself out of his blissful daze, he starts to scrub himself clean under the hot spray and *ow, shit OW!* Stupid bruises. On the other hand, it's not like it's going to kill him. Shrugging to himself, he scrubs some ore at a patch of dried blood on his left thigh. All he wants now, thought, is to finish his shower, get a bite to eat – maybe – and then crawl under the fluffy comforter on the sofa. Falling asleep to the sound of the traffic downstairs. Or, falling asleep period. That sound about right. And *sooo* good. Tempting. Really, really tempting.

But it's only as he gets out of the shower, ignoring his itching stitches and petting himself dry that he actually notices just how tired he really is. It takes a lot more strength than it should to slip on his clean clothes – *thanks Sammy*. His body's protesting every single move, every muscle screaming out in agony as he stretches his arm over his head. Oh yeah, that what so little sleep gets you. And getting thrown around, of course. The painkillers are doing their part, taking the edge off the pain. He doesn't want to think about how much he'd ache without them.

Propping himself up against the sink, he squeezes his eyes shut, focusing on how to breathe and *not* fall down like an idiot.

As soon as the room actually stops spinning, he pushes himself off the sink and toward the door. Not good to let little brother wait too long and let him agonize over his well-being, or lack of therefore, as he's sure Sam is doing by now. Then again, if he can manage to walk over to his sleeping place, a.k.a. the sofa, without falling on his face or something equally humiliating? Would be just as good.

But you see, Winchesters are never that lucky, so Dean isn't either. Just as karma has it out for him, the dizziness hits him as soon he steps out of the room, moist air following in his wake. Walking straight into his brother. Well, almost. *Joy!* And what the hell is the kid doing hovering in front of the freakin' door anyway?

"You okay?" Sam's voice makes it barely over the rushing blood in his ears to his brain.

Oh. Right. Exactly that. *Hovering.* Worrying. *You're such a mother hen, Sammy.* "No, I'm actually lying passed out in the bathroom, drowning in the shower stall," he wheezes. And was it always so hard to breathe? "What the fuck do you think?"

"Fuck you Dean! You lost a lot of blood, for God's sake. I think that justifies the slightest concern I might have of you slipping in there and breaking your neck. But hey! You don't have to concern yourself about this, right? Because you are so much above that, above mere human effects, or whatever. Right. Be macho all you want but, dude, don--" And that is when this *blahblahblah*-we-had-it-all-before-drama

actually gets interesting.

Or no, no, no. Not interesting, but... uh, weird. Why? Oh, that's easy. The sound cuts off. Yeah. Cuts off. Just like that. Like you'd suddenly switch the TV on mute. And since he can still see Sammy talk, lips moving and all that, but no noise makes it past that rushing sound? He finally gets the memo that yes, there might be something wrong here. Has to be. Furrowing his eyes, he softly shakes his head. Once, twice. It doesn't work. It only results in making his head feel like a massive balloon and his brain a little woozy. Maybe a little like flying. *Oh Christ!*

The next thing to go is the feeling in his hands, and, shit, his legs feel like Jell-o. Not much of a comfort that he, you know, actually feels them. Nope. When Sam reaches for him, he accidentally looks down and...whoa! Way too far up from the ground. Oh wow, the feeling of his arms are gone, too, since hello? He doesn't feel his brother's hands – paws, really – gripping them. Looking up again, he catches the look of worry, of panic on his brother's face that only gets more intense, heartbeat after heartbeat.

Or maybe that's...his head pounding?

Blinking, he tries to clear the black dots from his vision, only to have them melt into each other, the room and—

...this is going to hurt...

—he might already be out cold before he feels himself hitting the floor.

*_*_*

The first thing he hears is his brother's voice. Which is good. It's quiet, but not far away quiet, rather the 'I-don't-want-to-wake-my-big-brother-so-I'm-going-to-talk-very-softly' kind of quiet. The next thing he hears, really hears, is what he is saying. It's all still pretty fuzzy, voices weaving in and out, but what does get through to his brain is not what he wants to hear. Or what he expected. The words, "...heart" and "...damaged."

Uh-huh. Yeah, he knows where to put those two word in context, even half unconscious, and, yeah, so not cool. He remembers, though, that Sam hates talking about it. Or perhaps it's him who hates to hear about it, he's not so sure. Then Sam's talking again...and what the fuck anyway? Why is he talking about that *now*? "----like I was going to be sick. Except I knew better, I know things they don't. I found what I was searching for----ignorant asshole showed up at the motel----sick of----no hot nurses----to see a specialist--

"----anything but ecstatic, complained I wouldn't let him die in peace----let him die, period. ----healed him. Only it wasn't okay, others died too, died because of it. Because of me----want to see that there was a catch. Because I couldn't lose----crazy enough to do something like so the man she loved was still with her. Dean said no, she wasn't

crazy, just desperate----because so was I----a way to keep him alive. If I had known what was going on, I'd probably still have taken him there----never forgive myself if I hadn't tried. Anyway..."

And that about as much as he can take. Enough to last him the rest of his borrowed lifetime. And then some. Time to cut that shit out. "There you go with the chick-flick moments again," he mumbles tiredly, barely able to scrape enough energy together to get the words out. And both Justin and Sam, from what little he sees off them sitting there on the stairs, jump about a foot high. Brian snorts from... somewhere. "I'm out, what, a minute? And you go all Dr. Phil on them."

"You were asleep, or should I say. Knocked. Out. Flat on your ass, so it doesn't count..."

"It totally does. And I'm *sure* other people in here would like to *not* drown in your God damned chick flick moment. Christ. Now shut up... and g-get out of my way, I have to piss." And possibly throw up, but he's going to keep that little detail to himself. Not that it will be a secret for long, but hey! Stubborn here! He can almost see Sam's fingers twitch when he drags himself out from under the covers, itching to help and aid him into the next room. Bright kid that he is, Sam keeps his damn hands to himself. *Good.*

Lucky fella that Dean is - *yeah right!* – he makes it to the bathroom just in time. Which is really *thisclose*, so he's not going to complain. Much. And not generally about that. Why do hits to the head always have this affect on him? Well, not always. If there is enough adrenalin pumping through his veins, then hell no, this does not happen. Like in a life or death situation, the infamous 'I'll-have-to-move-otherwise-we're-dead' moment, and '*Move your ass nownownow*'. Only now? No such luck.

He'll just crouch in front of the toilet and worship the porcelain gods a little bit longer, thank you very much.

And just so you know, coughing up Tequila along with other... fluids and stuff? Not cool. Nope. Burns like hell. He is all too aware of the fact that Sam and Justin and Brian should be able hear him in the next room, but even more aware that none of them – especially that goddamn mother hen of a little brother – make their way in here. Let him keep *some* dignity, 'kay? That said, how the hell Sam came up with the topic of his... almost dying, he'll never know. Not even sure he wants to.

When he walks out again, teeth brushed, he silently walks back to the bed, sitting down. "So, blood loss?"

"Yeah, the adrenalin finally wore off..."

"And me down," he jokes. "Yeah, I figured." Not that somebody actually has the decency to laugh or anything. Or it's just not funny, who knows. Sam looks like he's either going to cry, or hug him, which dude, both unacceptable. So yeah. "So, someone said something about food?"

*_*_*

It takes a few minutes before Justin finally shows up in his line of sight, ignoring Brian's words of mockery, carrying a tray with a bowl, a glass of what Dean assumes is orange juice and a bottle of water. "I didn't know which you'd like better," Justin says, placing the tray next to him on the bed.

"Water's fine, thanks." The bowl is filled with some kind of soup and, *hmmm*, it smells wonderful. If it tastes only half as good...*yum!* Dean, however, eyes Sam and Justin with distrust and a moment later increasing horror as they make themselves comfortable and at home on the huge bed. Justin's holding the bowl, Sam the spoon. And if they are going to do what he thinks they are thinking of doing... oh no, no, no! Oh hell, no!

"Dude! Personal space here," he snaps.

"Shut up Dean, and eat."

Brian, walking up the stairs, snorts. "I can get you a towel to cover him up if you need one," he mocks, eyeing the three of them with open gloating.

And why wouldn't he? Enough is enough. "If one of you two clowns has the nerve to actually try and spoon feed me that fucking soup," he says, glowering at them both, "I'm gonna kick your ass out of the door, down the stairs and out onto the street butt naked like the day you were born with my hands tight behind my back. So... *back THE HELL off!!*"

They do. *Now would you look at that?*

Justin and Sam both glare at Brian when he laughs.

"Now that's better." He proclaims cheerfully, taking the bowl from Justin and wriggling his fingers at Sam. "Gimme," he says, snatching the spoon out of too big hands as soon as he can. Dipping it into the clear, hot liquid, his stomach grumbles at him. Oh yeah, something to eat might not be a bad idea. He's worried about it being bad, since it smells good enough. Come to think of it, he survived countless not-so-good diner's all over the country *and* his father's cooking. And as much as he loves the man, nothing, *nothing* could ever be worse than that.

Aside from that, it is a home cooked meal, which makes him totally not picky. And to his stomach's delight, the soup is more than good. It's fantastic.

"Uh, I had to warm it up after you...uhm, so, it could be a bit--"

"Can it, kid. It's good," he says another mouthful, already shoveling more vegetable and soup on the spoon.

It doesn't take long to empty the bowl and he doesn't decline the second one or the third. By then his brother is rolling his eyes and Justin can barely keep from smiling. That's makes it worth it. Not that it is a burden to eat the delicious soup in the first place. He is kinda hungry, so that's not a problem. But it's a nice side effect that it makes the pretty blond smile and Sam worry less. Gets them both off his back.

As soon as Justin and Sam are gone to do one thing or another, Dean takes a deep breath of relief. He's tired, hurting, and he longs for a good night's sleep. Since that's not an option, he could go for the next best thing: a nap of a few hours a day.

The pillows are heaven when he leans back into them, taking the strain off his upper body. Somewhat at least, since the arm is still throbbing like a bitch, shoulders feeling like they're going to rip themselves off the rest of his body. In other words, he feels like shit. Dean closes his eyes briefly, trying to will the pain away the happy pills cannot. And with his eyes closed, the headache is almost easier to take, too. Taking a careful breath, he concentrates on the soft noises of dishes being cleaned, paper shuffling and glasses rattling.

Getting thrown around by bitchy ghosts so isn't fun. In fact, it outright sucks.

He startles a bit when the bed dips beside him. Forcing his eyes open, he wonders why he didn't notice Brian coming so close. The light in the bedroom is off, Brian holding out a glass filled with honey colored liquid to him. "Beam," he enlightens him in a low, steady voice, sensing his confusion. "You look like you need it."

Dean snorts. He just might. Taking the glass from long, elegant hands, fingers touching for a little more than the necessary seconds – or a lifetime. The first sip burns down his throat, settling warm and heavy in his stomach. Somewhere in the back of his head, a soft voice that sounds *just like Sam* tells him it's probably not smart to mix painkiller with even more hard liquor. Then again, the same voice tells him that every time. Doesn't listen. The second swallow goes down more smoothly; by the fifth, he doesn't even notice the burn anymore.

Maybe that's why he doesn't protest when the brunette stretches out alongside him, watching. *Too close*, the rational part of his mind shrieks, but the alcohol and the fuzzy feeling all around get to him and he doesn't care. Or maybe it's 'cause Dean feels so goddamn cold, like he's freezing from the inside out, and Brian's so wonderfully warm – he can feel it even though they're not quite touching. Otherwise Dean might just be going crazy. Maybe all of the above. Or somewhere in between.

Yeah... He watches out of the corners of his eyes as he drapes that sinfully body even closer to Dean's side, propping his chin on his hand.

Guy looks like a piece of art.

He chuckles to himself and his thinking. That thought's just a bit too corny, he can't help himself. Brian, well, Brian's frowning, confused. Yeah, guy can't hear his thoughts after all, which is not that bad. Really. If if he think Deans crazy. "'Tis nothing," he mumbles, blinking against the urge and let heavy lids close. The smile he receives, the

raised brow, it's so familiar. Probably because he saw it on himself so many times before. "'Tis nothing," he says again, draining his glass slowly before it slips from his already fragile hold.

When he's done, Brian leans closer, so close that his breath tickles Dean's ear "You should go to sleep," he says, "you'll probably feel better when you wake up."

"mmm..."

Drawing lazy circles on Dean's thigh, he murmurs, "You should feel honored, you know, not a lot of people get to sleep in here." That makes him chuckle again, and my, who knew that laughing could hurt so much? *You do know*. Right he probably just... forgot. Kinda. "Don't fucking laugh at me, you asshole," Brian scowls softly, but there's a smile in his voice, so, "it's true."

It might very well be. Dean doesn't care. Couldn't care less, droopy eyes feeling like they weigh a ton - or twenty. "Mm..."

There's a long pause where the world seems to slow around him, everything he hears are the dishes clattering in the background, water rushing and the faint scratching noise Brian's nail makes moving over his jeans clad thigh. "Very eloquent." He isn't sure, but he thinks there are lips touching his for the fraction of a second before he whispers, "Go to sleep, Dean," breath tickling his cheek.

Dude, I'm not a kid! Don't tell me what to do!, he wants to say, protest, because really, Sammy does it all too much these days. But when he opens his mouth to tell him off, everything that gets out is a yawn. Next to him, Brian starts talking, close to his ear, voice barely above a whisper, low and a little raspy. Dean slips into a light doze as he listens to it, lulling him to sleep little by little.

Already half asleep, he wonders how this bone deep exhaustion could sneak up on him like this. Without... him noticing. *Hmm...weird...* Or maybe it didn't sneak up on him so much as the last few days did. *Fucking pain pills. Fucking ghosts*, he thinks.

He doesn't think for long anymore, as sleep finally claims him as their own.

He dreams of hazel eyes and brown hair that night.

-- TBC

Interlude #3: ...You keep talking.

- Brian's POV.

You keep talking and talking until you're sure he's asleep.

You keep talking even longer than that, voice barely above a whisper at the end.

You talk about Justin, the night you met him, about the weather, about Gus, about everything and nothing, and you're damn sure Dean misses all of it. Every single word you say. Which is probably the one and only reason all of that shit is spewing out of your mouth in the first place. He looks so still like this, lying there next to you, sleeping. It's almost the absolute opposite of his usual personality. But of course, you know him for a few days, hours really. How would you know anything about him? About how he is? What makes him tick? But then again, the liveliness you've come to witness in him?

It fits.

Way better than this absolute stillness while he's just sleeping. It's just about disturbing when you compare this to the spirit and energy he presents while awake. Strange enough, you don't mind him here, sleeping in your bed. Despite him laughing it off, it's true what you told him. Few people slept in this bed that weren't you. Justin, Mikey, just a handful of people, if that. It's also true that you fucked countless tricks in here. None of which had the right to stay. To sleep in here. Never sleep.

Well, technically speaking, Dean isn't even *that*. A trick.

You never fucked him.

Not yet, anyway, your arrogant mind cuts in, and oh shit, you hope so, too. Truth is you kissed him more than once, made out in the backroom of Babylon like horny teenagers just some time ago, but you didn't get to fuck him.

Like with Mikey.

Only Michael is your friend, your best friend. Dean isn't. Not even close. Dean is a little more than a stranger right now, at best, and still, he's here, isn't he? Why's that? *Because*, your brain cuts in once again, *you asked him to. 'Cause you want him. 'Cause you want to know.*

Yes. He has something upon him that draws people in. Makes them curious. Makes *you* curious, and that's something not a lot of people can say about themselves--making Brian Kinney curious about them. Usually people bore you. And few have ever managed to hold your interest when it's not about fucking. Probably a lot less than even people sleeping a night in your bed.

Justin is the exception to both of those rules. Ever since the very first night you met him. Fuck, it's never boring with him. You never get sick of him, not really, and even the fucking isn't getting old. But he is your--fuck, he *is* your lover, you can admit as much to yourself. Dean? Isn't. Then why does he fascinate you so damn much? What's his secret? He's pretty, oh yeah, hot even, and yes, you admit you want to get in his pants. Desperately. Want to bury yourself to the hilt in that gorgeous, firm ass of his.

But it's not that, or at least it's not *just* that. If that was the case, hell, he wouldn't make you curious about anything more than how he'd look out of his clothes. How his mouth would feel on your cock. How he'd sound while you'd rim him within an inch of his life, holding him right there on the brink. How he'd writhe under you when you'd talk dirty to him until he'd be begging for release.

Breathing in deep, you stamp down on that train of thought. Oh yeah, you can be a kinky bastard most of the time, but humping a guy that's injured, on pain killers and therefore dead to the world? That would be awfully low even for you.

But that you're not just interested in all of that? Assures you that the guy's more than a potential fuck. A mystery, that's what Dean is.

A real one. And that's *it*, isn't it? The crux of it all.

Careful not to disturb him, you finally take an empty glass from his limp hands. There's not much resistance as you peel fingers from the warm, smooth surface, your touch lingering longer than strictly necessary. Thing is, you can't make yourself care. To let go. Or feel guilty. Humping a passed out guy's leg would be bad, but this? Nah. *No apologies, no regrets*. That's always been you're your motto, hasn't it? This isn't going to change anything.

The glass clanks softly as you put it down on the nightstand. Dean keeps on sleeping. Of course he does. It's not surprising. One, he has got to be used to domestic background noises considering the brothers must sharing a room more times than not, if not always. And two, he looked about dead on his feet when he stumbled out of the bathroom--right before he passed out the first time. Not that you blame the guy. With what he's been through, you're impressed he was still standing up at all. Silently, you watch him breathe for a few moments: inhale, exhale, chest rising, chest falling, the hand resting there moving along.

It's an incredibly soothing motion.

The ring on his finger--right hand, you noticed and you wondered--catches the faint light on every downward shift. The metal is cold under your finger when you reach out to touch him again, do so in spite of what happened the last time you did while he was asleep. You hold your breath for a moment, anxious of what might happen, but Dean sleeps on once more. You almost laugh at yourself, then. How stupid one can be sometimes. Maybe he shakes it off as not important, harmless. In the end, it doesn't matter. You fully cover his hand with yours after that, fingers curling slightly around it.

Dean's pale. Not as pale as Justin, obviously, and you noticed it right from the start, but still pale enough, all right. Those lively, sparkling, green eyes, now hidden by a thin layer of just-as-pale skin, they stand out in his beautiful face. Sharp and taxing, or playful and sparkling. It suits him. And you've seen guys like him, too--models, strippers, whatever, boys with pretty faces and hot bodies, light curves and soft spots.

Dean doesn't have that.

Dean has angles. A lot. And probably scars, too. Rough edges that make him *him*, in a way unique that leave others in the dust. Keep him from being interchangeable and going under in the sea of pretty boys and girls. It's what makes him different, you think. An individual in every sense of the word. People may run into a brick wall trying to get close to him, to get to know him; nevertheless he possesses the power of drawing people in. *Reminds you of someone, doesn't it?* Biting back a curse, you think that, yes, he reminds you of *someone*, of yourself, and that is another fucking reason you're so fucking interested in him.

Oh and isn't *that* hilarious in and of itself? You snort quietly. Yeah. Talk about being narcissistic.

You allow yourself to touch Dean's ring again, let your thumb rub over the firm metal-- back and forth, back and forth. It's still cold, only slowly warming up to your ministrations. It's the only piece of jewelry he wears, that is, if you leave out the weird amulet, the one he doesn't seem to take off. Ever. If he does, you never noticed. You wonder about that, too. About the why. The when. What they mean; to him or someone else. Something else. Not only the amulet, but the ring, too. It looks so out of place; there's nothing feminine about Dean at all despite his pretty, big eyes and perfect lips. And yet at the same time, they fit him just as well.

You wonder when he's started wearing both.

Years, of course, has to be, both pieces are thoroughly beaten up like the shell bracelet you own lying around somewhere. But was he still a kid, a teenager? Was it a present? Something he bought himself from the first money he earned himself? You want to know, and that doesn't happen all that often either. And fuck, why do they do what they do, anyway? When did they start? How do they now about... all this? Why do they care? Dean--and Sam, too--caught your interest, and they won't lose it for maybe a long time. You knew it the moment you remembered their names the morning after meeting them. Even after you fucked Justin into the mattress after the blond's dream of Dean. Something.

You want to know about Dean, and not just because you'd like to bury *your* cock deep in his ass. It's in spite of that. Shit, most of the guys that catch your eyes to nail them can't keep it longer than it takes for you to dispose of a used condom or three after.

Which probably says a lot about you. If you cared.

You don't.

You know that he knows that you want him. Of course, you haven't been all that subtle, and he isn't stupid. You know as well that he doesn't give a shit about it. One way or another. Otherwise you might have received a broken jaw back at Babylon along with a broken nose or your wish of him on his knees sucking your cock. Neither happened.

And he could have done it without breaking a sweat. The breaking his jaw part, of course. Smirking to yourself, you guess that even he would break a sweat sucking cock. Either that or he's doing something really wrong. But the memory of a sharp blade against your throat is still vivid in your mind, and it gets rid of any fantasy your mind might indulge in fast enough to get anyone's head spin. Then there was the fact that he and Sam took the two assholes out, out for trouble--for blood--and that kills about the rest of lingering thoughts.

That's something else that has you interested in him, though. He saved Justin.

Okay, fine. Bullshit. *They* did, more or less, but still. It's Dean you want to fuck. But that's bullshit, too, since you wouldn't say no to Sam, either. He's a pretty kid, tall and strong, and fuck, that would be nice, but you know there's not a snowball chance in hell for you there--or anyone else male. Plus, fucking with him would probably kill the chance you have of ever fucking Dean. Protective fucker that he is. Not that you mind, of course. You don't even dare to about what could have happened to Justin back then, bringing unpleasant reminders of Dumpster Boy up all over again. Right now it makes your skin crawl and your stomach turn over a little too fast.

You bite your tongue to keep from calling him up here. To see--

To make sure he's all right. Here.

It's fucking pathetic. Yeah, yeah, you know that. You know that he's here, that he's okay. This time. Because of Dean and Sam, and you can't even begin to describe just how grateful you are toward the man next to you. Both of them. You can't put it into words, nor will you try, like ever, but it's still true. The memory of Justin, lying on cold cement covered in blood is one that will haunt you till the day you die. Like a persistent ghost you just now realized existed. Something else you can't--won't--put into words. This little incident brought it all back, in Technicolor and surround sound. A movie turned nightmare.

You remember Justin saying that the run-in with that asshole back in that alley was nothing--*no a big deal, Brian, really, don't fucking freak out on me*--but the bruises on his arm speak a different language. You jump a little, bed rippling beneath you as you hear that sound again. It's a memory--the sound of wood hitting flesh and bone, but it's real to you all the same. It once was. And sometimes it's still real enough to make you sick to your stomach. You press your forehead against Dean's shoulder, squeezing your eyes shut against the low light as you drag in a shaky breath.

Breathing him. Rubbing your nose against the rough fabric of his shirt. He twitches a bit, snuffling and sort of screwing up his nose, somewhat wriggling around. And

thankfully he keeps on sleeping. You don't want to explain what exactly it is you're doing. 'Cause honestly? You don't know. There are bright dots dancing behind your eyes reminding you of just how tight your squeezing them shut, hard bone of a shoulder digging into your forehead. There's something burning your eyes from the inside, something that's causing your throat to close up a little, and you'll be fucking calling bullshit if someone dares to call it fucking tears.

You don't do crying.

And how fun-freaking-tastic pathetic is that?

Letting out a self mocking chortle, you somewhat straighten up. That blood back in your bathroom? Gave you flashbacks to the night of the bashing, and you wanted to curl into a ball and hide under your freaking blanket until it all went away. Dean and Sam? They didn't even blink. Not really. Like it's normal to them and maybe, maybe it is. That thought alone makes your stomach roll a little more. A smoke. That's exactly what you need right now. Licking dry lips, it's possible that Dean's right and you really are the coward here. Ah, hell, of course you're somewhat of a coward. Only for a lot of different reasons, apparently.

You stupidly watch him breathe again. Watch him sleep.

It's hypnotic, and watching Justin sleep is one of your late-night kinks these days.

It has nothing to do with sex, however. Most of the time it's to reassure yourself that he's back. That creamy white skin against your dark sheets, lithe body pressed against yours; that he's here in your bed, with you, not with the... With *Him*. It's... comforting. That first dawn waking up beside him after so long, you couldn't believe that it was real. He was back. For the longest time you'd just stared at him, nervous out of your fucking mind that he'd just been a dream. Vanishing into thin air the moment you touched him. Just something your hangover-ish mind had made up.

But then he'd rolled toward you, right hand hitting your bare chest, and you knew he was real. Sometimes, Christ, sometimes you want to wrap yourself around him and keep him safe. Just to make sure he's there, protected and warm. You need him there, with you. Never wanted to, of course, never wanted to need anything or anyone, but it happened and yeah. Shit, you really *are* turning into a lesbian. Or the drugs are turning you into one.

