

Easy on the Clutch

by yourperiphery

They roll into Panabaker, New Hampshire at three in the morning on a Friday, headlights cutting bright across the rain-slick main road. It's almost May, but Dean has his hands tucked under his thighs to keep them warm.

The weak light of Sam's flashlight from the backseat flickered and died two hours ago, and now he's lying down, having given up on trying to read by the occasional flash of passing lights. His limbs take up too much space back there so he's folded up awkwardly, one foot flat against the window and the other leg bent at a bizarre angle into the foot well.

Dean wants to tell him to get his dirty sneakers off the window, but he thinks better of it. Sam's been punchy, lately, almost sixteen and even quieter than he used to be. He spends most of his time tucked into himself and his books, and the rest of his time slamming doors and rolling his eyes and telling Dean to leave him alone.

"What's the sign say?" Sam grumbles from the back. He's got an arm thrown over his eyes, but no chance of sleeping with the crappy back road potholes tossing the car back and forth.

Dean squints through the darkness at the side of the road. Sam likes the town welcome signs. He always remembers the dumb ones: *No parking or standing anywhere in the Village of Asharoken, Welcome to Asharoken!* Dean can't see this one, though, bushes grown over it and paint fading.

"Panabaker: where happiness goes to die," he lies.

Sam snorts and it's almost a laugh; it's enough to make Dean grin into the dark. They both hate this town already.

John clears his throat, the first noise he's made for a hundred miles. "Sam," he says. "Get your dirty sneakers off the window."

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The car pulls up a long dirt driveway and John parks it beside a pickup truck that's seen better days. The house Sam and Dean will be staying in is big and old and Dean's pretty sure it leans a little to one side.

John doesn't waste any time. He's leaving before the sun comes up. Sam mumbles a

disinterested goodbye and heads inside to find the biggest bedroom, but Dean hangs back and helps their dad choose what he'll need from the arsenal.

"You know, if this was a real war," Dean says, "I'd be prime drafting age, and you'd be too old."

John grunts, slinging a bag of silver into the back of the truck. Travis had left it there for him, promising that it would get John as far as the job and back, but probably not much farther. "You're right, Dean. That's just damn unfair. You'd better write your congressman."

"I can run faster than you, Dad. I'm quicker on my feet." He does a half-hearted moonwalk there in the driveway to demonstrate and John rolls his eyes.

This is just par for the course, at this point, just part of their routine. John leaves them an emergency credit card and a few hundred bucks in cash, he salts the doorframes, he scrawls out a list of numbers to call if he doesn't come back, and he has this exact conversation with Dean. Every time: *you're too young, watch out for Sammy, and don't get lazy.*

This time, though, John secures the weapons trunk with rope and turns to Dean. "Fine," he says. "Pack your stuff; hurry up. Sam's old enough to fend for himself, now. We'll leave him a shotgun."

Dean's stomach twists up instantly; he's flooded with images of the nine hundred things that could happen to Sam here alone. Really bad shit, like werewolves and witches, and regular shit—grease fires and strep throat. "What?" He follows his dad around the truck bed. "Dad... wait, what?"

John chuckles, a rare grin dimpling his cheeks, and grabs Dean by the shoulders. "I'm sorry I can't stay and help you boys get situated in the house. Stay out of trouble."

"Yeah," Dean says, relaxing. He scowls—it's not fair, his dad calling his bluff like that. No fair messing with the routine. "I'll keep an eye on him."

"I meant you," John says, swinging up into the driver's seat. "You stay out of trouble."

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The house is huge; four bedrooms upstairs and enough space downstairs that whoever used to live here probably had an office, a dining room, and one of those fancy living rooms that nobody actually uses for living. It's got a sloping back yard that kind of disintegrates into thick woods, and in the distance, Dean can hear water running—a stream or a river, maybe. It's the kind of house where a big family could live, the sort of house Dean imagines his mom might have liked, when he takes the time to imagine her.

Travis helped get rid of a poltergeist here a couple years back. It looks like the family high-tailed it out of the place without bothering to fix the damage—there are still holes punched out of the walls and cupboard doors hanging precariously from broken hinges.

Most of the furniture's gone, but there's a folding table and four chairs in the kitchen, and a fridge that makes a groan-*clunk* sound every five minutes.

Dean finds Sam upstairs in the biggest bedroom, rolling his sleeping bag out over a stained mattress on the floor. "Hey."

Sam looks up. "How long's he gone for?"

"He says two weeks," Dean replies. He shrugs. "So maybe a month."

Sam sighs. He sighs like an old man at the end of his days, someone who has been through wars and famines and five ex-wives.

"What, Sam? You should be amped. Means you'll get to finish out the school year in one place, right?"

"My birthday is in six days." Sam flops back on his sleeping bag and tucks his forearm behind his head.

"Oh," Dean says. He knew that, of course, but Dad probably forgot. And even if he didn't, he would've left anyway. "Yeah."

"I don't get why we have to stay behind when the hunt is two hundred miles away. I could just go to school *there*."

"Maybe Dad doesn't want you gettin' educated in a town run by a coven."

"He just doesn't want us in his way."

Dean grinds his teeth together, does his best to bite down on the things he wants to say. He and Sam have already had this fight a thousand times. Dean's life is like the most unpleasant merry-go-round ride ever, up and down and up and down but always the same scenery every time around. "I'm gonna take the room next door," he says, gesturing toward the bathroom that opens up between the two bedrooms.

"If you take one of the rooms down the hall, we'll each have our *own* bathroom."

The hallway is long. Dean might not be able to hear Sam if he yelled in the night. He clears his throat. "Which would be awesome," he says, "if we had more than one tube of toothpaste between us. But we don't."

Sam rolls over onto his stomach and reaches for the little battery-powered alarm clock he's carried around for ten years. "Whatever. Go to sleep, Dean. I need you to drive me to school in four hours."

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There are some towns that Sam doesn't mind. He liked it when they were in Ithaca last year, and when he was in the seventh grade they spent a couple months in Austin. That wasn't so bad.

Sam really hates Panabaker.

Dean is half-asleep on the drive to the high school, but Sam is paying attention. They pass four churches and not a single 7-11. Sam doesn't see any strip-clubs, and the only liquor store is called a *winery* and is attached to the antique furniture store.

It's the kind of town where he and Dean stick out like sore thumbs, with their scarred-up hands and their clothes that won't get clean and their tendency to case a room when they walk through the door.

The high school is even worse. When Dean pulls over into the bus zone, they both grimace at the wholesome game of Frisbee going on out front, the girls sitting on the steps killing time by braiding each other's hair. It's like something out of a Norman Rockwell.

"Wow," Dean chuckles, drawing the word out long and slow. He slaps a hand down on Sam's thigh. "Have fun, Sammy."

"Whatever." Sam shoves Dean's hand away and grabs his brown-bag lunch, stuffed full of whatever they didn't eat in the car yesterday. Slim-Jims, a Twinkie, a warm bottle of Dr. Pepper. "There was a help-wanted sign at the video store, in case you didn't notice."

"Yeah, yeah, I'm on it. See you at three. Try not to get elected homecoming king."

Sam slams the door too hard. Usually, Dean would be half-climbing out the window, demanding that Sam get his ass back here and apologize to the car, but the school bus's horn bleats loud behind him and Dean has to pull out of the no-park zone before he can shout at Sam.

It's a small victory.

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The principal is a short, round lady with maroon lipstick on her teeth. Sam hands over the thick file he carries around from town to town and she clicks her tongue against the roof of her mouth as she turns pages.

"Your grades are very impressive, Mr. Winchester," she says warmly, when she's finished. "But you've got some blocks of time unaccounted for."

Sam knows. Three blocks of time, in fact—a month and a half from eighth grade, four months from freshman year, and two weeks from this past November. The thing is, when a school requests that CPS start investigating your dad, you don't exactly swing by to pick up your records on your way to get the hell out of town.

"There was a fire at one of the schools," Sam says. He puts on his most earnest *I'm so very sorry to inconvenience you* face. "And last November I had mono, so I didn't get enrolled at my new school right away. The other one—well, we move a lot, Principal Hartley. Sometimes things get lost in the shuffle."

She cocks her head and looks at him quizzically. "You know, Sam - usually, parents call ahead to enroll their children."

"Oh, I know. My dad's picking me up this afternoon, though. I'm sure he'll be in to introduce himself. He's really hands-on; even though his job moves us around a lot, it's real important to him to be involved."

He smiles as wide as he can, feeling his cheeks stretch with the effort of it. It's not a lie his dad told him to tell, coaching him on how to dodge questions and avoid suspicion. It's a lie he made up all on his own.

By lunchtime, Principal Hartley will have moved on to some new drama - some girl will get bulimic all over the gym bathroom or some guy will vandalize some teacher's desk, and Sam Winchester and his dad will fall to the bottom of the list.

"You don't have any bake sales coming up, do you?" Sam continues, just for the hell of it; he's on a roll. "My dad makes awesome banana bread."

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The woman who owns Panabaker Video looks like she was around when electricity was discovered. She's wiry and grey and too blind to notice Dean's rolling eyes and bored expression.

"So you mark down which video somebody's taking," she says, tapping on the clipboard at the desk. "You charge them three dollars. Now, they really shouldn't take more than two movies at

once. But if they look trustworthy... you know."

Dean shoves his hands in the pockets of his jacket. He hates the honor system on principle. People can't be trusted. *He* can't be trusted. "Yes ma'am."

"Oh! Aren't you polite," she coos, clapping her hands. "I think this will work out just fine, Dan." It's a tiny store, just modest-sized room with a counter at the end. *Independence Day* is still sitting pretty on the New Releases shelf.