Stuff makes you fucking sappy.

Or maybe you really do need a smoke. Or a drink.

You're not sure if Justin knows you're watching him. If he does, he's smart enough to keep his mouth shut. But Justin is observant, more so than a lot, hell, *most* people you know, and he's always been onto you. So, yeah. He probably knows. Little shit can almost always read you. Sometimes better than you could yourself, which should scare the fuck out of you. Which, frankly, it does. Most of the time. The rest of the days, well, it's soothing. Calming. To have someone know you that well that he

can--that he knows--ah fuck. Shit.

Better not think about it now.

You raise your head a little, just enough to catch sight of Dean's calm face.

It's only when you turn your head to the side, trying to locate the pack of cigarettes you're sure you left around here somewhere, that you become aware of his presence. The fact that you're no longer alone. Standing at the top of the stairs leading to your bedroom, it's definitely not Justin. You can tell that much. No, it's Sam. He looks like *a--no, no, no, Kinney, ghost's not the right word, not anymore*. It's just that he's covered in shadows, the faint light from downstairs making it impossible to read the expression on his face. Not from over here. The right thing to do would be moving away, quit touching him, not lying this close. And yet you can't make yourself move, let go, *get away*.

He's got to have a better view of you from where he stands. He can't not. So in turn, he should be able to *see*. Where your hands are, the look on your face, something, but he doesn't say a word. Or react in any way. From the little that you can make out, he just stands and stares. A little uncomfortable under his gaze--and what the *fuck* is that about? You don't fucking do uncomfortable. You force yourself not to squirm. It's a feeling like doing something forbidden, wrong. Tarnishing him somehow. Which is absolute nonsense, but there it is. Right here in the back of your head, whispering.

And *fuck me* if you haven't felt that way for a very long time. Not when it came to this. To touching someone. To sex. Fucking. Maybe it's because Sam's Dean's little brother or shit. You don't know, but it doesn't feel right.

This doesn't happen. It just doesn't. Only that it does now, and you want to scamper away and hide. You aren't even touching him in an inappropriate way, nor are you naked. Not even close. Weird enough, that's just how you feel. Naked. Exposed. Crazy. And even though you can't really see his face, his eyes on you are burning on skin. If he's really looking at you or if that's your imagination, you have no clue.

It's only when he steps further into the room, the light not protecting him from your eyes any longer, that you notice it's not you he's looking at. It's not even your *hands* on the body next to you that got his attention. No. His dark eyes are shining, and they are focused on one thing and one thing alone: Dean. Dean's face, probably. You look away then, eyes finding the place where your hand still holds his, and you don't feel so... guilty for touching him anymore, the way Sam looks at his brother.

Like there's nothing in the world as important to him. Like he's precious. Such a soft look in his eyes, a look that doesn't speak of affection or devotion or love. No. A look that screams all those things. Maybe it's the reason it all feels so wrong. It's a most private look no one should overlook. Tender.

And Sam. Hell. The kid is so open sometimes, eyes revealing such strong emotions without a single sign of reserve--so much like Justin that it's creeping you out. The way he talked about the time Dean had been on his death bed, so to speak? Of a

'broken' heart of all things... it hurt, enough for wanting to tell him to stop. Just... stop. It brought back memories. And not good, happy ones at that. Hospitals and blood and a scarf and nothing you want to think about now. Ever. Just hearing Sam tell that story was enough to feel cold.

It's so clear what the kid must have gone through during those days. The whole story is all kinds of fucked up, even by Brian Kinney standards of fucked-up-ness. Okay, so you knew that Dean meant a lot to Sam, not only since that fucking story. The way he stared at the man's unconscious form lying motionless in your bed from where he sat with Justin. It was so obvious, out there for all to see.

You'd give your right hand--well, no, maybe your left--to have anyone, someone, your family, look at you like this. Like they cared. Like you were important. Like it mattered. *You* mattered. But that was a long time ago, wasn't it? Now, now you couldn't care less. You don't give a shit. Not really. Only when you do, and that's even more fucked up. Just back then, when you were still a kid, it would have meant the world. 'Back then' being the key words in that.

Now your old man is dead, and your mother? Well, she might as well be, given the way she's putting away the wine or whatever she converted to now. Aside from her religion, naturally.

"It finally pulled him under." Sam's whispered words bring you back to the present after a long minute ticks by. You put on your usual mask, not sure what he's seeing right now, and smirk.

"Looks like it."

"Good thing. Doesn't get much sleep these nights." He sounds tired, oh-so-tired himself. Almost as bad as his brother looks.

So he does what he would do if it were Justin standing there, exhausted and tired and strung out. "You should go to bed. You look almost as bad as your big brother."

Sam half-heartedly glares at you. "Thanks. But we need to finish this before more people get hurt. Or killed, meaning: still got work to do."

"No you don't."

If he'd been anyone else, your sure you'd have them spluttering by now. Sam barely frowns. "I don't?"

"Nope. You've got to go to sleep, that's what you've got to do."

Frown turning into a slight smile, a shake of his head. Yet, it doesn't look like it will take a lot to convince him. "Says who?"

"Me."

Sam makes a sound that's somewhere between a snort and a chuckle. "Fine, *Dean*," he sighs. And sighs like it's the most unreasonable thing someone ever asked of him. Like the perfect, annoying little brother. The smirk on your face widens, to the point where it hurts your cheeks. And know what? You can actually see--hear?--Dean saying exactly those words to Sam. "Mind if I take a shower, then?"

"No. Go ahead."

"Thanks," he says, turning and making his way to the bathroom. He doesn't walk in. No, he pauses in the open doorway, turning back just enough for you to get a glimpse at the calculating twinkle in his eyes. Uh-huh. He's an open book most of the time, okay, but right at this moment, you have no fucking clue what he's thinking.

"You know," he starts to say, slowly and awed like it occurred to him just now, "you and him?" For a second his eyes flicker to the sleeping man next to you, but you don't need that sign to know whom he's talking about. "You might have been pretty good... friends. In a different life, I mean," he goes on. The way he hesitates on the word 'friends' makes you think he wanted to say something else. You have an idea what it might have been. Maybe. "But I sincerely pity everyone who would have crossed your path. Then."

You can't help but laugh, a short, but sincere bark of laughter, suddenly intent on avoiding Sam's dark eyes again all the same. He's right. Or he could be. When you look back up a few seconds later to tell Sam that he's over thinking things like a certain blond drama princess you know and to fucking get out of here already, he's already gone. Door closed. Huh. Might have been staring longer than a few seconds at Dean, then.

"Brian?"

You don't jump at his voice, oh no, but you are a bit surprised that you didn't hear him coming up. The bed dips under his weight, his eyes taking in your hands. Your face. Dean. You smile at him, then, turning a bit so you can make out the blue in his eyes despite the darkness. "What?"

"Everything okay?"

"Everything's peachy, Sunshine. Just... peachy."

"Yeah, except for when it's not," he states, voice a little rough from the lack of sleep himself. You love the sound of his voice. Not in bed, or no, of course you do, but not *just* then. You love the breath of your name on his lips when you enter him, love the way he talks dirty to you over the phone when you're bored to fucking death by the morons at work, or he just talks about school. The way it carries on when he talk about something he loves. His art, his mom and sister. You. There's a special kindness in his voice, his words. Like when you've had a particularly shitty day and he tries to take care of you, and for once you're not being an asshole about it, but letting him. For a while.

It's almost like he's trying to talk a skittish horse out of running away. Or a lion from biting his head off, which you guess, you can be. Sometimes even both and at the same time. When you stay silent, not knowing what to say, 'cause yes, he's right, he smiles. Reaches out to you like he always does. Pink lips curled into a soft smile, he brushes a strand of hair out of your eyes, back of his fingers brushing your scratchy cheeks. You almost laugh. Oh yeah, it's been some time since you shaved, *bite me*. You want to brush him off, tell him to *cut it out*, but you don't. You're just going to half lie, half sit here and take it. Just for now.

Take his comfort, the... love he so freely offers you in a gesture, a look or the words. Having you wonder how he can do that so openly since the day you met him. It wasn't love that first few days--make that nights--can't be, but after some time it might have turned out that way for him. And you wonder. More so now that he knows both of your history and how spectacularly it went wrong. The real kicker, and that almost startles you out of the bed, is when you suddenly realize something. You actually do have that. That Look. The one Sam bestows upon his brother. Fuck. Justin looks at *you* like that, like you're important and with so much love in his eyes that you sometimes fear you're going to choke on it.

A different kind of love, obviously, but just as intense and deep. Honest. No tricks nor traps. No mirrors. He looks at you like that right now, and all at once it gets just that little bit harder to breathe.

Justin doesn't appear to notice, for he asks, "How is he?"

Breathing a lot easier, you want to say, *all because of you*. But you have to clear your throat first--twice--until you get the words out. Around that fist-sized lump that somehow got stuck in your throat, and by then you had enough time to talk yourself out of it. So you don't. Instead you go for the obvious: "Finally sleeping, as little *Sammy* just stated." Your voice is anything but normal, yet you force yourself not to turn away from those inquiring eyes.

After a long second, Justin snickers. And let's you off the hook. "Don't let him hear you say that," he whispers, soft eyes moving to Dean's sleeping face. "I have a feeling that's just for him." Your eyes, too, automatically return to your sleeping guest. Justin moves his hand on top of yours; the one still covering Dean's. You stay like that for a long, silent moment as the shower's turning on in the background. The sound of rushing water is almost soothing in the otherwise overly quiet space, reminding you how late it really is and that you're actually tired tonight.

Justin pulls you out of the trance, saying, "Think he might come around?"

"I... don't know."

And when did you actually start to give a shit about that? *Somewhere between him saving Sunshine and turning you down. That bothers you, doesn't it?* Fucking bullshit. But the alternative is probably worse: you actually do give a shit. And that's almost worse than a wounded ego. Not that you're going to tell Justin that. You give him one of your patented tongue-in-cheek smirks. "Hopefully. I wouldn't mind getting my hand

on this one, you know?" you say, brushing sinful lips with your finger.

He shoves you a bit, but he's laughing as well. "I bet. Now cut that crap your talking and tell me how and where we'll sleep tonight. I guess you'll leave them your precious bed." It's not a question, and you know he's once again on to you. *Shit*. Still, he manages to look so sure yet so innocent, you want to kiss that smug grin off his face. And that's what you do.

Pull him down until you can ravage that lips of his, twirling your tongue around the inside of his mouth. When you let go, you're both a little winded. "What do you think, Sunshine? Sleeping on the floor, under the bright Pittsburgh night sky?" you suggest, seductively wriggling your brows. Justin gives his head a quick shake, eyes rolling so hard that you feel dizzy just watching him. Still, he is smiling.

"You're an ass, Brian, but you're an honest one," he states, leaning in to kiss you again.

What's to say to that?

-- TBC

Part 13: ...Hmmm, coffee . . . perfect!

A/N: Sorry for the overly long wait, but RL is once again a bitch. :(Anyhow, enjoy. *g*

Dean wakes to Brian talking on the phone.

Or rather that should be cursing on the phone. One, because using words mostly interchangeably with 'fuck' and 'shit' in almost every sentence isn't talking, and two, no one's talking back. Which either translates into 'phone conversation,' or Brian talking to himself. For some reason, Dean sincerely doubts the latter. It seems to be a fairly one-sided conversation - not on Brian's end, and in spite of plenty of curses. If he didn't know better, he'd say the guy was talking to one John Winchester.

That makes him snicker into the warm pillow under his cheek, burying himself further into the covers. It muffles Brian's voice, all right, but that doesn't mean shit considering the sheer volume he's talking. Neither does it do anything to soften the irritation in his voice. It is, in fact, hard to miss.

As is the anger.

"I told you, something came up," he hears, and he's sounding like he's said it a million times before. "What the fuck else do you want me to say? Yeah? So now I say otherwise, again, what the fuck do you... no, no, no, don't pull that shit on me, Lindz," *ah, a chick*, he thinks, which explains nothing and everything all at once. "I gave my rights up so you could be... no, don't try to turn this into something it fucking isn't... he isn't even. Oh hell no, you don't... fuck you."

Groaning, Dean pushes himself up on his elbows, which ouch. Not good. Apparently getting thrown around wasn't a dream. *Too bad*. Sitting up further, and more carefully with the blankets pooling in his lap, he blinks into the brightness of the not-so early morning. Like on default, his eyes automatically search out Brian, who looks like he wants to throw the phone against the wall or right out of the window. *Double ouch*. And Dean would so swear he hears plastic crack when he finally puts the phone down.

It amuses him to no end that Brian startles as soon as he detects Dean sitting up and awake. Okay, so he's twelve, whatever. "Good morning, sleeping beauty," Brian drawls, coming over to stand at the bottom of the stairs. "Took you long enough to wake up."

"Yeah, well," he mumbles, "busy night."

"Right. And you hogged the covers, too."

Uh, what? Brian reads the frown right for he asks: "You don't remember?"

"Nope. Should I?"

"Our first night and you don't even remember!"

And fuck him if Brian doesn't do shocked and scandalous well. Of course he'd be even more fucked if he actually believed a word of what the man's saying. He's hurting far too much to believe he did anything but sleep during the last hours. And his ass is about the last part of his precious body *not* hurting, so there. *Yeah, being twelve and all that.*

Dean flips him off, quickly noting that it's not a good idea as a bunch of muscles scream in protest to moving that quickly. "Fuck off, dude. I doubt I would have been anything but enthusiastic last night. Probably would have felt more like you fucked a doll. But if that's your thing..." Then again. "Come to think of it, I kinda feel like a crash test dummy right now. Which reminds me. Someone should start a petition against violating those poor saps if they feel like I do right now after their stunts. Shit and fuck."

Brian has the decency to wince a little. And snort. *Bastard.* "Coffee?"

Or not. "Yeah... please. But first," he says, sniffing himself, "shower."

"I'd say be my guest, but hey, looks like you already *are*."

"If I am, you made me one."

Forcing his tired body out of that sinfully cozy bed is not as painful as he had imagined. Getting to his feet, however, *is*. Honestly? It's even worse. His shoulders are killing him, and his arm feels like it's gonna fall off or choke him. And let's not talk about his head, 'cause *ow!* Everything is tilted a little to his left until it's finally all right. Thank god. Then again, it's pretty quiet in here, and for his little brother not to come rushing in to help him and pet him and name him George. So: "Sammy not here?"

"Nope. Went out some time ago. Said he needed to do some research on some other things." He points to the living room table. "He left a folder on the living room table for you to look at, though."

"Good," Dean says while peeling off his shirt, and in an afterthought, "thanks."

He stretches tentatively once he gets rid of the fabric, both arms over his head, and as the pain doesn't feel like he's ripping his arms off, stretches a bit more. What do you know? His shoulders start aching as soon as he pulls them down to fumble with his jeans. Great. And sleeping in those things? Not the best idea he ever had. Nor will he ever repeat that if he can help it. It turns out a real challenge to get rid of them – stiff fabric clinging to his sweaty skin. Dean makes a face. *Yuck.* Throwing the clothes in the general direction of his duffle bag – he hopes – he catches Brian staring at him. Smirking.

Oh, you've got to be kidding me! And he tells him exactly that, too, but of course, he's

not. "What now?"

As if he didn't know. And damn, does he know that look, he really, really does, so he isn't shocked when Brian offers to help. "In the shower. Make sure you don't fall on your ass, and all that?" And Dean has an idea how that *help* would turn out. In detail.

Dean doesn't bother with words. He offers the other man the infamous middle finger salute and a breathy "you wish" as he disappears into the bathroom. He doesn't close the door, and he's sure the laughter that follows his rather unmanly cries of, "Ow! Ouch, shit," is not a very cruel trick of his vibrant imagination.

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Thirty-something minutes, a shower, and the scrubbing of his teeth later, he's walking out of the steam-filled bathroom a new man. Almost. Still a little wet, yeah, but finally feeling human again. And that feels so, so good. The flowing water beating down on his abused shoulders hurt like a bitch, true, but it did the trick and beat some of the tension right out of them. Scrubbing a towel over his short hair, he doesn't bother to cover himself. Brian's seen it all before, and two can play this game. Dean is anything but shy, so it's not like a big deal or anything.

And Jesus, the cold floor feels wonderful under his bare feet. It's only Brian's quiet, "Coffee?" that shakes him out of that wonderful warmth and harmony that has settled over him like a warm blanket. A shielding armor. But coffee? Oh, he's always ready to lose it for coffee. Dean moans in contentment as the sweet, sweet scent of caffeine fills his nostrils prompting him to close his (close his what?). "Hmmm... Coffee. Perfect," he murmurs just to himself and no one else. When he looks toward the kitchen, Brian's standing behind the kitchen watching him. "Perfect. Just let me get dressed."

"I'm pretty much enjoying the view from here."

"I bet."

Slipping into a fresh set of jeans, socks, and shirt, he slowly makes his way down to the kitchen. If he just moves a little bit lower than usual, well everything is going to be fine. Right? Right. The loft is still quiet, empty if it wasn't for Brian messing with the coffee pot. "So you're the lucky one playing babysitter then, huh?" he asks coolly, seating himself. And if a deep sigh of relief rushes out of him for being off his feet? There no one to acknowledge it. *Perfect*. "How'd Sammy manage that stunt?"

Brian shrugs, way too casual look going out of the windows. "He didn't. I'm gonna work from home today. The weather is fucked, and I don't want to damage the 'vette."

Huh? Sam wouldn't dare to ruin his baby, so: "Lamest excuse ever, dude." He's gonna find out soon enough.

"Whatever."

Snorting he takes the offered mug from Brian. Dude. Coffee. Because seriously? This Dean so could fall in love with. The coffee, of course. Inhaling the oh-so-sweet aroma of the steaming liquid, he can't help but moan again. He carefully cradles the mug between two cold hands, trying not to burn himself, but at the same time warming them up. "Dude. Real coffee," he says in wonder, smirking, toasting to the man behind the counter before taking a huge swallow.

"I don't suppose you buy your coffee at Starbucks then?"

"That would be a big, fat *no way in hell*, dude. I'd have to hustle a lot more money if we did," he admits, and yeah, he would have to. Considering Sammy's fancy shit coffee cost them a fortune – seemingly a dollar per word in its name.

Brian's head snaps up, eyes narrow. "Hustle?"

"Calm down. Not that kind of hustling. 'M talking Pool, dude. Poker. Things like that."

"Yeah, well," Brian rolls his lips into his mouth, "not to say that you wouldn't be a fucking success."

Dean just snorts again, into his coffee this time, almost spewing half of it over the counter and his lap. It doesn't deserve a reply, yet it's dead on. It's not like he never got offers, mind you, but despite doing a hell of a lot of fucked up shit in his time, he never went as far as selling his body. And he won't do it, either. Not if he can help it. He's not *that* fucked up, sorry. He doesn't think. *Hm*. They are both silent, drinking coffee, and Dean thinks that this? Is a good way of starting a day. Any day.

Only the folder on the couch table is mocking him, calling his name – using Sam's voice. Fuck that. It can wait five minutes for him to finish the coffee. No need to ruin this, too, with whatever's in there. And it's got to be imported, otherwise Sammy wouldn't have bothered leaving it for him. Dean stares some more at the faded, yellow thing, and the thing stares back. Brian's faster than he is with the coffee, obviously, and excuses himself to take a shower.

Dean frowns. Would have sworn the older man was freshly showered in the first place.

Oh well. Of course there are other reasons for a shower than, oh, say, cleanliness, for example. A lot less practical, but oh-so human. He doesn't bother to hide his interest as he watches Brian strip. He doubts he's supposed to look away, either. To pass up on the show he puts up for him. He doesn't. It doesn't hurt no one, and Brian's hot, all right. So he can't touch right now, but he can very well look. And enjoy himself just a little.

Oh fuck that. Brian knows just how gorgeous he is. He plays that knowledge almost to the point where it turns to arrogance. But hey! Dean's guilty of that, too, and if it is indeed a crime, he doesn't want to be blameless. It doesn't make it any less annoying to have that trick played on him, though. Or amusing. He hasn't quite decided yet, but

it's somewhere in between. *Maybe both.* The way Brian removes all his clothes, all grand gestures and still intimate as hell, it reminds him of a stripper performing to a crowd.

When he's done, naked from head to toe, he just keeps standing there. Staring back at him, he says, "Like what you see?" Four words. Innocent, and in addition, full of innuendo. The guy's impossible – knew that already. He can't help that bark of laughter escaping him. Squirming a little in his seat, he thinks it's a pretty stupid question. It's so obvious that it hurts. Literally hurts.

"Like you didn't know..."

"Yeah. Just making sure that you do, too."

Annoying. That arrogance right there? Definitely annoying. Yup. For Dean does not *blush*. Does not stutter in the company of lovely women or men alike. He does not get flustered. Not since a long time. A very long time. So what the fuck is it about Brian that makes him feel like a virgin on prom night? What is it about him that turns Dean Winchester's hormones into a mess, sending him on a rollercoaster ride barely able to say no and stick to it? The only thing is, he doesn't seem to be the only one regressing to teenager status when confronted with that man.

Thank God. But it's nothing new, either.

And it wouldn't hurt either if his conscience freaking stopped sounding like Sam while trying to encourage him for fuck's sake! Come on, that can't be normal, right? If the little voice in his head is sounding like his little brother, it might as well kick his ass for being so distracted. Instead it's egging him on. *Yeah, well, no play makes Dean a very dull boy. And no fun to be around.* Argh. It's distracting. That's what it is. *All of this.*

"If you want to join me, feel free," Brian's interrupts.

Dean snorts. Persistent like a dog with a bone. And if that isn't one bizarrely-fitting analogy, Dean never heard one before. But it's not gonna happen. No matter that everyone seems to tell him otherwise. He's never been good at doing what he's been told, minus John Winchester, of course. Oh and how's that for a disturbing thought? No really. Pretty good, he'd say. Yeah. He stays silent as Brian shrugs, slowly turning around and parading his body into the bathroom – while giving him a good view of his backside. *Tease.*

He waits for the shower to turn on before he goes over to the folder demanding his presence. He can guess what's in there, and not particularly hot on finding out for sure. Not that he's got a choice or anything, but one can dream, right? Right. Adjusting himself in his pants a little more comfortably, he squats down low in front of the table. Reaching out, he pulls the innocent-looking thing closer. Looks can be deceiving. He's fairly certain his gut isn't leading him on in this. The innocence? Is all an act.

Shutting out the low moan reaching his ears from the other end of the loft, he goes

for the kicker and flips the thing open.

And comes face to face with the two ghosts of last night's adventure and the source behind his most recent bruises.

Or better said, a dozen or so pictures of the children the ghosts once where; living, breathing individuals and not the pale, screeching distortions he and Sam met. "Been busy, huh Sammy?" It's good to know that getting his arm and shoulders torn apart wasn't for nothing. Even better to know that they're just this little bit closer to putting that puzzle together. Doesn't hurt less, but yeah. Smiling sadly, he flips through some of the documents attached to the photos.

"Sammy say what he was going to do?" he calls out, loud enough for Brian to hear him over the flowing water.

"No. But he left a message somewhere in that folder."

Figured.

Looking some more, he finds a yellow stick-it note on one of the last pages. It's an eight by eleven photo of a young woman in worn jeans and a loose, white shirt, a tri-colored cat rubbing itself against her shin. If he looks a little more closely and frowns a little less, she actually looks familiar. *I'll be damned!* Younger she might be on that picture, but her features are the same. The hard eyes, the stern set of her mouth. No question asked. Ghost-wielding chick got a name now. "Emily McNamara," he murmurs to himself, trying the name on his lips and carefully removing the note, "Nice to finally meet you."

He crumbles the memo in his hands that tells him further that Sam has gone to do more research. On witchcraft. No, really. Witchcraft.

Huh.

At least the whole deal got rid of that hard-on.

Scoffing, he starts to flip through the folder again, pictures and reports and newspaper clippings catching his eyes for an instant as they slip by the next. Then there's the deep rumbling of the door as it opens in the background, followed by footsteps walking in. *Ever heard of knocking?* Apparently not. The tip-tap on hardwood floor is simple to relate to one thing: high heels. So. Not Sam. Craning his neck so he can look over the back of the sofa, he catches sight of a mop of dark brown hair and leather jacket. Whoever this chick is, she's hot. And tiny.

She doesn't notice him at first, only when she turns around, obviously searching for someone – and Dean is very inclined to think that someone is Brian – does she spot him. She stops right in her tracks on the way across the room. Dean has just enough time to put on his charming grin when she bristles at him. *Now, what? I didn't even say anything!*

"Get your dick out of wherever it is, and get down here, now!" He really wants to pat himself on the back for not jumping at her clipped tone. And... *what?* The shower shuts off even before she finishes the sentence. Fierce eyes back on Dean, she murmurs, "Well, well, well, at least one could argue that he has *some* taste," eyeing him with something like interest. Only not really. The disdain? Oh, yeah, definitely there. And real.

Not letting that stop him – because, seriously, when did it ever? – he gets up from the floor, all but towering over Brian's visitor even from half across the room. "Come again?"

"Ha. Yeah. Good joke," she says, and Dean's a little bit lost. Geez, what joke? Before he can question the chick, she goes on. "Since when do you keep your tricks around for longer than it takes to get off?" she calls out loudly obviously to Brian coming out of the next room as her eyes never leave Dean. He feels like the proverbial monkey in the city zoo. Gawked at like *whoa*.

"Why, Mel," Brian drawls, has he casually drapes his long, wet – naked – body against the frame of glass panels, "I didn't know you cared." That has 'Mel' spinning around, startled.

And averting her eyes as soon as he notices the man's state. "Put something on, for fuck's sake. I just ate! Geez!" *Just ate?!* Dean chuckles to himself. Come to think of it. Watching and listening to them just now, there doesn't seem to be much love lost between these two, if at all. *Interesting*. "And I don't, but I care about Justin, so you better not—fuck, I meant put some clothes on, not *that!*"

'That' turns out to be a towel. Well, it is, it's just, well. Really small. "Fuck off, it's my house, I can fucking walk around naked if I please." With the towel barely hiding anything, he might as well *be*. Dean's damn sure Brian does it just to poke fun at her. "So? I better not what? Fuck around in my own fucking home? Like I said, it's my loft, Justin knows that."

"Doesn't mean he likes it."

"He *knew* what to expect when he came back, so leave it the fuck alone. It's none of you business. Geez, you'd think you're the poor little wife I cheated on, how's that? Oh, wait. No, that was you."

"Asshole."

"Likewise."

O-kay. Leaving the fact alone that they technically aren't fucking, and that, hello, no one's married to anyone as far as he knows in this room, he has no idea what's going on. So it's getting mixed up into, oh, whatever this is, or stay the hell out of it. Considering his way with words. *Door number two, it is*. And there is a cup of coffee still waiting for him right over there. Still warm, for he wasn't gone that long. Tiptoeing around the duo, he makes it back to the kitchen unnoticed. And unharmed.

Dean sighs in pleasure to find that, yup, the drug of his choice is still plenty warm. *Yum.* Re-taking his seat at the counter, he inhales it like he does all the time. All over the United States. When he looks up, now aware of a tense hush, the chick is glaring daggers at him. "Well?"

His confused look only has her rolling dark, rouged eyes. *Well, tough luck, lady.* "Well what?"

"Don't you think it's time you left?"

Dean blurts out a flabbergasted, "Excuse me?" the same time as Brian says, "Leave him the fuck out of it. Jesus." But then there's this certain flicker in his eyes and... a sudden sense of dread charges through him like lightning. Brushing past his seething visitor, he puts himself right in Dean's personal space. One hand landing high on his left thigh, the other on the back of his neck. *Uhoh.* But, it gets better – or worse, depending on which end you're looking from. And 'Mel', for example, doesn't seem to like her end a lot.

Thoughts stop there, though, because Brian's suddenly *right there*, hot breath against his ear and cheek, hand sneaking upward to his crotch. *Fuck!* "We're kinda... busy here," he tells her smirking, coarsely cupping Dean through his pants to apparently make his point crystal clear, "you know, so tell me what you fucking want or get the fuck out." *The. Hell?*

They've got to excuse him now, but *what?!* They were what?

So yes, fine, he does it to provoke that chick, and Dean knows all about poking a sleeping dragon, but come on! He should open his mouth and tell him off, to remove that fucking hand from between his legs and don't fucking stand so close. He doesn't do any of this. Why? Dean shrugs inwardly. Maybe it's the closeness, the hand kneading his groin or the way Brian's warmth and scent is all around him; he can't bring himself to say something. He just looks on. Looks on as Mel sends him a nasty snarl, huffing and puffing and whatever else she's doing bitching at Brian.

Who is still standing *too damn close.*

Sighing, he goes for the coffee again, something to hold onto and ignore – escape – their conversation. He's good at that. At turning people out, ever since school and being a kid and being different. They've always been the odd men – kids – out, and people don't like 'different.' Rich, spoiled kids don't, either. Only when Brian's nimble fingers get a little too friendly with the jeans' zipper is he finally he reacts and catches the man's wrist in a tight grip, stopping him. He doesn't have to look. He can *feel* Brian smile.

Not bothering to turn around, he can hear the woman snarl, too.

Whatever. This is so not his business, so who the fuck cares.

Brian steps away from him then – cool air filling the space left by his warmth – making him shiver. He wonders if those two always bicker and bitch like this in front of strangers or if Dean is just that lucky. Merely the words 'your son' coming out of the chick's mouth manage to whirl his attention back to the pair. So fast, in fact, that it almost gives him whiplash. *Uh... what?* Thing is, he is not just good at tuning people out, he's also good at replaying conversations in his head he didn't pay vast attention to.

Therefore, his head presents the explanation that, evidently, Brian's got a kid. *Well, fuck me.* So okay, granted, gay men have testicles, so they obviously can procreate, but still. Huh. And for the sake of that kid he hopes that these two? Ain't the parents. *Christ.*

-- TBC

Part 14: ...What doors and locks are for.

They appear to hate each other's gut, which makes it less likely. Not impossible, mind you, just take a look at the world nowadays, but not likely. Come on. Maybe she's an aunt, a friend of the mother's. Something like that. That's way more apt, considering they fight like a couple of hyenas. Just louder. *Yikes*.

"You promised Lindsay to come by and get Gus, Brian!" the female hyena cries, flapping her wings--er, that would be baring her teeth, certainly.

"So what? Something came up," the male one yells back, "I didn't get him and what the fuck do you know? The world's still fucking turning. It's not as if you're so overwhelmingly happy to see me whenever I do show up at your doorstep, so don't fucking come into my house to bitch at me about what I should and shouldn't do with my son!"

She bestows another cold glare on him, snarling, "Oh I can just imagine what *came up*, you fucking prick! It's not like you care that that kid is waiting for you, do you?"

Brian snorts. "Bull. Shit. He doesn't even know I was getting him today. That's not what this is about, is it? You're always so fucking happy whenever I stay as far away you're your cheerfully domestic little family," he mocks, "you're just pissed that you can't fuck your wife-y now that Gus is still there. That's what's really grating you, isn't it Mel?"

Dean almost drops his mug. Of course, lesbians. Why didn't he ever think of that? *Fuck me again!*

"At least I don't put my son's welfare above my sex life, you selfish prick."

"You talk and talk, but all I hear is blah fucking blah."

And off they are again. Dean stares, a little dumbfounded, and a lot amused. And right there, another light bulb turns on in his head. So *that* is the reason Brian's home. Scrubbing a hand over his head, he lets a quiet sigh slip. But apparently not quiet enough, because the woman turns and takes a go at him. "Would you mind quit staring, asshole? If you don't have the decency to fucking leave than at least--"

Dean holds up his hands – one half in defeat, the other just to get her to shut up. What the hell does she care? It's not like there's a place in the loft – or outside, for that matter – where he wouldn't hear them going at it anyway. Telling her that is not one of his best decisions, true, but hey. In pain, here, so they can fucking cut him some slack. No one does. Of course not. Dean barely refrains from rolling his eyes, because that? Really would be a mistake. And childish. "Listen, sweetheart," and he opts to ignore Brian's snort, "I have no idea what you're going on about, but I don't doubt for a second that there is no place in this building where they can't hear you two bitching."

Tilting his head a little, he gives her a shrug. "But if you'd rather have me gone. Fine."

He slips off the chair heading for the coffee pot, because if he has to get out of here for a while? That's just as well, he's got lots to read, only not without a fresh cup of coffee. He'll probably need it, too. Thing is, the two of them remind him of children at a playground hashing it out about one thing or another. The only thing missing is the hair pulling and throwing sand at each other. *Or maybe a pair of teenaged chicks in a cat fight over a guy.* Dean would know, he's had it happen to him.

He barely catches himself from smiling at the memory. *'Cause come on, it was kinda hot.* Only that was years ago, and these two are supposed to be adults here. "I can't believe I give Sammy crap about being a girl. If you're searching for me," he tells Brian, "I'm outside the door, listening in with the rest of the neighbors." He's about three steps to the door, feeling Mel's stare all the way on his back, when Brian's voice sounds again, low but angry. "The fuck you are."

Dean stops in his tracks, turning around just as Mel splutters out a flabbergasted, "Excuse me?"

"Take your goddamn dildo or whatever it is that's up your ass and get out, Melanie. Oh and please give my regards to Gus and your wife."

'Mel' huffs and puffs, so obviously livid that he can see the fire in her eyes when she looks at him again. The idea of steam coming out of her ears makes him clomp down on the insane laughter bubbling up his throat. She doesn't miss the twitch of his lips, though, which earns him another glower and a "Fuck you." Dean merely shrugs. He's been told a lot worse, called a lot worse by a lot of different people. Stopped caring years and years back. Learned to stop listening shortly after.

But his indifference isn't sitting well with Melanie, as she turns her eyes back on him, repeating her "fuck you" before walking out. She doesn't bang the door on her way out, nor does she react when Brian once again calls after her to say "hi" to his son and Lindsay. Just keeps going.

It's quiet for a while after she's gone, only the *tap-tap-tap* of shoes on cold, hard stone echoing in the stairway. Getting quieter as she gets further down. He jumps when Brian finally closes the door. With a bang. *Whoa, careful there, dude.* And Sam still wonders why Dean doesn't want to trade their life for 'normal'. Because if this is normal? He takes their own fucked up little world and family over this any day.

"What the fuck is it with people walking in here anyway? Fucking Christ," he growls.

Shrugging, as he watches Brian stalk past him and into the kitchen again, he says, "You could always not let them in."

"Yeah, and that is so easy."

"That's what doors and locks are for, isn't it?"

Brian scoffs, whilst pouring coffee into his cup, and apparently so not caring that half of it sloshes over the rim and onto the counter. Followed by thrown in cream and sugar, some stirrig and more spilling over. A milky brown puddle, turning into a small lake. *Ewww*. "With a bunch of friends like mine? Not fucking likely. Nothing is ever that easy with them." And takes a huge gulp, wincing either at the heat or what Dean thinks is a not so fortunate blend of coffee, cream and sugar.

Chuckling, Dean shakes his head at the older man's behavior as the puddle makes its way across the slick, polished countertop. When Brian catches him watching, he sheepishly eyes the mess, wordlessly going back to emptying the mug. Before the liquid can spill over the edge and onto the floor, Brian casually disposes a few paper towels in the way, successfully halting the coffee flood. The brunette gives him a victorious grin – and Dean can't help but grin back. And fuck him if he doesn't like Brian. Because know what? He really, really does.

But making friends, well, that's a luxury he can't afford. In their line of work friends are a risk as well as at risk, knowing him. Knowing them, knowing what they do. It's bad enough that Brian and Justin now know what's out there, *really* out there. He's told Sam as much – look what happened in St. Louis and what a fiasco that turned out to be. A legally dead murderer, that's what he is right now. Of course it was the right thing to do, and no, he's not complaining, but affording to keep in contact with friends too closely? That's never a good idea and most of the time it doesn't work out well.

Brian and he stand like this for a long minute, grinning at each other, until, finally, they ain't grinning anymore. It's the return of that weirdl wonderfully tingle in his gut, heat spreading up his neck and way south as he realizes that, yes, Brian's still mostly naked and walking closer again, smirking that stupid tongue in cheek smirk again all the same drinking coffee and--

--kisses him.

Kissing him flush on the mouth, a pair of soft and wet coffee flavoured lips and tongue and way too warm and wet and *dirty*. He's a little too dazed or surprised to shove him away at first, and when he's finally got his bearing back, Brian's moving away all on his own, smirking, as he rubs a thumb over the corner of Dean's lips. "You had... cream there," he offers as an excuse, yet he doesn't sound particularly sorry. Dean doesn't believe for a second he is. Nor that there *was* any cream to begin with.

The mention of cream, however, makes him think of far less innocent things and the soft press to his lips goes straight to his groin, burning. It makes him want to suck on that elegant, oh-so-tempting finger. Find out if it tastes of coffee, too. *Shit*. Blinking stupidly there for a second, he tried to get his last few sane remaining brain cells to work. "You got a kid?" Okay, fine, changing the topic isn't that bad, even if it was a little obvious. Or his voice being a bit too high-pitched. *Damn it*.

"Smooth, Dean, really smooth," Brian murmurs. Taking a step back. Finally! "But, yeah. Jerked off into a cup and that's all she wrote." He points to the closed door. "That? Was the mother bitter half. Now and then I wonder if there isn't a pair of balls

somewhere between her legs, too." He shudders and Dean laughs.

"Be careful, or someone might think you're scared of pussy." Brian's eyebrow goes up. Way, way up. And, yeah. Okay, so, "on second thought..."

Brian snorts, but saying nothing as he goes to get himself another refill. Holding up his cup, he says, "I drink to that. Half of the people I know are more or less convinced that I'm the devil in disguise anyway. But who gives a shit."

Dean snickers, watching him drink. *The devil in disguise, huh.* Oh yeah, Brian might be an asshole, sarcastic as hell or whatever, but one thing he's not. The devil – or anything else for that matter – in disguise. You get what you see, so to speak. Grinning, because come on, the plan that just popped up in his head? Is genius, if he dare say so himself. *Ahem.* Jogging, well, more or less, *shut up*, up the stairs, he carefully crouches in front of his bag.

Brian throws him a curious glance when he passes. He'll see. Digging through the shit in there, he comes up with handcuffs – nope, wrong kink; for now, – a dreamcatcher – huh, how did that get in here? – a pack of matches and, ah yes. There it is. With the flick of his wrist, he opens the small container and turns it around, a cold, smooth weight hitting his waiting palm. Stuffing everything else back inside, he gets up and turns to face Brian, who's – surprise, surprise – putting on clothes. "Hey." Dean calls out, sharp and quick so it gets the man's attention. Looking at him. "Catch."

What do you know? He does, even though his ass hits the bed as he loses his balance trying to catch that little something with his jeans half up to his calves. "Fuck! What the fuck?!"

That picture! Like a lost, little boy. And he can't help it. Dean bursts out laughing, almost doubling over as Brian glares at him. "Dude. You should see yourself," he gasps, pointing at the half dressed man sprawled half across the bed.

"Ha. Ha."

It takes a pillow hitting his head a second later to get himself back to the task at hand. "Uh. Yeah."

"What the fuck is this?" There, on the palm of Brian's hand, is a silver shining bullet.

"A bullet?"

"I see that, Dean, but the hell did you just throw that thing at me?"

"To prove a theory."

"The fuck?!"

"That thing? Is a silver bullet blessed by a priest and engraved with the Lord's prayer. Don't bother reading, you'll just hurt your eyes," he insists. It's true. You need a

magnifying glass for that. The blank look that greets him, makes him chuckle. "That thing, as small as it is, kills almost everything out there." They know too much already, so why not give them the real deal? Let them know to be careful. Always. There are not human monster out there as well. "Demon. Werewolf. Shapeshifter. You name it. You ain't the devil, dude, not even a measly demon. Sorry."

He isn't. And wouldn't it have been just the Winchesters' luck if he actually would have turned out to be a human possessed by a demon? *Of course it would have.* Good thing Lady Luck obviously is busy tormenting someone else *somewhere* else. For a second there is a look of utter confusion, followed by shock, covering his face, until it's gone and in its place is a smirk and amusement once more.

"Yeah, well, don't tell anyone," he says, meek. It's a joke, but not really. Maybe half of it.

Chuckling, because it's expected, Dean shrugs. "Nah. Don't worry. Your secret's save with me." When the brunette tries to give back the bullet, Dean swats his hand away. "Keep it."

It's the door once again that saves him – them – from saying anything more. Hopefully no more surprise visitors, but no. Their new company turns out to be no other than Justin. Thank God. Dean steps away as Brian gets up to get his pants on properly.

"In here," Brian calls out after finally buttoning up his pants.

There's the familiar sound of rustling paper before the blond walks up, his carriere bag still draped over on shoulder. He doesn't look happy. Not at all, despite the smile and the "hey" he offers Dean. In fact, he looks like someone just killed his puppy. Does the kid have a puppy?

"My, Sunshine, aren't we one awfully cheerful camper today!"

"Shut up Brian."

Huh? Brian seems to think the same: "What the fuck crawled up your ass and died?" There's no real heat or menace behind the words. Just asking a question.

"Nothing," Justin says, voice muffled through the pullover he's pulling on. "Just, why did Melanie just storm out of the house, running into me and arranging half of the groceries all over the sidewalk, before she warned me not to come up here – twice - when she couldn't get me to leave with her? Hell, I think she was short of just kidnapping me. So? What's up?" The confused look is a rather cute look on the blond, but the sparkle of anger and annoyance is hard to overlook in his oh-so-epressive blue eyes.

"Because," Brian snaps, "Sunshine, poor little you has to be protected from the corrupting devil. Or. No, no, no, no, the bad wolf. Right. The big bad wolf. has to be protected from the fucking devil, no wait, the big, bad wolf.", he sing-songs, holding up the silver bullet.

"Huh?"

Brian barks at him. "How the fuck should I know?"

"No I mean the..." Justin suddenly freezes, hand still raised to wave at the bullet in hand. Apparently somewhere something clicks in the kid's brain, light bulb going on behind two sharp eyes. Well, at least someone's getting what's going on, 'cause he certainly doesn't. Not really. "Why didn't you tell to her why you couldn't get Gus?" he insists. And okay, that's something he'd like to know, too. "I'm sure Lindsay would have..."

"*Because* it's none of her fucking business, Justin!"

"Brian."

'Brian', however, brushes the kid off by rushing past him and right out of the room, leaving Dean with his boyfriends. And his coffee. Not for long though, for after a deep breath, there's only his coffee to keep him company. Stepping up, so he can lean against the panel frame and watch, it's freakin' obvious that the young man is used to Brian queening out like this.

"So, just to be clear," Justin starts, making his way across the room, "Mel mistook Dean for your latest trick." The blond is smiling now, he can hear it in his voice, and he's without a doubt not waiting for conformation or anything like that as he goes on. "And you let her believe that bullshit. Oh Christ, I cannot believe..." Voice trailing off into laughter, he takes the last step so he's standing directly behind Brian sitting at his desk. Curling both arms around the man, more or less hugging him, and nuzzling his nose against the back of his neck.

"As if one of your fucks ever, *ever* stays the night, let alone the day. Jesus, and you call me a drama princess. You're all drama queens, you know that right? All of you."

"Fuck off."

"You couldn't have told her that Dean's just a guest, could you? Oh God, I love you, but I swear, every normal person would have just told her that. That they couldn't get Gus, because someone was bleeding all over their bathroom floor. But no. Not Brian Kinney, right? He always does things the hard way."

Brian grabs Justin's right hand and pushes it down to his crotch. "Always, Justin. Always. Hard." Dean grins. Of course that's what he's going to say. "Didn't you learn anything?"

Laughing, Justin kisses Brian's ear. Soundly. "I learned, all right. Most of all that while you act like the most grumpy grouch known to mankind, you really are just a big, old teddy bear," he snickers. Brian shoves Justin off so viciously that, for a moment, Dean is afraid the blond is going to hurt himself falling down. Except he's still laughing picking himself off the floor and seating himself on the man's lap, both wrists crossed

behind his neck.

"The fuck, Justin?!"

"Yeah, I love you too, Brian. Now put that devious tongue of yours in my mouth and shut the hell up."

*__*__*

The world can be a cruel and ruthless place.

Everone knows that. The Winchesters, though? Probably better than most.

Dean certainly knows that there are evil things out there. Things out there to get you and the people you care about and people other people care about. There're things out that got his mom and Jessica and oh so many other people. Innocent people and not so innocent people. Things out there he's hunting. Hunting them down until they are nothing more but dead corpse on the ground or turned into a pile of ashes.

If even that.

Ghosts, demons, werewolves – those are the supernatural beings he deals with, day in day out. And lots more. But the other evil, the one that is lurking all around them all the time and all human? That is the one almost harder to take. Harder to deal with. Reading the life – and death – stories of those kids turned spirits, turned murderers, even the chick that's directing these ghosts, using them as nothing more than killing devices – a fancy knife or gun, if you like – read like horror movies made in Hollywood

Abuse, violence and hate written all over them with a deep crimson marker.

Deep crimson. Like blood.

Shaking his head in disbelieve and/or disgust as he reads the reports Sam left him with – and he does it more than once, because he doesn't get it. Not really. Doesn't want to, really. The other girl, or no. Not girl, but beautiful young woman, as her birth date indicades. She was already 19 – Dean snorts. *Try 'barely', why don't you.* - when she died. Abandoned by a mother one day when she was a little girl and went through one foster parent after another, only to be killed by her so called 'best friend' years later with a gun as she went out with her new boyfriend. A guy said best friend wanted for herself. Boyfriend survived the attack – took a bullet to the shoulder and back. Never going to walk again.

Then there's the other kid, the male ghost with the deformed face from the night before – cause of death: fatal hit to the head. Explaines the damage they saw. What the report does not say is that some sick fuck beat the poor dude with a golf club. Head, ribs, legs, arms; Dean can't remember the last time he's seen someone with so many broken bones at once. The sheer cruelty of the act baffles even Dean.

Get's even worse once he discovers that said 'sick fuck' is the kid's uncle and his legal guardian. Did it because the kid's mother – his sister – was killed in a car accident that left only the boy alive. A boy of four years, growing up to expe^t a life of hate and cruel worlds in a house of with his uncle and the man's wife. Dean can imagine how that went and he doesn't want to know at the same time. *What the fuck is it with people?*, Dean silently marvels.

Angrily scrubbing his face with his hand, he sincerely thanks whoever is listening right now and back then that, despite his father's faults and ticks, it never came to this. It never got out of hand like this. *Oh Sammy, you should be so happy--*

"Everything okay?"

At the sound of Justin's voice, he looks up so fast that he can hear his neck crack. Hand wandering up to massage the muscles there, he watches the kid come closer. He looks freshly showered with his hair still wet like this and sticking up at all angles. Apparently Justin hears the sound, too, for he grimaces like it hurt. "Sure it is. Why do you ask?"

"Nothing, nothing. It's just, well, I'd say you look like you saw a ghost, but you didn't look like this the other night, so..."

Despite everything, Dean is startled into a laugh. "I see. Nah, everything is peachy, don't worry your pretty little head about it." *Don't worry about me*, is what he really wants to say and doesn't. "Now... did you and Mr. Kinney have fun in the shower? It's his what? third shower of the morning?" he can't help but ask. Wriggling his brows suggestively. He hopes. And just like he predicted, Justin blushes. Not enough to be obvious, but enough,

"Uh..." he grins.

"Aww, Sunshine, he's just jealous that you didn't get to watch. Right Dean?" Brian's voice promptly booms from the other room.

Rolling his eyes, he says, "You'd like that, don't you?" He doesn't deny it either. It's true. Kinda. It beats going over reports of killed and tortured kids... and yeah, *that* puts a damper on his mood once more. Shit.

His eyes travel down on the closed folder and-- "Dean?" *Shit*. "Are you okay? I mean, really?"

And hell, kid is awfully perceptive, isn't he?

"Are you hurting? There's some painkiller in the bathroom--"

"Dude, it takes a more to take me down and stay there, a lot more. I'm good."

Justin tilts his head to one side, studying him. "Sam said you'd say that even if you were missing an arm and bleeding to death."

And, again, what do you say to that? Funny enough, Dean can almost hear himself saying exactly that to Sam. "He said that? Well, tough, I'm the big brother and you know what that means?"

"Uh... no?"

Dean grins mischievously, eyeing him through his lashes. "I'm always right."

"No it doesn't!" Justin insists, Brian's laughter echoing from one place or another in the loft.

"Oh it totally does, dude. It's a rule."

"A rule, my ass," Justin states, chuckling while actually giving him the finger.

"Careful, kid, I might have to give you a hiding." Dean jokes. "Respect ya elders and all that shit, will ya."

"Ooooh.. I bet he'd like that, wouldn't you, sonny boy?" Brian again.

"Shut *up*, Brian!"

"What? The last time I spanked *your* bubble butt, you couldn't get me to fuck you fast and hard enough. Repeatedly, if I may add. Geez, and people think I'm corrupting your pure, innocent mind." And what do you think? He can hear the guy rolling his eyes.

Justin shakes his head, filling a glass with orange juice.

And fuck him, it's only after that Dean makes the connection. He swears by anything that's important to him that he hadn't had a clue, and really, how could he? There's no way of knowing. Otherwise, he would have kept his mouth shut, like he's done before. Would have kept those fucking pictures to himself. So when he's once more shaking his head in disbelief at the folder, and Justin asks him what's wrong, Dean tells him. For once he shares something, like Sammy wants him to, and it backfires like *whoa*.

"God, how'd he die?"

Dean grimaces. "Took a beating with a golf club, haven't read about so many broken bones for--"

The shatter of the glass hitting the countertop takes him by surprise, more than it should, but it does the trick of cutting him off mid sentence. Justin's looks why too pale all of the sudden, almost white as a freshly painted wall. Shaken, like someone ripped the floor from under his feet and still standing there like...like he's seen a ghost, something really, really bad. Carefully stepping closer, he watches as for the second time today liquid makes its way to the edge of the counter. This time there being no paper towel to stop it from trickling to the floor.

Most of the glass is up there or in the sink, which makes it less likely for the boy to cut himself. There's pain in those blue eyes and Dean doesn't know what to do with it. What to say. He doesn't have to. "Justin?"

"Did he...was he...?" The blond isn't responding to Brian, but Dean, only he doesn't know what's going on. What he's trying to ask. Did or was he what? He doesn't have the time to question him and after all, that might be the best, for Brian's there a second later crossing the floor faster than Dean thought he could the moment he saw the blond's state.

Pulling him away from the few shards on the ground and, in turn, turning him around, he frames the younger man's face. Staring. "The fuck happened?"

Justin laughs shakily after a long, silent moment, and tries to move his head in a shake, but Brian keeps him still. "No, tell me. You don't freak out like this. Not like this. Not since, not--" And that when he trails off, maybe getting what's going on, and why. He's clearly got a better shot at it than Dean - for a hundred different reasons. One front and center, though. He knows the kid. Dean doesn't, not really. That he said something wrong, well, that's for sure. A panic attack of sort, again. That is what this is. A small one, but still.

Justin whispers something Dean can't quite catch, but it must mean something to Brian, for he goes very still. There is this one second, just a second, but maybe two, when the same pain and shock and *fear* Dean saw in blue eyes moments ago is reflected in a pair deep brown ones. Right before they turn blank. That one second, or two, there one second, gone the next, almost leaving him behind wondering if it happened at all. But Dean's used to reading people, good at it, too, and this?

Wasn't all his imagination.

-- TBC

Part 15: ...Clear instead of a murky orange.

[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]

Part 16: ...He pulls off the same scam as before.

Armed with a fake badge and a picture of Emily McNamara, the first store had turned out to be a letdown. The owner had been nice enough, calling in all of his three employees to let them take a look at the picture of "that beautiful young lady," he'd said. But none of them ever had seen Emily before. "It's an older picture," he'd said, explaining that it was taken about three years ago. And maybe she would look a bit older, a bit different. Yet they didn't seem to remember someone that even resembled her to a degree.

Accepting that he had been defeated this time, he'd thanked them for their goodwill and cooperation and walked back to where Brian had parked the 'vette one street over. He'd left the man in the car, busy tampering with the radio, whereas he was now outside, leaning up against the car's side, cigarette firmly between his lips, as people strolled by him. But not all, as apparently two guys were chatting with Brian. Or Brian was chatting them up. As soon as they saw him approach, glare in place, he almost ruined his act by laughing out loud as they took a hasty retreat.

But come on, if Brian could fuck with him, so could Dean. A little confused at first, looking around to--probably--see what the hell this is all about, Brian turns serious as soon as Dean walks up to him. "No luck?"

"Nope. Guy said he doesn't remember seeing her before. Neither did his employees."

Brian shrugs. "Maybe your little brother had more luck."

"Maybe," he says, leaning against the car as well. "But he's going to call if he does, so you better get back into the car. We have work to do." Taking the cigarette from Brian's lips, he throws it onto the pavement, crushing it under his boot. "Come on."

He doesn't get as far as in front of the car when he's stopped by a strong hand on his arm, pulling him back and around. "What...?"

"Manipulative bastard," Brian growls, pushing him against the hood, kissing him like the devil. *You're such a fucking asshole*, he thinks, but it's the same thing Brian is telling him with this kiss. Well, two can play this game, and Dean's no saint. He's got to live with it.

Even if he doesn't want to listen to it, to the kiss, Dean can feel it right down to his toes. Brian doesn't say a word when he releases him, not even breathing hard as he opens the door and gets in. Dean smirks through the windshield while Brian's way too busy starting the car. And this time he really does laugh out loud when he follows the man inside, putting on his seatbelt. "Look who's talking."

He's sure Brian got it just right as they pull out of the parking lot.

----*

Pulling up across the street of the next and last store on their very short list, he gets out of the car as soon as the car comes to a halt. He ignores Brian calling his name, instead throwing the door shut and jogging through the light traffic to the other side. He pulls off the same scam as before: private detective, a worried family looking for a young woman gone missing at a rough spot in her life three years ago, tipped off that she is in the city and she might involved in wicca circles or right out witchcraft.

People want to hear about tragic, heartbreaking stories a lot more than stories about murderers and are therefore a lot more cooperative, a lot more talkative if they know something. He isn't disappointed. "My, that poor thing. It is always a shame when a misunderstanding rips a family apart, is it not?" Dean nods like he's expected to, putting on a sad smile for the man. "I personally never saw her, but my family helps out here sometimes so I just... I'll show it to my wife and my children. They are upstairs. Please wait here for a second."

"That would be awfully nice of you, Mr. Smith. Thank you." It's very clear that the man has Asian forefathers somewhere down the line, maybe Chinese, Dean thinks. Mr. Smith is barely reaching up to his shoulder, but full of odd little smiles and hands that flap and flip in the air when he talks. The little corner shop smells of the fresh tea and a faint scent of flowers and other herbs they sell.

"Of course, of course, young man. We want to help where we can. Just thinking my children would disappear like that..." he trails off, giving his head a shake. "Ah I'm wasting your time, yes, yes. I shall go upstairs now."

"Thank you."

Dean releases a deep breath as soon as the man is out of his sight, picking up one of the multi-colored stones lying around on the counter. It looks like an overgrown pearl, a marble maybe, only that it's not made of glass. What, he can't tell. "Rainbow colored, huh?" a voice murmur against his ear, and Dean jumps. "Just like I thought." And fuck him for that stupid grin in there.

Oh for fuck's sake...! Turning around, he glares at the smirking brunette, hissing, "The fuck are you doing in here?" 'Cause really, who the fuck does the guy think he is?!

But, of course, as full of himself as he is, Brian ignores his little outburst, going on like he never said a word. "Jesus fucking Christ," Brian whispers, casually leaning his hip against the counter while flipping through a thin book, "I almost bought into that fucking sob story you told the fucker. Jesus, you should have become an actor, Dean. With your talent and your looks..." He's purring, too, like a cat sprawling in the warm afternoon sun, giving him another once over.

Barely refraining from rolling his eyes and/or sticking his tongue out or the impulse to strangle the older man, Dean swallows it all. "Fuck off."

"Sorry, can't do."

Turning away, Dean concentrates on the round thing in his hand, ignoring Brian's soft commentary on whatever it is he's looking at. That is, until the store owner returns, a pretty young black haired woman following on his toes. Before he turns to him, the man addresses Brian. "Just a moment, sir. We're done here soon, and I'm with you in a second."

"Sure..."

"Thank you." Coming around the counter, he hands Emily's picture back to him. "Lady Luck is on your side, Mr. Sokovitz. My wife did not remember seeing her, either, but my daughter did." The girl next to him smiles shyly at her father and then Dean, nodding. She's not pretty. She's actually quite beautiful, all dark, almond-shaped eyes and shiny long, black hair. She's blessed with those Asian traits herself. "Lien said the woman came in a few times during the last few weeks, did you not, sweetheart?"

"Yes father. I remember her because she always looked so sad, you know? Only coming in late in the evening. That's when my shift is at the store, after school's out," she adds for his benefit, Dean thinks. "But she came in this morning as well while father was still busy upstairs, and I was just watching the store for him before he would come down as she walked in."

"By any means, she wouldn't have bought these things?" he hands her a list Sam had written for him.

"Oh, yes. She bought the first two items on the list, Mr. Sokovitz. I asked her if she was trying to perform a cleansing ceremony or the like, and told her she might want to wait for the next week because it works better then, but the miss just smiled and said she knew, yet it was urgent, so she was forced to try regardless."

"Did she say something else that might help me to find her?"

"No, I don't think so. Oh, but she mentioned once she lived in a motel, I think. She never arrived by car, I don't think, so I suppose it must be close by."

"You are a life saver, Lien," he tells her, kissing her cheek as she blushes hotly under his lips and attention. The father is grinning, only trying to hide it as his daughter throws him a murderous look, daring him to say something. He doesn't. "And you, too, Mr. Smith. Thank you so much for your time."

"You are quite welcome. I hope you find her soon and she can return to her poor family to clear the air, so to speak."

"I'm sure she will," he says, lying though his teeth. Without bothering to acknowledge Brian, he walks out of the store, eyes already busy trying to find a phone booth. Jogging up to the only one empty in sight, his hands automatically go for the yellow pages, flipping through the thick book until he lands on M for Motel. There shouldn't be too many around to render it impossible to check them out in a radius that would

allow her to walk to this shop, and Sam and he had beaten odds way worse than this, and more than once. Looking left and right, he rips the pages from the book at the same time fumbling for his cell phone.

"Bingo," he says as soon as Sam picks up his phone.

- *"You found the store?"* –

"Yup Sammy. We're gonna take a look at some of the motels around here since the owner's daughter said she never saw her use a car."

- *"Good. I wanted to stock up on some things anyway and the first shop is fairly cheap. If you're not done by them, I'll come over..."* –

"All right. See you later, Sammy."

- *"It's Sam."* –

"Course it is," he grins, ending the connection.

Closing the yellow pages, and stuffing it back in place, a voice calls out to him. "Catch."

There's barely enough time to slip the phone away as well as turn around to do just that as something comes flying at his head. He manages, of course. Superior reflexes, anyone? When he looks down at his hands, he can't help but laugh as he comes face to face with a small, rainbow-colored, marble thing. "What's that?"

"A good luck charm." Dean gives him the raised eyebrows. "I asked," he explains. "The guy said it also helped to keep one's patience in dealing with things. And people."

"Ah," he mumbles, rolling the small stone in his hand. "I guess I got to put up with you some more then, huh?"

Brian gives him a sly grin, tongue in cheek, and yeah, he gets it. "You are so full of shit, it's not even funny, Brian. Fine. Get in the car, then. We're gonna visit some of the motels in the neighborhood." He's not for elaborating this time around. Instead he stuffs the napkin into the brunette's hand. "Let's go."

*__*__*

The first and second and third and even sixth motel they hit are flops. The seventh, however... *Jackpot*, Dean thinks as he shows the picture to the pretty girl behind the counter, and her eyes widen in recognition.

"Yes, she's has been staying with us since my aunt checked her in a few weeks ago." She tells him, pushing her long brown hair out of her eyes.

"Has been?" Dean inquires, mind going into overdrive as a terrible feeling creeps up on him, cold wrapping itself around him.

"Yes, it's so silly, really. You just missed her."

"What do you mean?"

The girl smiles ruefully, wiping invisible dust from the gleaming surface of the desk. "She checked out half an hour ago, paid her bill and all. I saw her pack up her things into her car, a black SUV--maybe Ford?--an hour before that when I started my shift here, if that helps you any."

"Did she say something else? Where she wanted to go? If she had friends here? Anything that could be otherwise useful?"

"No. I'm sorry," she apologizes again, starting to shake her head, but then, "or wait, yes. She did say something. I assumed she was leaving town and told her about a road block on the interstate just outside of the city so she wouldn't get caught up, and she said thanks, but not to worry, that she had something to do first. A visit, I think. I didn't ask any further questions about it, wished her well, 'cause it's not my business and all that..."

"No, no, no, this helps me already." The bad feeling increases tenfold, like icy fingers sliding up his spine. *Damn it.* "Thank you so much for your time, Tamara," he tells her, offering a charming smile before almost running out of the small office, barely avoiding running over a mother and her kid coming in and an elderly lady calling after him to good Lord, look where he's going. He doesn't answer, footsteps on gray cement and the beat of his heart loud in his ears.

Crossing the crowded parking lot in long, quick strides, he swings open the door and slides into the passenger seat, barely getting his feet inside before slamming it shut after him. "Get back to the loft, quickest way you know," he barks, putting on the seatbelt while simultaneously reaching for his cell phone. Multitasking is a good thing, and it comes in handy not just during hunts. The movement puts a lot of strain on his shoulders, but he ignores it, instead speed dialing Sam.

Brian just looks at him. "What? Why? What's going on?"

"Drive now. Explain later. Come on, move."

Dean ignores him after that as he starts the car, listening to the dial tone on the other end. His brother picks up at the third ring: - "*Hey. Did you find her?*" -

"Kinda. Sammy, listen, where are you?"

- "*Huh?*" -

"Just answer the question."

- *"On the way to help you, I was just about to call you. Why, what's wrong?"* –

Shooting Brian a quick look, he says, "I may have figured out who she's going to go after next."

- *"Who?"* –

"Who?"

The question comes in stereo—first from his phone and second from the driver's seat. "She checked out of the motel with her things all packed up. She's going to leave town. She's not going to do that knowing we're still after her. Think about it, she's got to get rid of us somehow. So remember before you came back from your visit with that Deborah chick?"

- *"Miss Deborah, Dean, but yeah. What about it?"* –

"Doesn't matter. Justin was... he was hit by one of his classmates with a baseball bat on prom night."

There's silence on the other end of the line as well as in the car.

- *"Oh shit."* –

"Yeah. I could be totally wrong here, and I hope I am, but we can't take any chances. Emily told Tamara—the chick from the motel—that she wanted to visit someone. I think she's trying to get us to stop looking for her. Now, college boy, you do the math about how she's gonna pull that off."

Another silent pause, then... - *Traffic is a bitch over here, but I should be at Brian's in about thirty minutes or so.* –

"Good. Emily checked out half an hour ago, I doubt she is that fast, with preparation and all, but you never know. So be careful. Oh and Tamara told me that she drives a black SUV, probably Ford."

- *All right. See you both soon.* -

Clicking his phone shut, he throws Brian a look. *Ah, there we go with the jaw clenching again.* "Dude. Focus on the driving part. It's not gonna help anyone if you drive us into a tree or the opposite lane."

"Fuck off."

"Brian..."

"Don't fucking patronize me, Dean. Don't you dare fucking try!"

"Okay, okay. But I could very well be wrong, so don't..." He trails off as Brian's eyes meet his in the rearview mirror, daring him to finish that sentence, and Christ no, he's not going to. It would be well beyond stupid. He damn well knows how it's like, not knowing, living through situations like this, trying to breathe through the panic, because hey, they are counting on you to get them out of this, not hyperventilate and die. So. Fine. To say 'don't panic' is the stupidest thing ever, he knows, and that doesn't cut it. Not even close.

Keeping silent, however, is the better idea, and he can actually do that. Turning his head to the window, glass cool against the side of his head, he watches the outsides passing as they fly past. They should never have left Justin alone at the loft. And for once he desperately hopes he's so damn wrong.

*_*_*

The Impala is nowhere in sight when they pull up in front of Brian's building. Neither is a black SUV. He leaves Brian at the car as he goes around to explore a little further, walking up the next street and the one after that, eyes scanning for a black car. He finds an SUV, but it's a light blue, and Dean doubts Tamara would mix up black with light blue. A really dark blue or even green, sure, but this? No. No way. Jogging around the block finds him nothing but cars, a few people looking oddly at him as he hurries by, and a couple in the middle of making out behind a dumpster.

Dean refrains from shaking his head, instead running back to where he left Brian. When he returns, he finds not only is Brian still there, but Sam's there as well, Impala parked across from Brian's 'vette, peacefully sitting there, locked. He pats her side once before he hurries over the street, right as the duo notices him. "Hey."

"Hey, I can't find a black SUV around here, but that doesn't mean shit. You and I both know that."

Sam nods, looking up and down the street. "Yeah. The car could virtually be anywhere..."

"Yeah," Dean agrees, nodding. Looking up, the windows to Brian's loft show nothing suspicious, looking innocent in the warm sunlight. His gut clenches uncomfortably. "The shotguns are up there, aren't they?"

"Yeah."

"Damn it." Patting his backside, he's a little comforted to find his gun still there, knowing there's a knife in his boot, too. It gives him a distant feeling of security. "Let's do this, then. I doubt she'll do anything to Justin until we're there," he starts, ignoring Brian's gaze. "She wants us. So she needs leverage."

Sam nods, head tilting the fraction of an inch toward Dean. He knows what he means. But. He shrugs. If Sam wants to try, fine by him. Let's see if he can convince the man to

stay here. "Listen," he begins, turning soft, sincere eyes on Brian. "I think it would be better if you stayed down here. We have no idea what's waiting for us up there, man, and..."

"No."

"Brian..."

"No. No way in hell am I going to fucking stay down here until you do your thing! I don't care if that messes with your mojo of whatever. You're not going to leave me fucking out of this, I have to--"

He cuts himself off, then, but Dean can complete the sentence in his head without problems. *If Justin's okay*, and so much more is what he doesn't say, yet it sounds loud and clear in the sudden silence. He shares a look with his brother, saying 'told you so' and seeing the same understanding he feels mirrored there. Yes. They get it. Somehow he's got the distinct feeling they are playing right into Emily's hands by bringing Brian with them, but Dean thinks it might be even worse not to. Who knows what the man would try on his own?

So he says, "Fine," for both of them, "but stay the fuck out of this. This is our playground, not yours. You're going to do what I say, and that means don't do anything stupid. Clear?" before jogging over the street, not waiting to see if they follow. By the two additional sets of footsteps echoing on the pavement, it's exactly what they do. They wait for Brian to open the front door, quietly heading inside. Sam stops Brian when he heads to the elevator, gripping his wrist to keep him from pushing the button. "Stairs," he quietly states, "a lot quieter."

Dean doubts it will give them much of an advantage. She has to know they'd figure it out sooner or later, so she's really the one having the upper hand. At least right now, Dean's not so fast on giving up just yet. Oh no, this is not over just yet. Taking the lead, Dean walks up the stairs carefully, footsteps soundless on the hard stone floor. They find nothing on the first few floors, only when they get up to the floor below Brian's does that change. And boy, does it.

There's a drawing on the floor at the bottom of the next staircase, a semicircle starting at one wall and leading to the other with a symbol in the middle of it. The symbol is connected with the outer circle by fine, red lines, barely visible to the naked eyes. He'd have missed, too, if it hadn't been for his job. He doesn't know the meaning of the symbol but habit has it that he's looking around, finding Sam doing the same. He finds a mirror image of the ceiling, a tiny amulet dangling in the middle.

He has no idea what that is. Eyebrow raised, he turns to his brother, giving him a look when he meets his eyes. *Any idea what this is?*, it says, getting a half hearted shrug and another look in return. *Probably not*, that one says, and yeah, sure, kid can't possibly now everything. Regardless of that, Dean has been around long enough to have a suspicion or two, a supernatural motion detector being the first on a short list. Crouching down at the drawing, he wets his fingers and wipes at one of the lines. It reappears almost faster than he can snatch his hand back.

Not giving up, he tries again, a different line now, but with the same results. The small amulet dangles over his head innocently, even though Dean knows it's anything but. Shrugging, Dean pulls his gun from the back of his pants, releasing the safety. Only then does he set a foot on the first stair. When nothing happens, he follows it with the second, carefully setting one step at the time. When nothing happens, he gestures for Sam and Brian to follow him. They make their way up the stairs, Dean filing away more symbols they pass on the wall and every second step.

The eerie quiet that's suddenly all around him has him gripping the gun tighter, finger twitching on the trigger. The silence is anything but normal, he knows, hell, he can feel it in his bones, and it gives him the creeps, an abnormal cold brushing over him. It's even worse now that they have to go into this blind, more than usual, but they don't have much of a choice here, do they? And it's not the first time. Not that it makes him feel any better.

And he doesn't make promises all that often, but he does today. This will end today, he thinks. *And if we're lucky, it won't blow up in my face.* There are no other traps around, no nothing, and Dean's not sure if he should be relieved or alarmed by that. One thing it does, however, is make him want to kick his ass even more for being so stupid to leave half of their gear upstairs. *Stupid, stupid, stupid.*

The first thing that catches his eyes when he's up the stairs is the open door. Merely enough for a person to step through, one at a time, but it's sure obvious now that she's waiting for them all along. He has been expecting as much. "Please, don't stand out there in the cold. Do come in, guys," a by now familiar voice emerges from inside. It's soft and calm, yet it grates on his nerves like whoa. "You are welcome to join our little private... get together anytime. In fact, I was waiting for you, like you probably already know. But let me tell you, not half as anxious as the little blond here. Isn't that right, Justin?"

There's no answer, but Dean's convinced she's not bluffing. There's no reason to. "What do you want?" Dean calls out.

"Why don't you come in first, Dean? All three of you. Oh and please, don't trouble yourself with trying to call for help. That's pointless. No one will hear you. I'm sure you already noticed the silence, huh. Same goes for your cells, of course." Of course. Would have been too easy, right?

Looking back at the others, he says, "Would you be terribly offended if I told you I don't believe you?"

"Hm. No. Go ahead and try."

Fishing for his cell, he curses as soon as he gets it out of his pocket. No signal. Of course. Hell, it's not like he expected something else. Groaning to himself, he looks up to see the other two shake their head as well. Great. That's just great.

"Happy?"

"Oh yeah, ecstatic."

So. No choice other than walk into the lion's den. "Fine." Taking the last three steps, he crosses the threshold carefully, gun finding its target as soon as he's inside, eyes moving around the room, looking around but finding nothing out of the ordinary. If you leave out the candle on the living room table, burning brightly, and Justin sitting on a stool beside it, facing the door and the other side of the loft. He's dressed in the same pajama pants he'd been wearing before they left, open button-down shirt on top. Dean quickly looks him over, finds nothing but a small cut on his cheek. Nothing to worry about, really, just glaringly obvious against the kid's snow white skin.

Emily is standing right there at his side, expression friendly and open, holding Dean's own knife to Justin's throat. That, on the other hand? Is definitely something to worry about. And worry plenty. *Damn it.* Not to forget the gun she had the night they met face to face for the first time. Doesn't matter that she doesn't like to use it, she's smart enough not give up the edge it gives her. He tries to catch Justin's gaze a few times, trying to tell him that everything is fine as he hears Brian and Sam enter behind him. He doesn't hear a sound from them, though. No gasp. No curse. Not one word--and by 'them' he means Brian. He silently congratulates Brian for keeping his cool like that.

It's probably not what Emily expected of the man, but if she's bothered by the lack of reaction, she doesn't let it show. Instead her eyes seem to glaze over with a look of pure bliss, maybe even lust as she takes them in. It's gone in seconds, replaced with a blank look and a calm smile. Dean gets the imagine of her inwardly clapping her hands and bouncing on the balls of her feet, chanting something like 'yes, yes, yes,' over and over inside her head. And, wow, how fucked up is that?

Nodding to herself, she says, "Good, that's good. Welcome." Her eyes flicker down to Justin's blond hair, then back up to them. "Now, be good boys, and stand over there," she jerks her chin toward the dining table, "and away from the door. All of you. Please."

She says 'please' like he's asking for a refill of coffee, and when they don't move, she uses her other hand formerly hid behind Justin's back--ah, there's the gun--to make shooing motions like you'd do with a dog or a little kid to get them to leave you the hell alone. "But, ah, first. Please hand over your guns."

"Guns?"

"Yes, Sam. Guns, as in plural. I'm sure you were quite the smart boy back at school, weren't you? Winning spelling bee and the like?" She moves the hand with the gun back behind Justin's back, out of Dean's sight, a dreamy expression crossing her face. "Thing is, I finished first a lot, too. Well, at least at one point of time." The laughter coming out of her mouth sounds like she has been eating glass, all broken, cut, and sharp. Nails on a chalk board. "Now, quit playing, and hand them over." She pauses, eyeing them. "How about today?"

"Okay, okay." Never taking his eyes off her, he walks backwards, following Brian and Sam until there's nowhere else to go, literally with their back against the table. Stands right in front of them. There's the rustling of plastic coming from his back and a second later he finds Sammy at their feet, laying a circle of salt around them. *Good one, Sammy!* The hysterical voice in the back of his head remarks that, hey, the salt may help against ghosts, but not the freaking bullets! He swallows that carefully, trying not to choke on his own spit. It's a step up, though, going from nothing to something.

Emily doesn't seem particularly surprised. Or impressed. Just looking bored. "The guns, guys, come on," she persists.

-- TBC

Part 17: ...She might as well be dead.

Holding eye contact with the chick, he finally puts the safety back on after a few very long, very tense moments. Lowers it before holding it out to her, giving her his most charming grin. "Wanna come and get it?"

"Nice try," she smiles. "I see you're quite the comedian. But no, if you put them on the floor and kick them over, that'll do. It's all so nicely clean and polished, isn't it? So smooth. Almost like--," a pause, "--blood." He's quick to put the gun down, itching to kick himself in the teeth rather than give the gun to her for his idiocy, and doing so anyway. "There, that wasn't so hard was it? Now you, Sammy."

A second later Sam's gun, too, hits the sofa with a dull thump, slipping beneath it. Emily chuckles, not even attempting to look concerned. "Clever little devils, aren't you. *Not*. I don't care about the guns. I told you I don't like them nor do I need them. So childish to think it would worry me, really. But then again, walking right into my trap like this..." She shakes her head, brows drawn together in a disapproving frown. "Truly amateurish."

"What? Don't tell me you planned that all along. To take a kid hostage and then what? Blackmail us into leaving?"

"Oh no, Sammy. I wouldn't dream of having such an opportunity present itself since I noticed you were following my trail. Thing is, nothing better could have happened, played into my cards. Right, Dean?" Her eyes glow with gleeful delight again, maybe craziness, too. Not sure about the latter, but he wants to wipe that smile off her face. "Yeah. You know it's risky to get too close, and still you couldn't resist. How could you? I mean, look at them. Human desires, is it not? I noticed, and I questioned: how can you use this to your advantage? How can their faults be of use to you? Guess what came to me? It made my job so much easier."

Standing there, the woman looks like she has no concern in the world, not like she's holding someone at gunpoint—even if said gun is a simple knife. Or not so simple. Dean got hands-on knowledge on what damage the thing can do, if used right, and that, well. *Thank you very much for bringing it up, brain.* "Still now, sweetie, don't move. You don't want me to cut you again, do you?" Justin flinches, and to hell with it that she's a woman. Dean wants to punch the calmness right out of her. "In a way, yes, I guess I have you to thank for this after all." She tsks at Justin when he flinches again, moves the knife against his throat. "Now, now, what did the lady with the knife just say?"

"Leave him the fuck alone, you cunt!" *Uh-oh.*

Dean catches Brian's arm just in time with him taking a step forward toward the duo across the room and past the salt and Dean himself. Uh-uh, not a good idea. The salt is only one reason of many in a long string of pearls of reasons and ways to fuck up and why. Fisting the thick fabric of the other man's jacket, he keeps hanging on, ignoring

the heated glare burning into the side of his head.

"Such language. But I expected as much from you, Brian." She tilts her head to the right, a smile like a caress on her lips. "Brian. A very nice name. Had a teacher once by the same name, but that is not important right now, is it? Hmm. I'll get to you in a moment. Please wait until then. Let's get to the point of this chat first, shall we? I am sure you're anxious to get it over with just as I am." A glance at the blond. "Perhaps more."

Sam's the one to utter the question of all questions, answers obvious or not: "All right, we'll play. What do you want?" You don't need to be college boy over there--or a college boy--to figure it out.

"You know, you look like an overgrown cheerleader when you do that, Sam," she points out Sam's stand, hands on his hips, probably a disapproving look on his face--Dean can guess, he's been on the receiving end of it once or twice--chuckling to herself. "Or a cute puppy that desperately wants to look threatening. I can't decide. But yes! What I *want* is to get out of here. Told you that already. Pay closer attention."

"Door's to your left. Don't let it hit you on the ass on the way out," Brian smart mouths, and Dean can't fight off the smirk tugging on his lips.

Emily frowns. "Now, Brian. I told you to wait, did I not? I wasn't done. But I do feel generous today, so yes, believe me, I would just walk out if I could. Due to those Ghostbusters right next to you, the choice is no longer my own. I don't want to do this. Could have been gone for hours now. They just won't leave me alone."

I wonder why that is? Dean thinks crossly, glowering.

Dean feels Brian shrug. "Bullshit. That innocent act? Is fucking hard to pull off once someone knows you're a murderer."

"You'd know all about hard, right?"

Cutting in quickly, Dean's pretty sure he doesn't want the chat take a turn down *that* road--not if he can help it. He's learned to pick his battles and listen to that churning feeling in his gut when it makes itself known. Like now. It's not a good idea to ignore it right here, oh no. "So you really did come here to blackmail us, doing what? Cast the ghosties on the kid so we wouldn't try to follow you wherever you want to run after you get out of Pittsburgh searching for a way to break the curse instead?"

"Yes, Dean, that was the original plan. It would have been a little tricky, risky even, except you've got to do what you've got to do. I give you credit for figuring that out. Guess what? In a way, it still is. I just found is a more... appealing target, the right one. More fitting to my usual MO, you know. Less risky for me. Have to keep my reputation in mind, after all. Not that little Justin isn't suitable. No, no." She smiles fondly at him, stroking the barrel of the gun down the kid's cheek. Almost tender, a perverse imitation of a mother soothing her distressed child. The show gives him the creeps. "Poor kid. What happened to him and all that, isn't it? People can be so cruel. Yet, it's

not what I usually go for, either."

"That's right." And God, does that sound like the very epitome of *wrong* to say. He wants to throw up. Either that or strangle that bitch. "So what? You decided to go with Plan A v1.1?"

"Hmm, that's a good way to describe it, yes. I simply need the kid here to get to my actual target."

Dean straightens, but it's Sam's voice in his ears when he says, "What?"

"You're clever, Sammy. I'm sure you will figure it out."

"This isn't Jeopardy, and you ain't no Alex Trebek. Just an annoying, murderous bitch."

She tsks at him, shaking her head in disapproval. "Dean, Dean, Dean," she fusses, wiggling the knife in time with the words and all too close to Justin's face. "Not so impatient, honey. By the way, it's witch. Not bitch. You'd do better remembering that."

"I don't see the difference just yet."

"I think sweet little Justin does, being Brian's bitch and all. If you'd only ask nicely, I'm sure he'd explain it to--"

"You're killing people, Emily," his brother starts to say, talking right over her and Brian. "Whatever they did or didn't do, you're in the wrong here. We can't let you do this anymore."

"My father broke my ribs forty-seven times." Her voice is calm when she says it, collected, obviously ignoring Sam. Her voice is quiet, yet the statement roars like a tornado passing right through your house. "Granted, they just kept re-breaking over and over. We moved around a lot. People didn't get suspicious, not that quickly." Deep in thought, she frowns. "Oh, he hit my mother, too. Until he finally hit her once too often, once too hard. He screamed at her to get up, to stop pretending. Yet she didn't, no matter how loud he yelled. I hated her for that."

Dean doesn't look away when she meets his gaze. He's a proud of that. Geez, it's not like he wants to feel sorry for her, it's just that he kinda can't help that he does. That's the trouble with having a heart, you know. What she went through, no one should ever experience the things she did. No one should, and in that way she's a victim, too. A victim like all the others. Doesn't make her any less guilty for the murders she committed, merely a tad more tragic is all. Killing people out of revenge, out of hate and anger, because some got away and she didn't. It's no different than the ghosts and spirits they hunt.

She is still breathing, but in truth she might as well be dead.

Maybe she is.

"No one helped me. If someone noticed, they didn't lift a finger. Not once. I felt so... useless, so dirty. You don't understand how that feels. How helpless, how worthless that makes you feel. You can't." Emily turns her dark, shadowed eyes on Brian. And for the first time, he sees something else but joy and happiness and the sporadic flash of crazy in there. It's pain. A deep, sharp, sympathetic pain--the one he sees in his father's eyes every time their mother came up.

The sudden cold inside Dean is like a punch to the gut. A horrible, foreshadowing cold, growing with every second and enveloping him like the flood of icy water of a mountain lake. That horrible dread spreads like acid, curls around his heart like an iron fist, and squeezes. Squeezes till it's almost unbearable to breathe. The reaction...

- *"The fuck can anyone do that to their kids? I don't... how?"*

- *"It's not Gus. – It's not you. Let it go."*

- *"I know. – Fuck, I know. But..."*

...What Justin, what *they* said... It didn't click then. How could it? It does now. The reaction to when he wrestled Brian to the floor that morning after the man's fucked up wakeup call... it all fits. Like a perfectly-shaped piece of puzzle missing all along, finally found again in some other paper box to fit right in.

Crap.

"But you? You do. You know how that feels. To be helpless, don't you?" Brian stays silent at Dean's side, but he can still feel the muscle in him tense. "Oh yes, I can see it in your eyes. You don't have to say anything. That poor hurt, little boy grew up to present a harsh front. He's still there, isn't he? You still know how that feels."

"You're fucking crazy."

"Hmm. Maybe. But see, if I am, they made me that way. Just like your daddy did you. Isn't that right, Brian? Your daddy made you go out wanting to make something out of yourself, to get away. That hell. The beatings? Cruel words thrown at an oh-so-young child? Working so hard that you don't turn out like him? Like them? To get out and be what they were not just to discover that there is no way around it. We are our parents' children after all, are we not?"

"Bullshit," Brian spits out between clenched teeth. "You have no idea what you're talking about."

Emily frowns, confused. "No? But isn't that what you are so afraid of? What you ask yourself every time you are with your son? Your beautiful, sweet little boy?" She can't know that. She can't possibly know about that kid. It's... impossible. But then again, maybe not as impossible as Dean wants to think. Can't be that hard to get information

on one Brian Kinney on Liberty Avenue. He basically got a run-down on him and his life that one night at Babylon. "I wonder what you looked like that age. Did you look like him when your old man hit you black and blue for no reason at all that you could think of? Told you how you shouldn't even be there until you finally managed to drag yourself out of the house and away? Just *away*?"

Dean tightens his hold on Brian's sleeve mostly out of reflex and a little out of anger, fingers digging into cloth and skin. He's sure there will be bruises tomorrow. And there will be a tomorrow for the bruises to show, too, for them all. "Brian, come on. Don't be shy. Share with the class," she coaxes, carelessly waving and gesturing with her hand—the one that holds the gun—toward the three of them. "How did that feel? Wouldn't you have done anything to not feel that way anymore? To forget? To feel powerful, not helpless? That's just what I do, you see. Controlling the spirit of my father? I can finally help, finally do something, make a difference, punish those like him. I'm not so useless anymore. Wouldn't you do the same for your son?"

"You're killing people. Do you get that at all?" Dean growls.

She doesn't listen to him, maybe doesn't hear him, only having eyes for the man at his side. Her focus is solely on Brian, and that makes Dean more than a little uneasy. It gives them the freedom of slipping under her radar, though. Maybe. Keeping her talking, well, he could go without hearing all this, but as long as she doesn't *do* something, they have time to come up with a plan.

"You understand, don't you Brian? How many times did good old daddy break your ribs, your arms? Nobody came to help you, did they? Certainly not the God people are so fond of. At least he didn't come to rescue me. Tell me! Did he come to you? I doubt it. But I do. I do come to them, help those children, get them away from the bastards hurting them. I free them." *What about those that got away from their tormentor?* he wants to ask. *How will you to justify those killings? How do you excuse them?*

A small whimper claws itself out of Justin's throat. Dean longs to cut out the chick's tongue when she laughs. "Oh, little boy doesn't like seeing his boyfriend so worked up? I suppose I wouldn't either if I loved him as much as you do. Good that I don't, huh?" She tells them, pleased. *Fucking bitch*. "But I admit, pretty boy, I admire you for putting up with it. Can't be easy."

"What do you want us to do, you fucking bitch?"

"Please stop calling me that, Dean."

"I call what I see, so tell me what the fuck you want."

Her face transforms into a dangerous grin, eyes gleaming. "Like I said. I want to get out. Get rid of you. I have a... well, yes, proposal you may well call it."

Dean cocks an eyebrow. "We don't bargain with crazy murderers."

"That's right. You Winchesters usually don't. But you *do* protect people, right? I bet

you wouldn't want something to happen to Brian, would you? Or... oh yes, the pretty little blond over here, would you?" she whispers taunting, petting Justin's hair like a cat, twirling long locks around the sharp tip of the knife. Dean winces. Not all of the hair will live to see another day, that's certain. "Right Brian? You remember him bleeding all over the floor, don't you? My God, it is a miracle he's still alive, I give you that."

Dean keeps his eyes trained on the bitch, but Brian goes rigid like a brick wall under his touch. Muscles freezing up like water. "Once again you were so helpless, watching him get hit with that... bat? It's cruel isn't it?" She pauses, shuddering and looking at them--Brian--with pity in her eyes. "I could go after him, you know. Could send Them after him. Show him a bit of his own medicine, all the time wondering if it was your fault. If you hadn't shown up... You would like that, wouldn't you? To finally get revenge?"

"...no..." He doesn't hear the word. Dean really doesn't, but he can read it on Justin's lips. The kid's trembling, out of fear or rage Dean isn't one hundred percent sure. Maybe a little of both. Looking down, Brian's hands are clenched into fists so tight that his knuckles are white as bone.

"Or maybe I should grant precious little Justin the chance to experience what his lover's gone through, what I've gone through, so he can finally understand. And I'll make you watch, Brian, all of you, every single second, make you watch every little drop of blood dribbling out of that pretty mouth of his. You won't ever forget." She runs the tip of the knife beneath Justin's lower lip, and Dean's own knuckles share the ugly pale color. What's it they say? Oh yeah. If looks could kill. "Which is, sadly, not long for me, to watch. Oh, I wonder if I break his ribs, will Justin scream for me like you did for your daddy?"

"You are sick," comes his brother's calm voice from behind. He sounds so calm, a calmness Dean doesn't feel. Not right now with anger simmering right under the surface, and certainly not the last few weeks. "You need help Emily. Hell, you needed it years ago. You just never got it."

"Little do-gooder Samuel Winchester... always trying to do the right thing." Emily sighs. "I'm not sick, Sammy, not anymore. I feel good."

"Yeah, 'cause killing people is *such* a freaking rational and healthy free-time activity, right?" Dean mocks. Probably not the right thing to say, but what the hell. It's either being a smartass or doing something very, very stupid. And Sam would most likely kick his ass for the latter later.

She doesn't bother to take the bait. "Never felt better. But I'm afraid my patience is running out with you shortly."

In growing irritation, Dean watches as her hand moves from the blond hair to a pale neck, threading delicate fingers through the long strands there. Bowing her head, she presses crimson painted lips to Justin's ear, whispering words Dean can't make out. He doesn't have to. The kid's body language is saying it all for her: wide eyes filled

with alarm, shock. Nah, this isn't good. Obviously Brian picks up on it as well. *'Course he does! Damn it.*

"If you touch him--"

"You'll what?" Emily's voice is soft, soothing still, like she's reading a fairy tale to a young child. "Hide behind those laughable salt lines? Oh please. Yes, they keep my sweethearts out, but would you still stand there if I...," and there's no way misreading the way she touches Justin's face, trails the back of her hand along his cheeks, his lips, "steal a kiss?"

"Keep your filthy fucking hands off him, you--"

"Don't."

"Let the fuck go of me, Dean."

"No. That's what she wants--to rile you up enough and get under your skin." *Look who's talking.* Aw, hell.

"I don't care."

"Well, tough. I do. I'm not gonna--"

Emily's laugh cuts him off. "Oh, Dean, honey, you'll have no choice but to agree to my offer. Look around you. There's no other way."

"We'll see about that."

"No we won't."

Dean fakes ignorance. All they need is time, and they are going to come up with something. They will. They always do. Have to. He's got Brian as an excuse, so he stumbles and pushes them a little closer to Sam and the bedroom. Dean knows their guns and shit are in there right behind the glass panels, and Sam is standing right there. He just has to lunge for them. All they need is a second or two. A distraction. Get her attention away from Justin. Away from them. "Oh, I'm sorry. Did you say something?"

"Dean."

Sam? Sam knows it, too. Knows him, how he works, how *this* works. It's what they do well, what serves the purpose. And distraction. So yeah, he may be putting himself up for another run-in with those ghosts or a gun or whatever, but it will be totally worth it if they get out of this freakin' mess for it. Because she's right. They walked into her trap, not knowing what was going on, unprepared, and they left their shit here. Something that should never have happened. "Okay, okay, let's just say we agree to it, what exactly does it mean? We promise to leave you alone, and you'll just walk away? I seriously doubt that."

"Oh no, you are quite right. It's not that easy, but almost," she murmurs, coming to stand with her hands on Justin's shoulders behind him. She looks proud. It makes Dean want to gag.

"My ghosties, as you like to call them, are out for blood, Dean--Brian's blood. Literally. I think you guessed this. I can write down the counter spell, something that will release him as soon as I'm far, far away. Say, being generous today, a week. Five days from now. Once the paper is burned into dust, he's free. As are you. For that time, you and your brother should remain here. They'll need you here." Dean frowns. "Oh, do not worry. The details, they will come to you. Don't expect me to be one of the bad guys in Hollywood movies. They spill the beans way too soon, get themselves killed or captured because of it."

She lets out a bark of laughter. "It's so stupid, so cliché... pathetic, really. I'm not stupid." In other words, they're gonna wait and see. It would be fine and dandy, for they can deal with four nights of hunting. That's not a problem, but there's another side to this coin. She's getting away, which is not an option. Not with what she's doing. And even *if* she will keep her word, with whatever she will throw their way, they won't find her again in time. Looking at how long it took to hunt her down this time, no. No freaking way.

More people would die. A lot more.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the real kicker. They can't let her walk away and keep killing. That's not how they work.

And he sure as hell isn't going to tell their dad the next time they see him that, yes, they had her right there, but oh no, sir, she got away because they were dim-witted idiots and working like amateurs. He doesn't want to be the one to explain that to one John Winchester. And just when he's about to tell her that it's all about leverage after all, about doing the right thing, the door to the loft starts to open. Slow and steady and inch by inch in a crawl. *Oh Christ, don't let anyone walk in on this*, he silently pleads, and right there, Lady Luck seems to be listening.

The movement of the door is completely silent. Not a single sound--none of metal grating on metal, a handle being moved. No footsteps. Not like it *should* be. There is nothing--just the untainted, tense silence. The terse quiet of something that should not be quiet. Dean's brows draw together. No one on this side of the world--alive, human--should be able to open a door like this. Open anything like this--a window, a door. It doesn't matter. Indifferent, the door keeps moving. Moves until it's open as far as it goes, a gaping hole in an otherwise solid wall.

There's no one standing on the other side. No flickering lights, no nothing. It's... empty.

The hell?

Whatever this is, it gets Emily a step or two away from Justin, watching with the same

interest as the rest of them. The same puzzlement. Can't be her planning then, huh? Before he can make up his mind, his heart leaps into his throat. Wind. *No, no, no, no... not good.*

The soft breeze floats through the loft, twirling and curling and fanning out around them like a gentle embrace, a caress. Comforting somehow. The lump in his throat doesn't loosen, not just yet, as his brain tells him. Wind and salt don't mix. They do freakin' not. He knows that from experience, and he's got the scars to back him up, too. Against everything he knows, every single fiber of his being, goes what he sees happening next: the air moves around the salt without disturbing it, not moving a single white grain, keeping the circle intact and untouched. Even when the pull gets stronger, less like a gentle breeze and more like real wind.

No one moves.

The yellow folder on the counter is swept up from the counter with a hollow howl, photos and reports and newspaper clipping soaring in a whirlwind of air, eventually tumbling to the floor; every little piece of paper of information spreads out like they are pieces of a giant puzzle, covering the floor like a gruesome rug. Dean looks away. Emily isn't watching the floor, observant eyes scanning her surroundings, a deep frown marking her face, searching for a source, probably. Wherever her eyes wander, she never loses sight of either of them or Justin--not completely.

With no idea of what this is and no idea what to do, there's a sudden sort of awareness pulling on his mind. Somewhere, deeply hidden in the farthest, darkest corner of his mind, he's aware of everything and everyone around him. Can feel the pressure of air from where Sam is moving closer to the bedroom, the ripple Brian's constricting throat causes in the air when he swallows. It rivals the feeling of going to sleep in a waterbed. When one moves, the other can feel it in the way the water shifts below, changing, re-shaping; not mattering if there's a gap of five inches between them, or five feet.

The air feels like this now. Charged with energy prickling skin, making him hyperaware of *everything*. Every subtle shift, every ripple, every breath, just *everything*.

How that is possible is everyone's guess.

The moment he stops resisting, stops second guessing himself and his instinct, the second he closes his eyes for a moment and stops concentrating, the whispers start. A low voice murmuring words he doesn't hear, has no idea how to. He doesn't understand how he doesn't feel threatened by it, either, and whether if it's because of experience or idiocy or simple deception. Looking at Emily, he's completely convinced it's not her doing. If it's his own conviction, or something--someone--else's, he's not sure of. There is no fear in her eyes, but the uneasiness is definitely showing through.

And it's real enough to him.

There's no way she is that good of an actor. It's too subtle.

Dean tries to catch Justin's eyes in the turmoil going on around them. They need to end this quickly, the pressure of air tells him, pressing on his head, or all of this will end badly.

Brian feels like a solid mass of anger and worry and pain beside him. Like desperation.

Sam feels like calm, like quiet, like... knowing. Like a plan.

From across the room comes a wave of confusion and fear and shock. Dean has no problems matching them to the right person. It's all there, all so clear on his skin, in his mind. What he needs is distraction, and to get between her and Justin. He can feel the pull, feel the push. There's a knife in his boot, and he's not above using it.

"No."

Emily's voice feels like nails on a chalkboard. Not only hearing, but *feeling* it right down to the bone. It sounds like it's ripped from deep inside her, and it feels that way, too. The voice of a child, a terrified child, caught in the dark all alone. It makes his hair stand on end.

"No. Please no. No! Stop!" She covers her ears with her hands, never letting go of the gun or the knife, but if it's the same for her than it is for him, she'll hear it anyway. Hear the words in her mind. She flinches, cutting her cheek. It leaves a thin line of red, a soft trickle of blood on pale skin. It goes unnoticed. Dean, however, feels every single red drop hit the floor. The pain, it doesn't come from this. It comes from a place far deeper down than a superficial cut.

The voice in his head gets louder with every bead of blood, every flinch, every word of protest. Her pleading. The voice is chanting in surround sound now, producing sounds in a language he doesn't know, never heard spoken before. It's not Latin, not even close, but it's old. Definitely old. How he knows this, he has no idea. It's just--like so much else is at these moment--a feeling. The voice is female, soft but firm, a soothing cadence of trickling words and sounds that has him on high alert. Like a tiger the one moment before it pounces onto its prey.

He moves like a puppet on a string, then. Slowly, ever so slowly edging toward the bedroom, feels the air move with him, feels Brian and Sam move with him.

It's just a matter of time now, he knows.

This is some kind of magic, a spell, something. Has to be. Doesn't matter that he's unable to understand the chanting. Chanting is chanting. Usually, it would be more than enough to raise his hackles, but there's no trace of the nervous flutter of foreboding in his gut. No dread in his blood. *This is the one shot you will get*, his brain grants. *If you want to act, it's now or never*. And never is not an option. Not here, not now. Not ever. "Don't move," he whispers, gripping Brian's arm tighter. In the background he hears--feels--Emily cursing and whimpering. "I mean it, don't do anything stupid. And for fuck's sake, don't step out of the circle."

"I can take care of myself."

Dean pulls at him sharply. The air doesn't move, doesn't betray them. "Nah, you really can't. Not here. This is *my* playground. For once in *your* fucking life, do what you are told--"

"No, you old wench, stop it." Her voice sounds hoarse now, even worse than before. "You are not going to make me lose control like this. I am not that girl anymore."

A strong voice answers her after a moment. In English. "I don't have to. I don't even want to."

It's Sam's voice that comes next. "Dean."

"I know."

It's here.

-- TBC

Part 18: ...Everything falls silent. Everything around. Everything but.

The air around him seems to freeze. Figuratively and literally, so thick now you could cut it with a knife if you wanted to.

It's not just his imagination. Emily's hand flies to the amulet resting upon her heaving chest, fingers letting loose of the knife, in its place gripping the small piece of jewelry. Dean can't make out the words she's whispering, holding a gun to Justin's head, but they wrap in shapes around him, mouthing their meaning into his skin. A meaning that has his skin breaking in goose bumps under it. She's calling in the cavalry. It's that back alley behind Babylon all over again. *Not gonna happen, sweetheart.*

He feels the flutter of lashes on his skin when Emily closes her eyes.

Everything falls silent. Everything around him. Everything but the cry of NOW that echoes in his bones, his mind, his blood. Everything moves. He doesn't see, but he feels Sam dive for the bedroom stairs, feels him scramble for the shotgun. He feels the floor under his feet as he moves, doesn't remember ever starting to. Emily doesn't move, silent words tumbling from her red lips. She doesn't notice. Somewhere to his right something explodes. He sees, he feels, he knows, but he doesn't hear.

Emily does.

She jerks around, hand still wrapped tightly around the pendant, lips never faltering on the chanting.

Dean launches himself head first over the sofa, like diving into a shallow pool, pulling Justin from the stool onto the floor. For a moment or two there's nothing but silence. Real silence this time. White noises in the back, maybe yelling or the screeching of a door. It's hard to tell. Another loud bang snaps him out of the whiteness, the feeling of MOVE engraved into his mind and bones. Default setting.

Then he *is* moving, pulling himself up and away from where he's lying half on top of Justin. The pain stabbing him feels like a faint echo from far away, nothing more, dizziness overcoming him, a wet, heavy blanket of disorientation.

"Dean?"

Just for a moment.

"Move."

He is following the order before the word is fully out of his mouth, one hand going around Justin's arm, dragging him away and around the two chairs in front of the TV, toppling them over. He pushes the blond down, following suit to take cover. It's not ideal, not while faced with a *gun*, a gun pointed at their head, but they had worse, and

it has to do. For now. As soon as he gets his bearing, they make a run for the bedroom. Anyway, it's safer there. He feels movement around him, air pressing in waves against his side, tickling the back of his neck, the ripple of something familiar against his chest.

Dean has no notice of ever closing his eyes until he opens them, blinking stupidly down at the polished floor. One hand is still gripping Justin's arm while bile is trying to crawl up his raw-feeling throat. *Fuck. Definitely head hitting involved.* And looking down isn't doing it for him right now, nothing good at the least, so he carefully, slowly turns around, blinking rapidly into the assault of light. Justin looks down at him, worry shining bright, lips moving restlessly.

The rushing in his ears is too loud to let him make out the words, too distracting, but he feels the waves of concern crashing into him like a truck, the implication of the words shaping itself once more around and into his skin. *Are you okay?* they say, *say something*, and *please*.

His ears get back to him after a moment, same for his voice. His brain. "You okay?" he grits out, not wanting the kid to panic even more. A ripple of air curls around him in a familiar caress. *Sam*, he thinks. He doesn't know how or why or who, but he knows that. Everything stopped making sense the moment the freaking wind didn't disturb the salt lines, so he won't try to make sense of this now. It's just going to give him a headache. A headache worse than the one already pestering him and--is that blood on his sleeve? Why yes, yes it is. Groaning, he pushes himself up a bit. Gonna be a bitch to get that out.

Justin looks at him like Dean has gone mad. "You're asking *me*?! She fucking shot you!" he hisses, helping Dean sit up despite the glare it earns him.

She did? he wants to ask. It certainly doesn't feel that way. But he doesn't remember, either, not that part.

"I'm fine," Dean murmurs, and come on, he's pretty sure he is. Minus the dizziness and the blood. He grimaces at the sight of his arm. Or the sleeve, mostly. There really is a lot of blood, but he's one hundred percent sure he's not been shot. He knows that feeling. It's not fun, and it's not this. Moving his arm and shoulder is not a good idea one way or another, as he finds out. Doesn't matter. He needs to get the arm out of the jacket, take a look at what the hell this is if not the bullet. Justin flinches when he covers Dean's shaking hand with his own, assisting in getting the zipper and buttons undone. "I'm plenty sure she didn't hit me. What about you?"

"She fucking *shot* at you! She could have--"

"Justin. She could have done a lot of things. Point is she didn't. I think some of the stitches ripped open." Together, and with much grinding of teeth, they managed to get his arm free. And hello, he was right: the reopened cuts are bleeding like whoa. In the background he can feel his brother talking, feel his voice dancing in his head. He can't concentrate enough on their meaning, not just yet. *All your good work for nothing Sammy.*

It takes him a second too long to realize what's bothering him so much about Justin helping him take his jacket off is that the kid's favoring his left hand. "What's wrong with your hand?"

"What? Oh." He looks at it like he's seeing it for the first time. "I twisted it when... when she came here and dragged me out of bed. I think."

Blue eyes flicker nervously all over the place, never staying long in one place. He's pale as hell, even paler than usual. Dean can't blame him. Reaching out, he gently cups the young man's cheek, lifting his head so he can catch his eyes. It's a little awkward from the position. "It's all right, Justin. Don't freak on me now," he says, soothingly stroking his thumb along a pale, cool cheek. "She won't hurt you again, I promise. I promise. I know this is scary as hell, but I need you to be calm. Take a deep breath. Can you do that for me?"

A pale throat bobbles as he swallows, hard. Long eyelashes flutter as he reaches for the hand on his face. The kid's fingers are as cold as his cheek, closing desperately over Dean's wrist. "Okay," he murmurs, swallowing a few more times before his blue gaze meets Dean's again, "okay." The grip on Dean's hand is so tight that it almost hurts, as if he's afraid Dean will disappear as soon as he lets go. He doesn't comment on it. If something to hold onto is keeping him from freaking out, who's he to deny him that? This might be perfectly normal for him, but it's not exactly business as usual for Justin. Or Brian.

"Dean? You okay over there?"

Dean jumps a little at that voice. At *hearing* that voice again, not just feeling it. "Yeah, Sammy. We're okay." And it's even mostly the truth. Hitting his head and ripping out a few stitches? Isn't that important. Justin let's go of his hand as soon as Dean rolls himself onto his knees, carefully sitting up to spy over the edge of the chairs.

Emily no longer has the gun. She's rubbing her right wrist, the one which she held the gun with, like it's hurting. Like someone--something--maybe twisted the gun away from her. He can't see the gun from where he cowers, but apparently his brother can. As soon as the chick makes to take a step forward, Sam's voice floats over him again: "I said, stay back." It sounds like he's said it before. Like, many, many times before. "Don't you dare move."

"You said that already. What if I did? You'll shoot me?" Oh, thank God. "In front of them?"

"It's called fucking self-defense, you ignorant cunt," Brian snaps, and Dean feels the pressure of laughter bubbling up his throat, the deep relief leaves him reeling a bit more than is good for him. Good for them all. Crashing over him like an ebbing rush of adrenaline. *Still alive*, he thinks, *Thankyouthankyouthankyou*.

"But would they believe him?" Emily challenges, taking a step forward. Just one. Dean's hand involuntarily makes a move for the knife concealed in his boot. "A poor,

innocent girl against four guys? Alone. Helpless.” There are tears in her voice, eyes unnaturally bright, and he’s got to hand it back to her. Damn. She can act after all. *Bitch*. “I would think not.”

“You are fucking crazy.”

“Oh, you keep repeating yourself there, Brian honey. You all do. But I like your blond friend. What do you think I would have to do to--”

Sam cuts her off. “Shut it, Emily. I don’t want to hurt you, I really don’t, but I will if you take another step or so much breathe in the wrong direction.”

Hand going to her amulet, her teary-eyed smile turns wicked as she cuts a glance in their direction. Downright nasty. Justin tenses beside him. Not good. “Hesitating, ain’t you? And why should I keep silent? Justin is a pretty thing, is he not?”

“Don’t you fucking dare--”

“Enough,” Sam bellows, and they--Brian and Emily--fall silent. Dean can’t help the smirk. *You go, Sammy!*

“Ah, I see. But you wouldn’t do that, would you Sammy?” She taunts, almost gentle, and again, all he wants to do is strangle her. With his bare hands. Or her hair. “Shoot me with a shotgun? A poor girl like me? Unarmed?”

“You think so?” She takes another step forward, when nothing happens, a second and third one. *Sammy... Fuck...* “Think again.” And pulls the trigger.

The clicking of the weapon is abnormally loud in his ears. Dean swears he even feels it deep down to his bones as the mass of rock salt hits Emily’s chest. He just barely stifles a wince of sympathy. That hurts like a bitch, oh yeah. The shock of being shot, of actually being *shot* causes her to stumble backwards, tumbling over her own feet. She hits the edge of Brian’s desk with a sickening thud, dropping to the floor like a ragdoll. *Ouch!* Now that knock to the head might even have hurt worse than the salt to the chest. Maybe.

Rubbing his chest, well, maybe not. But it will give her a killer headache as soon as she returns to the here and now.

The feeling of ‘It’s-over-and-we’re-still-alive!-Yay!’ hits him like a race car at full speed, stealing away the last crumbs of resolve he has left. He pulls an Emily and drops like a sack of potatoes--minus the unconscious part, thank you very much. Or maybe he isn’t that lucky, for the next thing he knows, Brian is already kneeling beside them, cursing hell and heaven--well, mostly hell and Emily--and throwing insults left and right, all the time looking them both over for injuries. Duh. Shouldn’t be that hard, right?

Brian’s laughter startles him a little. “No it’s not.”

Huh?

"You're talking out loud," Justin tells him quietly whilst leaning over him. One hand is fisted into the fabric of Dean's bloodied jeans, holding on.

O-kay. So, probably got knocked out, too. "Hm. 'M good."

"Sure you are. Justin said you hit your head?"

Did he? Oh yeah, right. That's where the headache's coming from.

"Yeah..."

"How many fingers?"

Oh, come on. "Oh, come on!"

Brian pets his leg. "Humor me."

"Three. I'm not seeing double." Not anymore. Which is helping a great deal with keeping the nausea at bay. "And I didn't get shot, so go take care of your sweetheart, and leave me the hell alone." *I have Nurse Sammy for that*, he doesn't say.

It's almost cute how Brian's face twists with a mixture of annoyance and amusement at the word sweetheart. Justin merely laughs, a little hysterically, mind you, but he doesn't resist when Brian pulls him into his arms, kissing him. Forehead, temple and lips--to make sure he's still in one piece, maybe, his hand moving a bit frantically over the blond's body. Dean knows that impulse better than he knows himself. *Aww, shit, Sammy.*

He ignores the lovebirds to drag himself around the chairs so they are no longer blocking his view. Dean's more than a little surprised when he sees an elderly lady kneeling beside Emily's motionless form instead of his brother. Emily's amulet dangles from her finger. Dean frowns. Now, where the hell did she come from? And where's--oh there he is, shotgun still in hand as Sam walks over to both women, quietly talking to the lady. He doesn't look half as surprised and confused as Dean feels at her presence. Poking his head for a clue, he comes up with, well, nothing. Less than nothing, and he doesn't like that at all.

So, obviously he did miss something. *Dude. Unconsciousness will do that to you!* Straightening a little, because this is his brother after all, there's one way to find out. "Who's your friend, Sammy?"

Sam's whirls around like he forgot he's there. And is so damn shocked that he did. "Shit, Dean. Are you all right?"

"Yeah, Sammy," he drawls, waving away the look of concern at the blood on his clothes, "just trashed your artwork a little. Now talk."

It's not him who answers the question, though, it's the lady. She offers him a fond

smile, explaining that she's the owner of the store his brother visited earlier today. And, oh right, there's that light bulb finally coming on in his head. Miss--what's her name?--oh, right, Miss Deborah. Dean snorts silently. Apparently no date coming up on that end, then. Like she knows exactly what he's thinking--and hell, for all he knows, she does--she winks, imparting the same fond smile on his brother. Smiling back, because everyone who looks at Sammy that way deserves a freaking smile, he shrugs, which is not a good idea. *That's why I freaking hate injured shoulders. Ouch. Damn.*

"It's awfully nice meeting you, ma'am," he tells her.

"Same here, Dean Winchester."

When he asks about what exactly went down in here after the door opened, Deborah admits that, yes, it was her doing. The "magic" she has practiced since she was a young child, and yes, Dean truly hears the quotation marks around the word, it's not just his fucked-up brain. To give them an out, she says, and that's really all he needs to know. Gently prying Justin's finger from his pants, he forces himself to his feet--to almost collapse.

Sam's worried frown deepens, about ready to jump to his aid. "Dean?"

Dean stops him with an annoyed hand wave. "I'm okay, Sam! Christ! What about her?" he asks, nodding to Emily's unresponsive body.

"Who the fuck cares." Brian grumbles. Dean ignores him, but he gets it. He really gets it. That bitch had a knife at Justin's throat a minute ago, let alone everything else she's been doing.

"No, not right now, but she will be. Do not concern yourself with that, my boy. For weeks the cards tell me something terrible will happen today, and I've seen it in my dreams as well last night. So sad..." she whispers, eyeing every single one of them. One after another, after another. It's... creepy.

"What the fuck does that mean?"

Seeing the look in the woman's eyes, Dean's almost sure he doesn't want to know. It promises nothing good. Looking down and back at Brian, still holding onto a pale Justin, hands clenched to fists where they grip fabric, Dean's thinks he is, in fact, better off *not* knowing.

"You do not want to know," a female, quiet voice tells. *Figured.*

"The fuck I don't."

Dean chuckles darkly. "Fine," he says, matter-of-factly. "Then let's say you don't need to know, so leave it the fuck alone."

*_*_*

By the time Sam had dragged up their first aid kit, Miss Deborah and Sam had persuaded him to let the woman look him over. Despite his protests that he was fine, just fine, *really* and assuring her—and Sammy—that it was just a knock on the head and he was more than capable of treating a concussion himself, she still insisted. She had shaken her head at him, patiently like a mother dealing with her difficult child, and had him sit at Brian's dining table with him straddling a chair.

Sam had helped him out of the shirt, inspecting the re-opened cuts with an angry grimace on his face. It had not been bleeding by then anymore, but Sam was Sam, and Sam worried. "Just to be on the safe side," Deborah had said as she started. And with Sam turning that patented kicked-puppy-dog expression on him, the familiar look of naked worry shining in his eyes, yeah, fine. He'd caved, like he did way too often. And even if that look wasn't as patented as he thought anymore, it still worked. And talk about puppy dog eyes.

Brian had ushered Justin into the bedroom simultaneously, providing Deborah with the towels she had requested while asking if Dean was going to fucking bleed all over his fucking floor again so he could call his fucking cleaning lady before disappearing himself. After the nightmarish encounter with one Emily McNamara? Dean could hardly blame the guy for being pissed. Hell, he'd have been gladly telling anybody who dared to come closer than a five mile radius to fuck off and leave him alone if he'd been in Brian's shoes.

He's still straddling the chair, though, waiting for his personal nurse maid to finish stitching him up. "You should leave as soon as I am done. The police will be here very soon." True. She had Brian make that call, telling them a story of a crazy admirer talking about ghosts and her dead father. The story was a damn good cover when he thought about it, and he was almost jealous he hadn't thought of it himself. But credit where credit is due, and it's here and belonged to Deborah. "It would be better if they would not find you here. They would not understand," she continues, finally cutting the string and putting the needle away.

She dresses the wound like a pro, every pull and turn practiced and precise and perfect, and he wonders. Something must show on his face, because the next thing he hears from her is, "I was a nurse for a long time, boy. I know a thing or two about this."

"Do you read minds, too?" He's only half joking. Come on, they already had that happen, and it wasn't really funny.

She smiles. "No, I do not, but I know what I would have thought in your place. And I can read people well. It comes with my profession."

He bets it does. Nodding, he gets up as soon as she's done, grasping the shirt Sam got for him, shoves his gun in the back of his pants in the same breath. "The shotgun...?"

"Do not worry. I'll take care of all of it. They will not find a thing, not a trace of you."

"What about Emily?"

"She will be dealt with. And she will get the help she so desperately needs," Deborah assures, a soft look entering her dark, warm eyes. "Do not worry about it, my boy. There *is* rest for the wicked yet. All you have to do is burn the amulet by midnight, recite the spell I gave your brother while you do, and all of their unfortunate souls can rest as well."

"Will do," Sam agrees from over the breakfast bar. A quick glance toward Dean, and he asks, "Is he going to be okay?"

"He will be soon. It is nothing to take lightly, but it will not kill him." Sammy drops his eyes and Dean rolls his. *Oh please, not this again.* "Samuel, that brother of yours is perfectly fine. There is nothing wrong with him."

Dean watches Sam swallow. Hard. "He was dying..."

"...And he was saved." The old woman is smiling, the smile lightening her face, crinkling the corner of her bright eyes. It makes her appear so much younger than the lines indicate, placing a soothing hand on his brother's arm as he steps closer. "Was he not? In a way that should never have happened, possibly, but it did, and even though the man was a fraud, the act was not." Her eyes gaze his way for a second before they flicker away once more. "He got a second chance, Sam. You got one, too. In keeping him for a little while longer. My big sister, she died decades ago. I grieved for a long, long time. I still do. Sometimes. Be glad you still have him. Do not be afraid of losing him all the time."

"But..."

"You love your big brother," she says. From the tone of her voice, she's not just saying it, she knows, and it's Dean's turn to swallow. Back of his neck heating up. They don't say these things to each other. Not really. "And you're worried. That is normal. But it does not mean that it is necessary. We are only human, child. There is always an end."

"Sammy..." He waits for his kid brother's eyes to meet his before going on. "I'm telling you now, I'm okay. I might not be too thrilled about what went down in Nebraska, but dude, I'm not about to off myself out of misplaced guilt or anything like that. Just... Just give me a bit of time to... to deal. Okay? I swear I'm going to be okay."

Sam's head jerks up and down, like an overacting Jack-in-the-box. Voice hoarse, he whispers, "Okay..."

"Uh, I didn't get that. Repeat that for me."

"Okay."

"Good." He grins and claps his brother's shoulder compassionately before he rubs his hands, welcoming the chance to get out of this without drifting too deep into chick-

flick zone. "Now, help this pretty lady to get things in order for us to pull our disappearing act. I'm gonna check on Blondie and Brian."

Leaving his brother and Deborah, he quietly walks up the stairs, two quiet voices drifting away as he enters through a nonexistent door. He finds Justin flat on his back on the bed, Brian's head resting on his chest. Brian has his back to him, arms wrapped tightly around Justin like a kid's around his favorite teddy bear, their favorite doll. They don't notice him at first. Justin's too busy patting and stroking the older man's hair and not falling asleep as the fluttering lashes seem to indicate. When he finally does notice, head turning lazily, those blue eyes lack the panic and terror from before. *Thank God.*

Dean returns the soft smile he's granted, walks quietly and slowly further into the room, close enough to see that Brian has his eyes closed, probably still oblivious to his presence. He looks so tired like this, so still. Dean doubts there are a lot of times when the man let's himself be vulnerable, let alone in the presence of others to witness. When he stills, Justin beckons him closer, patting the space beside he and his lover. "How are you?" the blond wants to know as Dean takes the offered seat.

Brian's eyes snap open like blinds in the morning, wide and abrupt, only Justin's hands keeping him from moving. Away and in any way at all. "I'm good," he says. "All new. How about you?"

"Good. Alive. Thanks to Sam and you. Is... Is he okay, too?"

Dean nods, smirking. "Yeah, don't worry, Blondie. We're gonna be just fine."

"What... What about her?"

"Emily?" Justin nods.

"Who the fuck cares. Fucking cunt."

Dean agrees in a way, but he gives Justin his answer. "She's gonna get hardcore therapy somewhere, I guess. There's no way the police can tie her to the cases of the murders here or anywhere else, but she'll get some time in a, uh, mental institution. That's for sure."

"So it's over?"

"Yes. It's over. Sammy and I are gonna burn the amulet tonight, and then it's definitely finished."

"Thank you."

Dean frowns. "For what?"

"Saving my life."

"Don't mention it," he says, petting his hand. "Besides, that's what we do..." He trails off as a soft hand curls around his good shoulder, pulling him around and down into a soft, chaste kiss. There's nothing sexual about this, just another way to say 'thank you.' Dean lets Justin hug him, now both arms wrapped so tightly around his neck that he has trouble breathing, his shoulder screaming in protest. He doesn't flinch, doesn't protest. Doesn't say a word. Maybe Justin needs it. Needs this, so he can move on. Upon hearing sniffing, he pulls away some, looking down into blue, watery eyes.

"Aww, come on kiddo, it's okay. No need to cry," he whispers, wiping the tears away.

"I'm sorry..."

"Sorry's bullshit," Brian oh-so-eloquently provides, mumbling the words into the teen's stomach. It sounds listless, lazy, like he's reading a line from an old script. A line he said a million times before.

Dean decides to ignore it, too, stroking Justin's hair out of his eyes. "It's okay and you had a pretty sucky day, huh?" Justin nods, still sniffing as a few more tears make their way down his temple, vanishing into flaxen hair. "And you're tired..."

Clearing his throat, Brian moves to look up so he can see the kid's face. "Allergies acting up again."

Why he says that, Dean has no idea. It's an excuse, the lamest of them all, but it makes the blond smile under the tears, so that's okay. He's looking like he might fall asleep any second now. *Good.* "Dean?" His brother's voice reminds him that they have to get out of here, and freakin' soon.

"Coming." He brushes a brotherly kiss to Justin's forehead. "Sleep well, Blondie."

"Hmmm..."

Sharing a smile with Brian, they both get out of the bed as soon as they're sure Justin's out. Miss Deborah and Sam both turn to them when they walk in. The woman's kind eyes settle on the man beside him. "That boy of yours, he is a very tough kid. He's going to be okay."

Brian snorts, rubbing a hand over his face. "I don't need a fucking psychic to tell me that."

"Of course you don't, honey," she murmurs softly, eyeing the brunette for a long time, watching him as he lights a cigarette and settles for breathing smoke circles. Her warm eyes meet Dean's when she finally looks away. "It is time for you to go."

Dean nods, already reaching for his jacket. "All right. You're a lifesaver Miss Deborah." He says it with a smirk and a wink, but he's meaning it, too, and as he leans down to kiss her pale cheek. She must know this, too.

"You're not gonna take off just like that, are you?" Brian asks around the cigarette

bouncing between his lips as they shape the words. He's trying to look as nonchalant as possible, and it almost makes Dean laugh.

"No we are not," Sam answers, and the smile he bestows on them both startles him a little more than he wants to admit. Gut twisting around itself. He offers Deborah another bright smile before he walks out of the door, never looking back. Shaking his head, Dean provides the older man with a grin of his own and a wave of his hand before following his brother out and down the stairs. It takes about five seconds to catch up.

They are two floors down when Sam eventually speaks up. "So, motel room?"

"Yup."

Sam sighs. "Great. Could have gotten used to this."

Dean starts laughing.

-- TBC

Part 19: ...A silent, crimson red 'thank you.'

A/N: First, I'm so sorry for the long gaps in-between the last few parts, or better said, getting them posted. Let's just say RL was crazy and leave it at that. Second, well, on with the chapter and enjoy. *g*

Just like they'd planned, midnight found them on a deserted cemetery on the quieter outskirts of Pittsburgh.

Armed with shovels, two shotguns, a few candles, and half a dozen other things Miss Deborah had insisted on--plus Emily's amulet. Better safe than sorry, she'd said, and Dean found himself agreeing. Under one of the bigger trees, isolated from the main paths and the more pompous graves, they had dug a small but deep hole, salted and burned the freaking thing while Sam read from a small book and carried out the last parts of the ceremony.

Intensely staring into the flames, he hadn't noticed the air going a little chilly more around them at first, merely the flicker of *something* out of the corner of his eyes, a blurred image, had alerted him to the fact that they were, in fact, no longer alone.

Instead four ghosts had been standing across from them, on the other side of the hole and a little off to the side. Barely visible by the time he'd finally noticed. It still hurt to look at them, seeing the kids they once were in the distorted figures now, but they had finally looked at peace. For the first time since they'd crossed path, they hadn't looked like murderous, blood thirsty, killing machines. He hadn't bothered to reach for his shotgun.

They had no longer been a threat, just victims like so many before. Staring at them, it had felt like hours until they--Sam--were finished citing the prayer and completing the ritual, but it couldn't have been more than a minute. Barely a handful of seconds after that, and they vanished from existence altogether, the young girl mouthing a silent and crimson red 'thank you' that echoed through the breeze and crackled in the flames.

Then the fire had died immediately, letting the darkness swallow them once more.

They had buried what had been left of the amulet right there, filling the hole and trying to make it look like the ground had been disturbed by an animal, maybe a stray dog, not people.

It is long past midnight when they leave the cemetery, quickly passing the last view graves on the way out, iron gate rattling behind them. Dean grimaces. Good thing the surroundings were particularly vacant--no houses for miles to come. Turning south, the faint lights flickered in the distance. Nah, the sound wouldn't carry that far, no

matter that it's late at night. Yawning, he looks up at the sky.

He's fairly sure it can't be late enough to feel so immensely tired, but then again, the day had been hell, and all he longs for, all his body longs for, aching, is a hot shower and a bed. Stretching, he winces as it pulls on his shoulder. He might be able to sleep for the next, oh, say, twenty-four hours straight. Pulling the glove from his hands, he fumbles the keys to his baby out of his pocket, catching a glimpse of Sam propping himself up against her side. Staring at him.

That is never a good sign. Dean freezes. "What?"

Sam's reply is a shake of his head, a soft smile curling the corners of his lips up. "'S nothing." Uh-huh. Sure it isn't. He isn't freezing his damn fingers off, either.

Something is up, that's more than obvious. He doesn't say anything. First, because he might be lucky tonight and this disaster--whatever it is and, come on, he's sure it's a disaster--will pass him by, and second, if he isn't and it doesn't, Sam might spit it out without too much preamble. He wants a bed, so wasting time isn't high on his to-do list right now. Lifting the bag from his shoulder and dropping it into the trunk, Sam already turns his way, studying him closer.

By the time he's securing the shotgun at its usual place, said brother offhandedly tells him, "You know I was thinking." *Bingo*. And those? Are the words every big brother slash parent slash *someone* dreads like *whoa*, aren't they? If Sam notices him wincing, he graciously ignores it. "Maybe you should go out, and you know, take the chance to have some fun while we're staying here," securing a gun of his own. Never taking his eyes off the hands fulfilling their task.

Dean straightens and stares. "'While we're staying here?' Here as in Pittsburgh? Since when?"

"Uh, I just thought you might like to, a day or two. You know."

No, he doesn't. He's about to tell Sammy just that, when his brother's stare gets a bit more intense, piercing, like he should get something--or say something. Dean answers the look with a bewildered 'what the fuck?!' look of his own, because, sorry but *he doesn't get it*. Come on, he can't read minds, which, sometimes, frustrate him while dealing with a certain someone. It's impossible to guess what Sammy's up to. Not in the dark and not from how he's holding himself. Just barely making sure that no fingers get taken off, he abruptly closes the trunk.

Taking a step back, then another, he eyes his brother. "Whatcha mean?"

"I don't know, I just thought we're done here, the case I mean, and you are itching to get out, do something other than hang out with your little brother for a night."

"Huh? Since when do you wanna get rid of me this desperately, dude?"

"Since, I don't know, always?" Sam deadpans.

"Ha ha. You're a really funny guy," he grumbles. "But seriously, dude, what's with the get-rid-of-my-big-brother-for-the-night attitude lately?" Dean wriggles his brows. "Something you wanna tell me, Sammy? Got a girl somewhere I don't know about?"

Sam shakes his head, chuckling softly. "Noo-ooo." He manages to drag out that one syllable into at least two more. Wow. Could he sound more like a petulant toddler than this? Dean thinks not. "I just think you deserve a night off, and since the case is over, why not take advantage of being in the city?"

"Dude. You're the one always ribbing me for going out too much. And I know for a fact that we're not low on funds. What gives?"

"It's... It's nothing."

Sure it isn't, he thinks, and how many times was that actually true when you told me just that in the past? He happens to remember a dreadfully remarkable incident with a music tape from a decade or so ago, and it was *not* nothing, never just nothing. Despite what little Sammy says. Now, or back then.

"Uh-huh. Sure. Tell that to someone actually believing that I-am-so-innocent look." *I know you better than that*, is what he doesn't say, but it echoes loud and clear between them. "Come on, Sammy, spill."

"Fine. But don't say I didn't warn you," he says, sighing like he's got the weight of the world on his shoulders. "Brian and Justin. That's what." Dean forces his face to stay carefully blank, but his whole body flinches on the inside. "I've seen the looks they gave you, man, and you are..." He trails off, bashfully ducking his head.

And what the hell? "And I am' *what*, Sammy?" he asks, voice suddenly very calm and very quiet. Dangerous. It's all an act, though, for his heart is trying to pound its way out of his chest in a way that resembles the definition of 'panic' quite adequately. He isn't sure he really wants to know what prompted Sam to bring this up, though he has an inkling of why, and yet, he can't help but ask anyway. People are stupid like that sometimes, aren't they?

"You are not... You don't seem to be particularly put off by how they look at you, you know. That they look at you at all. It doesn't come across as if it bothers you or... anything. And well. I thought. Maybe, maybe it doesn't just not bother you, but rather that you... Like that."

Again, he is reduced to the act of silent staring.

The brother of his, the one that he has known for almost all his life? He doesn't recognize him. Not right now, not when he's standing there, like *this*. It's possible the darkness obscuring that well-known view of Sam, not recognizing what he sees, what he hears. The little boy that he helped raise, taught how to tie his shoes, how to drive and to undo a bra one handed; the kid he looked out for during kindergarten and high school and still does today.

There's nothing there. Right now, it's an absolute stranger standing by his beloved car asking a question Dean doesn't want to answer. Doesn't want to hear. Doesn't want to admit is valid. Or maybe that is what alienates him so, not the darkness, but the words falling from his lips and forming sentences as they travel through the air, reaching his ears. They work just fine in the dark, thank you very much.

Then again, he's grateful for the ever covering presence of the dark.

Oh yeah, he's sure Sam can identify the strain in Dean's voice despite all of it, but it keeps him from reading him, too. From reading the expression on his face. There's no doubt in his mind that it's... a strange one. One he wouldn't like himself if he were to look into a mirror this second. Loathe himself for what it reveals.

And then the picture of a stranger rights itself, clears. Sam shuffles his feet in the soggy dirt when Dean still stays quiet, too long hair falling into his face as he looks up at him no matter being a few inches taller--'cause that? Is all Little-Brother-Sammy again. Damn him to hell if he doesn't look like that somewhat annoying and pouting five-year-old he once was, instead of that somewhat annoying and pouting twenty-two-year-old he is now. Still meddling in Dean's affairs like they are his own.

It brings back the aura of confidence. Somewhat steady ground. And his voice. "What are you saying, Sam?" Dean hopes against hope that Sam won't notice how his voice cracks on his brother's name, a flash of fear shining through. He shivers in the chilly nighttime air, crossing his arms over his chest like a shield. All of a sudden the dark night is making the conversation a little too personal. A little too real. Honestly? He's fairly sure it *is* fear curling around his chest tighter than a coil spring, freezing his lungs to the point of choking on iced breath.

"Nothing. I... Listen, I don't want to put you on the spot or anything --" *yeah, right*, "--but I'm not blind, nor am I deaf. Just... Don't you think it's time to tell me?"

"Tell you what?"

Hates that he can't keep his voice from cracking again, from it being a little too high, too wobbly, heart beating a little too hysterically. Lips and mouth as dry as the Sahara Desert. And oh yes, does he have an idea at what he's trying to get at, Christ does he ever. Yet, all he wants to say is 'no, no, no, don't make me say it, shut up, go *away*'. He won't. No way. He couldn't move if he tried, but it doesn't mean he's got to make it easy on his brother. Not because Sam's in one of his caring, sharing moods. If he wants to drag it all out in the open, fine. Let him. It's not like he's got to be of help.

He's so not fucking prepared to deal with this shit right now, not ever, not when he's--

"Dean, calm down..."

"I am calm, Sam!"

"Okay. Okay, man. Look, why don't you just tell me? I mean, I might have been young

then, but Christ, I wasn't stupid--"

"I never thought you were," he cuts in quickly, looking anywhere but his brother. Fiddling with a loose thread on his sleeve jacket. Unfortunately, Sam isn't distracted easily tonight.

"-- and I know you didn't want me to know, didn't want to know anyone, probably still don't, but I knew. I... always knew. Or I figured it out pretty quickly anyway. Guess what? It didn't change who you were to me then, won't now. So why not tell me?"

Deans swallows the panic, almost choking on it as it gets stuck. "Y-you already think you know. What does it matter?"

"It matters to me," is the unfair counter, eyes going all soft as soon as he dares to meet them, and--damn it. He should have seen that coming. There's no escape, no getting away from this. Sam's like the dog with a bone, god damn it. Dean almost longs for a ghost, a shapeshifter, anything to show up and attack them just to have an excuse to end this, and how fucked up is that?

"Look, I want to hear it from you. Guessing and knowing, *you* telling me, are two different things. I know it's none of my business. But it's not your dirty little secret either, Dean, it never was and it can't ever be. I don't care if there're not just girls there. I don't care. Got that? You're my brother. I care about you, you stupid fool, and there's nothing that could change that. As long as you're happy and okay, it doesn't matter to me who you--uh, fuck."

Dean doesn't wince at the word. He knows that if he wasn't so busy forcing down a panic attack that would put everything that came before to shame and keeping emotions at bay, he'd be damn surprised at the use of the f-word by his usually soft-spoken little brother. All there is now, bubbling right under the panic, is hope and a droopy smile and his heart stumbling over itself in relief in his chest. Only for a completely different reason than fear, and fuck, does it hurt. In a good way, but damn, he almost forgot warmth and gratitude--love--could freaking hurt like this.

Hurt like you can't breathe and can't speak, so much that you can't stand it and worse than barbwire digging into flesh. It burns, deep down and all around.

"So if you wanted to... you know, with them, tell me to back off and entertain myself for a few hours and I will. I won't even tease you too much about it in the morning, if you're lucky." And he's never going to admit it, not under the worst imaginable threat of torture, but this is the best thing and the worst thing Sam could have given him. Absolution. He doesn't care how silly it sounds in his own head, or how needy, he's not planning on repeating that out loud.

He doesn't care what people think of him. Not usually, doesn't care of what they say behind his back or right to his face, for it doesn't matter. They don't matter, has always told himself that, to move on. Except as many times as he had told himself he doesn't give a damn about what Sam would say to this as well, his heart never bought into it. Regardless of the number of times he tried. It still does, in fact. It matters a

hell of a lot. He can't even pretend that it wouldn't trouble him if Sam wouldn't understand, that it wouldn't freakin' *hurt*. A different pain like now.

Because he's family.

Because he's *Sammy*, for Christ's sake. His little brother, the one person that matters above everyone else.

The gigantic lump stuck in his throat is choking him with tears he won't cry, words he won't say. He knows it, and Sam knows it, too. Sam knows, because Sam knows *him*.

Because this? Yes, okay. Shit. He probably *is* caught in the middle of the biggest 'chick flick moment' known to mankind—or, you know, him. And he is *not* going to start blubbering like a little girl! He's not a chick and he's not Sammy and--fuck. What the fuck is it with this touchy-feely crap anyway? Coughing awkwardly into a tight fist, clearing his throat—half a dozen times, but it's not like he's counting—he nods, lowering his head, subtly sweeping his hand over his eyes.

If they are a little damp, it's the cold wind coiling around them, exhaustion, and the lack of proper sleep, he's sure. Forcing a dry chuckle from even dryer lips, he looks up again. If Sam notices, he doesn't let on. "You're right," he croaks, with as much dignity as he can drag up. "All of it."

"Good. Good," Sam says again, nodding. "I, uh, well, I think I get why you don't let anyone else know, but it's not a secret you have to keep from me. You were never good at that when we were kids anyway, so."

It's true. He wasn't. Or maybe it was more the fact that Sam could look right through him, pierce through his defenses like no one else whenever he bothered putting them up around that awkward little boy and then not so little and even less awkward. "Yeah. And it's not like you don't have your own secrets you don't tell people, right?"

Sam's gentle smile turns amused and somewhat sheepish, catching on his desperate attempt to change the topic. Bless his big, soft heart for playing along. "Like, when I was four and ran away when you didn't want to play hide and seek with me, and then hid in that giant dumpster behind the motel, anyway, and it took you and dad almost three hours to find me? By sheer, dumb luck, I might add." Evil, oh yeah. "Things like that, you mean?"

Dean barks out a strangled laugh, grateful that Sam lets him off the hook. In fact, he could hug the kid for it. "I remember that." His backside does too. "Christ, the bathroom stank for *days* after that. Dad got me got for that little stunt."

A snort, and Dean knows what's coming. It's been said and discussed between them back and forth and a million times over and that, the familiarity of it, finally gets him back on familiar, unshakable ground and away from the edge of a trembling cliff. From falling, drowning. *Breaking*. "He should have punished me, not you," Sam states like he always does, only not as bitter as the words usually are. The words, the tone of voice, it lacks a lot of the typical anger and bite. "I was hiding because you didn't want

to play, it's not like you were an ass who didn't want to come looking just to mock me."

"You know how he is Sammy, and it seems that it worked out just fine, didn't it? You never did that again."

Sam juts his chin out, crossing long arms over his chest. Trying to look disgruntled. The smile ruins the masquerade. "Nor did you play hide and seek with me for the longest time." The pout, he notices, is as prominent as it had been back then. They stay like that for the longest time. Just standing there, looking at each other through the darkness, eyes now adjusted to it as best as can be, the stupid smiles turning into grins pretty soon.

Grinning at the edge of a graveyard in the middle of the night like two lunatics on crack.

Huh, now that kinda fits them, doesn't it? Dean huffs a laugh.

"Uh, right. Okay. I... want to get a night's sleep and then some for once. Come on," Sam says, jolting them both out of their silent, stupid face-off, laughing and getting in the car.

Dean stands there, rooted to the spot for a few more, impossible long seconds, staring at the back of his car. He feels restless now, like he's on edge, adrenaline racing in his blood--and relaxed all the same. These are the times he wished he was smoking or heavily drinking. Only he doesn't, not really, so he kicks a pile of small rocks, pebbles, out of the way and swallows it all down. It's all fine now, and even if it's not okay, it's better.

Taking a deep breath, Dean gets into the car, door falling shut next to him.

And despite feeling jittery and jumpy, sleep still sounds like a damn good idea and very tempting.

*_*_*_*_*

Walking into Babylon a few nights later feels a little like déjà-vu. The guys, the music, the lights--it's still loud and packed and colorful.

Alive.

Only walking in this time, he has a goal. A plan.

And he doesn't mind the looks he gets passing through the mass of half naked bodies, doesn't mind the casual and not so casual pats on the back and strokes and touches. He doesn't say no to the drink the bartender puts in front of him, or the other three that follow. He's never said no to guys--and sometimes girls--buying him drinks, since

usually it's him doing the buying. Here, it's somewhat even, at last.

There's no sign of either Brian or Justin. That doesn't bother him, not really.

He knows they're here, already topic number one around the club again. There's little doubt in his mind that there are times they ain't. One way or another. Smirking, he nurses his current drink, something blue and strong and burning his insides, saying no, thank you, to another white or pink or blue pill. It's not his world. He doesn't worry about the number of eyes on him. He's fresh meat, like the night he was here with Sam, and if a few of the guys remembered, well, good for them. Especially since Sammy's not around tonight, and some are bold enough to approach him.

He looks *very* good, he knows. Sam had teased him about 'playing dress up for his sweetheart.' The dress up part was true, evidently, not so much the sweetheart part. What can he say? He does look good in leather. The guys are charming and interesting enough, and he's sure any other day he wouldn't think twice about going home with one of them. Although he's got to admit, the guy with the pink feather boa matching his bright pink leather pants swaying to the music over on the metal stairs *is* a bit distracting. It takes a lot of guts, though, and Dean can respect that.

Tonight, though, tonight is different.

Within the club, among the mass of wriggling, dancing bodies, are only two people that have his full attention. Only two that will take him home tonight. He's not the hunter tonight, oh no, more like a blend of seducer and prey. Not that the two he has in mind are going to have to work very hard, mind you. It's been a while since he played the game. That's not to mean he lost much of his edge. Dean smirks to himself. Far from it.

Tossing back the last drops of the blue liquid, melting ice cubs clattering in the empty glass, he puts it down on the bar. The dance floor is packed. A sweating, moving, pounding cluster of human flesh in the stroboscope light. Every supernatural being with sensitive eyes--or ears, if one thinks about it--is going to run like hell, never choosing a club like this as their hunting ground. Comforting, yes, but nothing more. There are enough creatures out there lacking one of the two or both.

Banishing those thoughts from his mind, he orders another blue drink, not bothering to find out the name. He isn't going to come back here, not anytime soon. If at all. He nods to the barkeeper as he hands over the glass. Bringing it to his lips, he sips a little slower, more careful, doesn't want to be too drunk for this. Drunken sex isn't pleasant, not if you can't undo shoe laces and pants and hold your own dick anymore. Or anyone else's for the matter. Hence, it's a mess, strongly resembling most first-time sex of sixteen-year-olds.

Risking another glance toward the dance floor, the first half of the duo that got his attention and thoughts tonight is moving into view. Blond and pale, but glowing and happy and wonderfully alive. Like it should be, not the shadow of the lively young man he'd last seen after the Emily disaster at the loft. He's dancing and making his way through the crowd at the same time, smiling at several of the men, some of them

nodding, touching his shoulder, others purely smiling back. He's got a glass in his left hand, arms stretched out over his head.

Dean keeps his eyes on Justin as he moves further through the crowd, stopping a few times to talk to someone or another, before finally making his way up to the bar. There's this second, right when Justin sees him, where his eyes go wide, like he can't believe what he is seeing, before flushing even a darker shade of pink high on his cheeks. Blue eyes light up like a Christmas tree.

"Dean!" he proclaims loudly, bouncing up the last few feet separating them, merely stopping to apologize for bumping into someone, before draping his agile body around and over Dean. Hugging and kissing him on the mouth like he's a present the kid always wanted. Which isn't all that wrong, Dean thinks mischievously to himself. It's only then that the younger man seems to actually realize what he's doing and with whom, for he jumps away, catapulting backward, and only Dean's reflexes and the grip on his arm keeping him standing.

Blue eyes take a nervous glance around. And Dean knows he's looking for Sam. "He's not here," he tells, draping his arm around the blond's narrow waist.

"Who?"

"Sammy."

"He's not."

Dean laughs at his confuzzled expression on the pretty face, answering by pulling the body next to him in. "Nope," he relents eventually, "and he's not going to show up, either." Justin still seems a bit lost, so Dean turns his head around, putting his lips directly to the kid's ear, saying, "Sammy told me to go and have fun. Get it out of my system, so to speak. Have fun, fun, fun."

Another confused look, but Justin is a smart kid, and the light bulb comes on soon enough. "Oh," he breathes, "Oh!" Now that it makes 'click', he's grinning like the cat that ate the canary, eyes bright and twinkling with mischief in the jittering spot light. "That's good. Right?"

"Yeah, yeah it's good. I'm good."

"That's--good." Justin then reaches for Dean's drink, suddenly spinning around in his hold, curling two slender arms around Dean's neck, basically hugging him more. "Really, really good. *Perfect.*" The words are mumbled into his shoulder, warm breath tickling his throat as he turns his face into the crease of neck. Either Justin is really drunk, on drugs, or really happy to see him. But Justin is an affectionate kid and it doesn't have to mean anything. "Hmmm... you smell good."

Maybe not drunk, but tipsy. Definitely tipsy. At any rate, Dean's willing to bet that the glass in his hand wasn't his first tonight. "I do?"

"...Hmm-mm...yummy..."

"How's your hand?"

"...hmm, fine."

And the blond is freakin' slurping Dean's drink behind his back. "Are you stealing my drink right under my nose, Justin?"

The answer is a set of wet lips pressing into the soft skin right under his ear. Leaning back a bit, he grins. "Possibly."

"I'd say it's more than possible, Blondie," he chides gently, wiping a spilled drop of liquid from the corner of pink lips. He doesn't mean it, of course, but it's cute to see the blond pout. The pout vanishes into a look of lust and want when he licks it from his finger. Oh yeah, he can play this game.

Justin's next words, though, leave him stunned. "Dance with me?"

"What?"

"Dance with me," says again, all gentle smile and soft eyes, holding a hand out for Dean to take. "Please? Pretty please?" And he actually bats his lashes! *Jesus!*

"I can't dance."

"Most of the time, neither can Brian...", he's told teasingly.

Dean laughs. "All right. But if you mention this to Sammy...", he warns.

"I won't! Cross my heart and all that!"

"Fine. Lead the way."

Justin take his hand, puts the glass down, and pulls him along in one swift motion, leading them right into the center of the dancing, moving crowd. It's not, like, ballroom dancing or anything, but that nervous, fluttering feeling in his gut is there anyway. Or maybe it's just the alcohol making itself known. Dean shrugs inwardly. It's not more important than the pressure of the hand leading him out onto the dance floor.

As soon as they're there, Justin's already moving to the passionate beat, hips swaying left and right, head bobbing in time with it. The kid loves music, that much is clear, and it's just as obvious that the music loves him, too. Finding them a spot in the mass, he whirls around at once, throwing his arms around Dean's neck--never missing a beat. And to his utter surprise, Dean feels himself following his lead. He's danced before, of course, but he usually doesn't bother to dance in a club like this.

There are other ways to spend one's time.

The blond in his arms isn't a girl. *Uh-huh*, very *obvious*. As petite and fragile as the lithe body feels moving against him, there's no mistaking parts of that physique. The soft smile meeting his gaze, the soft tickle of hair against his chin when he leans closer, it all comes down to flesh triumphing over mind, as his brain is apparently taking a break. It just natural to encircle the slim waist with his arms, and going by the soft moan, it wasn't a bad move. For his hands to go on a journey after that, to get a little bolder with every stroke and glide, let himself go with the music, is just as natural.

He feels Justin's smile against his throat as he whispers, "that's it."

And then, all of the sudden, they are kissing and it's not fast or hard and quick at all. Not like the music. The flashing lights. The moving people. Slow and lazy and wet, and oh yeah, dirty. Sensual. This time there is nothing holding him back, nothing to keep him back. Justin seems to sense it, too, for one of his hands comes up, grabbing a handful of the collar of his jacket to hold him close and down and *there*. Right there.

When they part, he lowers his mouth to the teen's ear. "You do know that half of the people are watching us, right?"

Justin's smile is angelic as he looks up at him. Contrary to the wicked gleam in sparkling blue eyes. Oh, hell. "They'll get something to see, then," he teases, and Dean laughs.

"All right," he whispers, lowers his mouth to Justin's once again. "I don't mind if you don't." Justin shakes his head. No, of course he wouldn't, and then he's spinning and touching and kissing and nibbling--and dancing isn't so strange anymore. Mostly because it isn't *dancing* anymore. More like fucking, maybe, with clothes on.

At the end of the song, Dean is getting a little too hot, and it's not just because of the dancing. As close as they are pressed together, erection pressing against the zipper of his pants, there's no way Justin hasn't picked up on it yet. When the hunter pulls back to get some space between them, the blond moves with him, rubbing a clever hand on his thigh. Like an accident.

It isn't. Can't be, if the faint twitching of lips is any indication. Resting his head against Justin's, he sing-songs, "You're doing this on purpose."

Squeezing Dean, a blond head moves from where it rests against his neck, a flushed pink and pretty face looking up at him. "Hmmm...maybe." Okay then.

They keep it up for another song--pun intended--before he can finally drag the laughing dancer away from the floor and steer them back to the bar, ordering another drink. He takes a huge swallow, another smaller one, before handing the glass over to Justin, who eagerly accepts. Grin in place, gaze never leaving Dean's as the kid takes a sip, he crushes both of their mouths together, letting the cool, burning liquid trickle between their lips. Well. Talk about 'sharing' a drink.

They keep handing the glass back and forth, laughing whenever they spill something

and successively ignoring curious or envious or interested glances their way. They are so into what they doing, that a warm, deep voice from behind them makes them jump, almost crashing the glass to the floor. Can't be said often enough that quick reflexes are pretty damn useful.

"It's not nice to tease, Sunshine," Brian drawls, letting his eyes wander. "I saw you two out there. You were hot." While talking, the man put himself between the blond and the bar, one arm curling around the pale neck. His eyes take a full tour around the club before they—at last—settle on Dean. "I take it that hot brother of yours isn't joining us tonight."

Dean smiles to himself at the sheer possessiveness of the rather innocent gesture, saying, "Nope. Told me I should get over myself and get the... real thing. Practically threw me out of our charming motel room." And Sam really did. Almost.

Brian's gaze as he takes in Dean is blazing hot. Half lidded eyes travelling from his feet slowly up to his crotch, lingering there for a moment too long before they move onto his belly and chest to finally coming to rest on his lips and—eventually—his eyes. The trail they took prickles like champagne bubbles on bare skin. Justin laughs brightly at his lover's act, doubly so when Brian glowers at him out of the corner of his eyes.

That very moment, the barkeeper puts a drink in front of Brian. Half leaning on the bar, he takes it, sending his eyes on another tour of the clientele. "Anyone you like?"

"Oh, yeah, I have my eyes on someone."

"Really?"

"Ye-ah." As if the guy doesn't know why Dean is here tonight.

Justin moves out of Brian's grasp, turns to look at the dance floor. Apparently trying to decide where he's been looking. "Who?"

"As if you don't know." Justin frowns. "Uh, maybe you should ease on the drinks, kiddo."

The blond looks even more confused, saying, "What?" Brian snorts. "No, really, what?"

"He's just trying to be clever, Sunshine." The brunette takes a swallow and raises the glass with the golden shining liquor at him. A wicked gleam in his eyes, and Dean feels himself react to that. "Ready to join us then?"

"Oh. Yeah."

"Aww, and I thought you two had all played out," a stranger's voice cuts into the conversation. That is, if you want to call it a conversation. Personally, Dean would go with a fucked up version of foreplay. Turning his head to face the newcomer, he gets just a little bug-eyed, as the guy standing right there is no other than feather-boaguy-in-pink-leather-pants. And, geez, it's... really a lot of pink. "Hi sugar," he says sweetly,

passing Dean and putting a long arm around the blond's shoulders.

Brian merely rolls his eyes, drinking more obviously in the hope that, if he ignores him long enough, he'll go away. Dean is enough of a people's person to know that he won't. "Imagine my *surprise* when I hear from a *very reliable source* that a certain infamous couple of Liberty--," he gives Brian and Justin a pointed stare, "--arrived here with two guys in tow," that would be Sam and he, "and, as my source tells me, an awfully hot couple."

Dean almost snorts his own drink out of his nose. Coughing and trying not to suffocate at once.

Feather-boaguy-in-pink-leather-pants' bewildered gaze jumps his way for a second before returning to his usual audience. "And now, a few days later, you show up with this particularly fabulous exemplar of the gay variety," he waves an impatient hand at Dean, "and I have to wonder. In fact, everyone wonders. So... be two darlings now and enlighten this poor old gossip queen with something *juicy* her source didn't already milk for all it was worth."

"You're not old, Emmett," Justin exclaims, laughing and blinking up at the guy.

"Aww, you're too sweet honey," feather-boaguy-in-pink-leather-pants--er, *Emmett* drawls lightly. The distraction doesn't last long, it never does. "So...? You wouldn't leave me hanging, would you?"

"...uh..."

"Piss off, Honeycut."

"Don't call me that!"

"What? Honeybunny?"

"Shut up Kinney."

Justin chuckles lightly. "Ignore him, Em, he's just cranky that he stumbled over all the guys throwing themselves at his feet but only got his dick sucked twice tonight." Giving Dean the eye, he adds, "Good to know we're about to change that, right?"

Dean snorts. *We'll see about that.* That, of course, puts him at the real center of attention, guy turning with Justin to look him over like a piece of meat. A very tasty piece of meat, mind you. "Wow, you look even more tasty from up close, you know. I saw you coming in, I was standing over--"

"There, yup, I know. I saw you, too."

"Hard to overlook, is he?" Brian mutters, sarcasm dripping in buckets.

Well, no, he isn't. "Yes, yes, the pink is rather bright, is it not? And the shirt? It glows in

the dark, or okay, black light, but still. Same difference." He chuckles just as bright as the shirt, and Dean can't help but return the grin with one of his own. "So, say, mind telling me how you--" He stops when Brian removes his arm from around Justin, pulling the boy back at his side. "My, aren't you--"

"If you say 'testy,' I'm gonna make you suck your own balls, Emmett."

Emmett seems to consider the treat for a second, eventually holding up his hands in defeat. "Fine, be that way, Brian. But don't come running to me if you need the latest rumors on--uh, on second thought, ah, no, forget it." He laughs awkward. "But still, there's this--"

Brian talks right over the man. "Fuck, where did I put that damn fly swatter again? There's this weird buzzing in my ear..."

Crossing his arms in front of his chest, Emmet glowers at Brian. "Well. I know when my presence is no longer desired. Be that way. I'm gonna find me some more fun company. Bye, honey," Emmett babbles, planting a noisy, wet kiss on Justin's cheek. A werewolf has nothing on Brian Kinney in the nasty-looks department right about this moment, Dean thinks, hiding his grin in his drink. "Have fu-un, my pretties," he sing-songs, winking at Dean and brushing up against him when he walks past.

Dean laughs, waving until the sight of bright pink disappears into the crowd. "Let's go." Dean turns back to watch Brian peels himself off the bar.

"What?" Justin looks as surprised as he feels. "Why?"

"If he is here, everyone else can't be far behind. Now, question for you, Sunshine. Do you *want* to deal with them when we could be fucking like a triplet of bunnies back at the loft in five minutes instead?" There's no question to what he's referring to.

In reply, Justin downs the rest of his--Brian's--drink and snatches Dean's wrist. The hunter shakes his head, chuckling, as he follows the giddy, young man toward the exit, Brian on their heels.

-- TBC

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Part 20: "Of All The Worldly Passions...,"

[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]

Part 21: "...Lust Is The Most Intense. ..."

[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]

Part 22: "...All Other Worldly Passions..."

[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]

Part 23: "...Seem To Follow In Its Train."

[Dieses Kapitel ist nur Volljährigen zugänglich]

Part 24: "...Morning finds him messing with the coffee maker."

He wakes again to nearly complete darkness, the loft wrapped in the dark of night like a blanket around his naked form.

Patches of light flicker across the wall where they face huge windows, the city with its bright lights looking in. There are shadowy stripes on the shiny, wooden floor, uniform lines due to the half-closed blinds facing the entertainment area. Dean stares at them for a while, stupidly and way too fascinated, as his eyes lazily trace one line down to where they vanish in darker shadows, and the next line back again. He does it until his gaze ends up at the platform as it comes into his line of sight.

Dean feels himself frown, eyebrows drawing together in a confused, rippled line. The confusion drips down to his eyes where heavy eyelids start to blink slowly. There's a hand down there, too, loosely curled into a not-quite fist and the back of its fingers resting floppily on the cold surface. The shadow lines paint it in a sharp contrast of light and shadow, and Dean thinks, *huh*, and *that's probably mine*.

Probably turns into surely as he and his sleepy and not yet all awake brain realize the cold seeping from his arm into the rest of him. Like chilly fingertips dancing across naked skin and a creeping cold he can feel down to his toes. Moving his head is harder than it should be, cheek brushing the soft, warm sheets where it rest dangerously close to the edge of the bed and moving closer to take a look.

Yup, that's his hand lying down there. The ring half hidden in shadows, half gleaming is a dead giveaway. Moving that hand is even harder than his head. It's stiff and cold and *Jesus fuck*, protesting in earnest as he curls fingers into a tight fist. The arm isn't much better, worse even, for it feels like a solid chunk of ice rather than a limb that shall bend and move. He ponders moving that arm further for longer than he's willing to admit, but in the end the want for warmth wins out, and he turns his face into the mattress to muffle a brief grunt of pain.

No wonder he woke up. *Geez!* He bends his arm a few times, twists and turns it until the whole thing doesn't feel like there are a dozen knives sticking out of it. The light weight covering the rest of him shifts a little with every move, penetrating the warm, cozy bubble of air surrounding him under the blanket. Shivering, Dean hurries to pull the edge of it back down as soon as his wayward arm finds a place at his side, freezing hand twisted into the warm fabric. Sighing in relief, he closes his eyes and waits to fall back asleep.

And waits.

After a long minute, a very damn long minute, thank you very much, he finds that that isn't likely going to happen. Not anytime soon. Dean snorts quietly. Sleep isn't going to happen, not like this, not when every part of his body feels like a taunt rubber band ready to snap at any second.

The ticking of his watch is loud in the quiet of the night, and Dean's lips press mute curses into the sheets. *Fuck*. Moving as little as humanly possible, he pulls the comforter tighter around him, marveling at the warmth. He listens to the seconds tick by, but the wonderful, welcomed heat does nothing to relax his coil spring of a body, nothing to release the tension of muscles everywhere. Okay. Great, so there's no way in hell he's gonna go back to sleep like this.

Groaning inwardly, there's only a single damn logic conclusion: shower.

A long, hot shower, a shower that he has to get up to get under. Get out of his homely bubble of warmth and the bed.

The wave of pain is more like a tsunami than a splash as he pushes himself up on his arms, biting the inside of his cheeks to the point of drawing blood. "Sleeping like this," he whispers to the silent night, "was a bad idea." The night doesn't answer him, only the harsh sounds of his own breathing, lungs feeling like they had the air knocked out of them. He gives his racing heart a moment to calm down before he proceeds, getting on hands and knees, or rather elbows and knees as the blanket slides down his back and ass to pool on the mattress and Dean's calves.

As much as getting up pains him--literally and figuratively--it's obvious that the hot shower is his best and only options right now if he doesn't want to walk around like an arthritis-riddled, eighty-year-old-grandpa. Eyes having adjusted to the semi dark long minutes ago, he's no problem finding his way around the bed without falling flat on his ass or face and into the bathroom. Turning to close the door, Justin and Brian are asleep, dead to the world under another heavy blanket.

The lights come on as soon as he hits the switch, blinding him for a second and bringing pained tears to his eyes. It's a reflex almost two decades of hunting that has his arms coming up to shield his eyes from the bright, biting light. It's a bad fuckin' idea. Agony shoots through him like a knife, like being ripped apart, muscle cramps almost bringing him to his knees. Falling into the wall, a wall like ice against his naked back, he waits and wills and wishes the pain away.

When he can breathe again, he goes for the first-aid kit, the scissors in it. His hands tremble when he sets them out to cut the bandage away from his arm. Another bad idea, and for so many different freakin' reasons, the first and foremost being that he isn't sure he can replace it himself, the second being, *ow!* The cold metal of the scissors dig into his palm as he unconsciously curls his hand into a fist. It makes it worse, of course it does, seeing as a dozen muscles in his arms tense. All he sees for a moment are bright spots dancing in front of his eyes.

Leave him gasping.

Leave him breaking out in a sweat.

Letting his hand drop, the scissors clatter in protest as they hit the stone counter top, and he leans heavily against the sink, smooth, cool edges digging hard into hip and

flesh. It's enough of a shock to let him forget the pain carved into back and shoulders. If there'd been an ounce of strength left in him, he'd startle like a rabbit on a gunshot and curse himself and the intruder when the door opens. Harsh bathroom lights spill out into the bedroom as Brian steps through, hair in disarray and a yawn splitting his face.

His dark eyes are sharp and away, too awake for the time of night.

Not that he's any idea exactly how late it is, but it's still too late or too early to look this awake. His own reflection agrees wholeheartedly.

Taking one look at Dean, his clenched fist and trembling hands, Brian walks over to the shower and turns it on. The rushing water is a weird comfort in his ears, shoulders sagging an inch or two, in relief or anticipation, he doesn't know. Doesn't care. He's still cold, still grinding his teeth together to keep them from chattering. He watches Brian come up behind him, naked feet making no sound on the smooth, tiled floor, so close that he can feel his body, feel the heat of it right there along his back.

He meets Dean's eyes in the mirror and Dean does jump this time. Jerks, short and sharp, and shivers. Swallowing hard, bracing him for the onslaught of pain, he reaches up to unwrap the bandage. Taking the scissors might not end well, so he'll have to make do like this. Brian snorts softly in his ears, pressing dry, warm lips into his neck and brushing Dean's hand away. Gentle fingertips brush the bandage, the tape that holds it all together.

Dean, sleepy soft around the edges and *hurting*, feels a strange, compassionate bond toward that off white bandage on his arm. Sometimes it's like he's solely held together by sticky tape, too. Sticky tape that's called 'family' and two names that can rip it off and slap it on so fast and sudden that it leaves him spinning and scrambling to keep all of the pieces that make him together.

Brian slips a finger under the end and slowly peels off the tape. It doesn't hurt. The older man takes over then, and Dean lets him, just this once, and it's only a stupid dressing, isn't it? It comes away with every twist of Brian's wrist, and when it's gone, familiar dry lips brush the line of stitches crawling up his biceps and shoulder. Noses the vague hollow behind his ear, the fine hair on his nape.

It helps that Brian doesn't say a thing, that he keeps silent, keeps his comments damn well to himself. That he just *does*.

Having discarded the thing, or Dean thinks he must have somewhere in between, for when two arms come around his waist, there's nothing left of the ruined piece of fabric. Dean makes a protesting sound, just for the sake of it. He's got a role to play after all, a reputation to uphold, but he's too tired to do much more. Doesn't resist when the older man stirs him toward the shower, rapidly filling with delicious warm steam, and with the shower stall, so does the room.

The mist rushes at them when Brian opens the door, enveloping him, them like a warm embrace, a pair of invisible arms that curl around you and keep you safe. The

last touch of cool air vanishes when the door closes behind them and Brian settles in behind him, chin parking on Dean's shoulder as those two arms--the real ones--curl around him anew and hold tight.

What does it hurt that he leans into the solid warmth at his back? Not here, not right now, not in the dark of the night where there's no one else. Sleep tugs on him like a toddler on his mother's skirt. A gentle, unrelenting reminder of 'I'm here,' and 'I'm not going away.' Sighing deeply, he revels in the warmth that slowly settles over him, at the quiet, silently listening to the hushed tones of flowing water, the rhythmic pitter-patter of it hitting their naked bodies. The sound of their combined breathing.

They don't say a word, the dream-like state a welcomed, wonderful contrast to the outside world that is Dean's life. Dean moans softly, leaning more into the warm body at his back, giving himself over to the hand sliding along his water-slicked cock. He turns his face into the flowing water, moaning softly, when he comes.

*_*_*_*

Morning finds him messing with Brian's coffee maker.

Thing must have cost a not-so-small fortune and apparently requires a degree in engineering as well. Dean doesn't have that, but he can build an EMF meter out of a walkman, so he'll be damned if the thing beats him into submission. Plus he's not Dad. Dad, who can barely handle a toaster without burning down the room, let alone a computer. Dean glares at the coffee maker. The coffee maker glares back, unimpressed.

Dean sighs.

In the end, let's say they're about even. *Fuck.*

"Wanna shower with us?"

Startled, Dean looks up from where he's pouring the second love of his life--freshly brewed and steaming hot--into a big mug, white steam curling up into the air. Comes face to face with Justin and Brian, undressing themselves and the other on their slow way to the bathroom. Tempting, yes, but--his gaze briefly flickers to the waiting pot of hot, dark liquid. Waiting for him, and just him. Nah, sex in the shower is, well, sure as fuck not overrated, but he needs the caffeine more. "Nah, I'm good," he assures, raising the cup. "Have fun."

Brian wriggles his brows, giving his swelling cock a stroke. "Wanna *watch* us shower? You can bring the fucking coffee with you, if you have to, I don't mind a good foursome."

I'm sure you'd like that. Laughing, he tells them to fuck off and get on with it already. "Go, live out your voyeur kink with yourself. I'm gonna molest your coffee maker some more," he says, stroking it the same way Brian does his cock. Justin's laughter follows

them straight into the bathroom. Not long after the shower starts--and his phone rings. Looking at the display, he smirks. "Yes, Sammy?"

- *"Uh, are you done?"* -

Dean snorts. "What? Little Sammy afraid to walk in on his big brother?"

- *"Dude, don't joke about that. I still have nightmares about the last time."* -

And, yeah, Dean remembers that, too. The little blond with long, long hair and longer legs curled under her tight ass giving head in the back of his car... *oh yeah...* Poor little Sammy almost choked on his cocoa when he opened that door following 'strange noises.' Yeah, well, getting your dick sucked kinda does that to a guy. "Hmm, yeah, I know what you mean..."

- *"Shut up. Since you're answering your phone, I'll guess it's okay."* -

Dean takes a sip of his coffee. Scalding hot. Perfect. And frowns. Then, "You're downstairs, aren't you Sammy?"

- *"...not, exactly."* -

"What do you mean, 'not exactly'? Either you are or not, dude."

- *"Uh..."* -

"Sammy...", he starts. And stops. Huh.

Putting the mug down, he walks around the corner. The door makes a rumbling noise when he rolls it aside, stepping out of the loft. Of course Sammy's standing there, a landing down and his cell phone pressed to his ear. Of course. *Only you, Sammy.* "Huh," he says, snapping his own phone shut. Rolling his eyes, he walks back in, listening to his brother's footsteps on the stairs, the rumbling that announces the closing of the door.

It's only when he turns to Sam, teeth-flashing, teasing grin on his lips, that he notices the book under his brother's arm. "That from Miss Deborah?" he inquires, grin going wider at the annoyed shake of Sam's head that sends his hair flying.

"Good morning to you, too. But yeah, she gave it to me. Gave me some names, too. In case we ever need help or something."

Picking up his coffee, he takes a long sip. "Good. In case we're crossing path with another insane witch that tries to kill us or some other people that..." He trails off when he notices that Sam's not listening. At least not to Dean. "Yo Sammy? Anyone home?"

"Hmm? Yeah, sorry."

"Something's wrong?"

A confused glance his way, a frown to the bedroom and--oh. Oh. Talk about strange noises. Coming straight from the bathroom. That is, if you listen, really listen. And Sammy? Always does that. Thank god he ain't that nine-year-old, too-curious-for-his-own-good kid anymore, so there's no risk of him storming up there. Although... the image that thought brings to his inner eye has him snorting into his coffee.

And smacking Sam on the back of his head.

Sam starts, giving him a nasty look. "The hell, dude!"

"Don't stare!" he says, poking his forefinger into his brother's shoulder. "That's rude. Unless you want to join in, which I'm sure Brian would fucking love so--mph"

There's a hand over his mouth, and Sam, owner of said hand, looks a little green and a lot annoyed. "Dude. Just. Shut it, okay. Shut up."

"What? I said I wasn't fucking. I didn't say anything about them." He hooks his thumb over his shoulder and to the bathroom. "Didn't bother you last time..."

"It doesn't *bother* me, man. It's just... nothing. It's nothing."

Dean makes some kind of agreeing noise, "hmm-mm," or maybe it's, "mm-hmm," filling a cup for his little brother. Shoves a cup at him. "I tell you what this is. You're jealous." Sam flushed embarrassment turns into a heated glare. Dean doesn't back down. "No, listen. What I mean is, you need to get laid, dude. Take a page out of their book. 'Cause honestly, come on, Sammy, you need to burn off that... energy somewhere, don't you? And it shouldn't be that hard to get a nice girl somewhere--"

"Dean. Stop."

"All I'm saying is, you need to get it out of your system before you snap once and for all."

"I appreciate your concern, Dean, but..."

"Who says anything about concern?" Dean rebuffs. He is concerned, but he's not going to tell. "It's just getting on my nerves that you're so freaking pissy all the freaking time."

Sam glowers. "*Pissy?*"

"Yes Sam. Pissy. Cranky. Annoying. Hovering. Whatever. One minute you're hovering over me like a freaking mother hen, like I'm about to die, and the next you almost bite my head off. That needs to stop, Sam. Like now. I need you sharp, all right, but that is not it."

"Dean..."

"I get that you're freaked, Sam, what happened back there, and in Nebraska, I get it, dude. I really do. But this has to stop. Remember? I'm fine. I'm alive. It's over and done with. Even your precious Miss Deborah said so. So go out, get yourself a beer and a pretty girl. You need it."

"Fuck off Dean. I'm not you. Sex doesn't work like that for me, and you know it."

"Who says you have to take her to your bed? Just go out and have a good time. Unwind a little, 'cause I got to tell ya, you're wound tighter than a fucking coil. All this shit about worrying about me... you gotta let it go. I'm not dying anymore."

Slamming the cup on the counter and using his newly free hands to cover his face, Sam sighs deeply. Leans heavy against the bar. "I know, I know. Shit. It's just... you're right. I'm gonna try to keep my hovering to an absolute minimum."

Dean grins. "Dude, I'm always right."

"No, you're not."

"Yeah. Totally am."

"Are not--wait," he laughs. *It's good to see you laugh, Sammy.* "I'm not gonna play this game. We're not four, for Christ's sake."

"That's because you always lost then, too." He pokes Sam's mug. "Now, stuff the touchy-feely crap and drink your girly coffee instead, bitch."

"Jerk."

And hey, it's still not all right. Gonna bet that, even trying not to hover, Sam is a master at doing it anyway and without realizing, but at least it's better than yesterday or a week ago. Taking a shower without stumbling into Sam afterwards as he comes out of their bathroom would be nice again. For starters, that's okay. Nodding, he changes the subject.

"You got us a new job?" he prompts, eyeing the newspaper cutout sticking out of the book.

"Yeah. There's a poltergeist in Cleveland. Or that's what it sounds like anyway. Strange noises in the basement, doors and windows opening and closing on their own, flickering lights, the whole nine yards. *And* the family living in the house ends up dead one way or another within the first four month, so I think it's a good bet to check it out until something else comes along."

Dean's eyebrow hits his hairline. "And someone still buys that freaking house?" He's always amazed at how stupid or ignorant people can be. Then again, people buy a lot of crap if it's cheap, and how cheap would a house be where several people had died over the years? *Deadly cheap.* Okay, okay, bad pun, but what the hell.

"Yup. An elderly couple bought it a few months ago. Moved in last week. It was left vacated for almost seven years before that, though." So. Not *all* stupid. "That's the reason it made the papers in the first place, made a real big deal out of it."

Scanning the article, he nods. "And knowing how our fuckers love to take that change, I guess Cleveland it is, then."

"What's in Cleveland?"

They both turn at the voice, finding a naked, smiling--and utterly glowing--Justin on the bedroom stairs. He never heard the shower turn off. Or their moaning.

"...uh..."

Dean doesn't bother to hide the smirk fighting his rational brain for control over his facial muscles at his brother's sudden inability to speak properly. He takes pity on him, though, yet he can't decide if it's Justin or Sam he's thinking about here. "Our new case."

He watches how Justin's face falls, smile dimming. "Oh."

"Cleveland is fucking boring," Brian doesn't fail to point that out, unasked of course, as he walks up behind Justin, but it's not like that ever stops the man. "Worse than the Pitts, and I never fucking thought I'd hear myself say that. Fuck."

"Well, it's good then that we aren't going there to party, right Sammy?"

"Uh... yeah." Poor kid's a little busy *not* staring. Either out of curiosity or the feeling of a train crash you can't look away from, absentminded stirring his coffee some more instead. Dean knows his brother well enough to guess that he's probably not even aware that he's doing it.

Raising a questioning eyebrow, Brian grins. "You know," he says, devilish grin firmly in place, "I don't know about you, but I could swear I once heard of a guy who stirred his coffee to death."

Dean barely sustains his laughter as a confused frown crosses Sammy's face. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Chuckling, Justin elbows Brian in the ribs, glaring at Dean when he can't stifle his own laughter. He really doesn't care. Smile still in place, Dean watches Justin drag his lover back into the bedroom, attacking the closet to find something to wear for them. "So, when did you want to leave?"

Dean turns to look at Sam. "After I finish my coffee," he admits, grinning. "Real tasty coffee, Sammy. How often do we have that?"

"Uh..."

He wiggles a finger. "Exactly."

And takes another sip, moaning at the lovely taste exploding on his tongue. Sam laughs, eyes crinkling at the corners and lighting up like a neon sign at any motel around the country--if it's not kaput, that is--and Dean has no choice but laugh with him. At himself, which is why he gives him The Finger. Come on, he *is* the older brother. So what if his bro's not that chubby ten-year-old anymore. He's still Sammy. Okay, *Sam*, but who cares about details?

Justin is the first to emerge from the endless depth of the bedroom that ate his underwear. Almost. He's dressed now in green cargo pants and a tee, walking straight up to the coffee pot. Dean grins. Can't blame Blondie. It had been a long, long night, and pretty exhausting, too. Just remembering the feel of two pairs of hands on his skin... *whoa*. Better think of something else. Thanks to his daydreaming, he completely misses what Justin whispers to his brother.

It has to be something good, for the smile that the comment or whatever earns, is both sincere and content. "Thanks," he overhears Sam saying.

He shrugs it off and hides a smile in his coffee as he starts to go over the prints that outline their next case. Looking at the pictures, the house looks more like a small castle than a house, and how anyone would want to live there is a question he doesn't want to think about. *A castle with its very own poltergeist. Great.*

"So, what exactly caught your interest in Cleveland?"

"Poltergeist," Dean offers, eyes briefly flickering up to meet wide, blue eyes watching him. "Probably." There's nothing more to say and he doesn't. The panic attack is still vivid in his mind, and he doesn't want a repeat. And given what he went through with that Emily chick the other day, well, he knows better than to open his mouth this time. Justin doesn't need to know, and as mature as he appears and undoubtedly is in some ways, he's still a nineteen-year-old teenager in others. Some very important ones.

Right then, Brian saunters down the stairs. Clad in a pair of jeans, a black, sleeveless shirt and no socks and... yum. He looks a lot like he stepped right out of one of those glossy fashion magazines looking back at him at every gas station. The guy doesn't even have to *try*, and fuck him if Brian doesn't know that, too. Plays it like, *whoa. Smug, fucking asshole*, he thinks, amused and smirking into the beloved, dark drink.

-- TBC