"Dean." He smiles halfheartedly. For six bucks an hour, he's not whipping out the Crest commercial grin.

"Now, if the customer has a child with them, make sure to offer them a sucker." She gestures to the lollipop tree on the counter. "They just love those suckers. The strawberry ones go fast! Oh, and the pornos are in the back."

Dean chokes a little on his own tongue. "Bzuh?" he manages.

"The *pornos*," she says, pointing to a curtained-off corner of the store. "Of course, when people check those out, make sure to be discreet! Eyes on their face, not their movie, if you know what I mean," she continues, jabbing a gnarled finger dangerously close to Dean's left eyeball.

He stutters out a, "y-yes ma'am," and then the bell above the door saves him, jingling as a girl hurries in.

"Hi, grandma," she says, focused on closing up the top two buttons of her blouse. She's got long hair and legs for days. "Sorry I'm late for my shift!" Dean's eyes start at her flip-flops and get stuck somewhere around the inch of tanned stomach he can see above her denim cut-offs.

"Oh, that's all right, Holly!" Mrs. Porter says. "I was just telling our new employee, Dan, about the pornos!"

Holly smiles at Dean as she's pulling her hair up into a ponytail. Her gaze hovers at his mouth for a moment; he's used to that.

"Oh," she says warmly. "Of course. We have to be discreet, Dan."

"Dean," he says, stepping up close and offering his hand, and that Crest smile. "Looking forward to working with you."

He could get used to this.

Dean gets to the high school a half an hour before school is even supposed to let out. He parks in a handicapped spot in the teacher's lot and turns up his music, waits for Sam with his fingers drumming against the steering wheel.

When the bell rings shrilly from inside, Sam is the first kid out the door.

"I could hear the music in my physics class, Dean," he says, glaring as he half-collapses into the passenger seat.

"So why the hell didn't you come out?"

"Because I was in class, asshole! 'My brother really likes to get home in time for TRL' isn't really an excuse for an early release."

Dean cranks the ignition and roars out of the parking lot, spinning the wheel so the tires squeal out. A handful of guys in letter jackets leap out of the way as he swerves by. "That was one time. And it was that genie in a bottle girl! Shut up."

Sam slouches down in his seat, his knees knocking against the glove box. He cracks his knuckles out in front of him, elbows locking. Dean thinks, idly, that Sam's hands are getting bigger, that the gun won't seem so unwieldy with his fingers wrapped around it anymore.

He clears his throat and nudges Sam's shoulder with his elbow, driving with one hand. "So? How was your first day, *dear*?"

Sam smiles - not at Dean, just out the window. Dean can only tell he's smiling by the way his cheeks shift. "Sucked ass," he says. "Yours?"

"Could've been worse. Got that job, but the hours kind of suck. People don't rent movies in the morning. Probably won't be able to pick you up from school most days."

Sam shrugs. "There are buses." Dean remembers a time when Sam would've scowled and insisted that Dean figure something else out. Sam's dependence on him has all but completely faded.

"You want to go get a burger or something?" Dean asks, clearing his throat. "Celebrate our first day in this awesome, awesome town?"

Sam sits up a little straighter and looks straight at Dean for the first time since he got in the car. He bites at his lip and grins, tossing his hair out of his eyes. "I'd rather go home and get drunk, actually."

Sam is pretty square. Most nights, he just wants to go home and do his homework and go for a run and fall asleep watching Nick at Nite. *Normal*, he'd tell Dean, punctuating his words with slamming doors. *I just want to have one freaking normal afternoon without getting freaking ectoplasm on my geometry proofs!*

Occasionally, though—when the moon is right and the tide is high and it's not Sam's time of the month—Sam will loosen up and just have some fucking fun. Dean figures that Sam justifies it by considering how much it would piss Dad off.

The furniture in the house leaves a lot to be desired, so they bring their bottles out to the back yard and sprawl out in the grass as the sun is dipping. Sam is taking up as much room as he can, flat on his back with his limbs starfished out around him. Even his fingers are spread wide across the ground—he's palming the entire planet like it's a basketball.

"So. Panabaker High. Any hot girls?" Dean asks, when they have more empty bottles than full ones. It's getting dark, crickets crying.

Sam's got a half-finished bottle balanced on his sternum. Dean watches him take careful, measured, steady breaths, keeping the bottle upright. He doesn't answer.

"Ah, right. You're fucking pubescent. Everybody's hot."

Sam scoffs and the bottle wobbles. "Whatever, you're twenty years old and you think every girl is hot, too."

"Wrong!"

"Right."

"There was a fat chick with acne at the grocery store with her mom. She wasn't hot."

"She was like thirteen!"

"Your point?"

Sam rolls over against Dean's side, laughing almost silently. The bottle tumbles off his chest and splashes them both before it rolls away. Dean smiles up into the sky. "Thirteen year olds can get into some shit, Sammy. You know what I was doing when I was thirteen?"

"Trying to get laid. Same's always."

"And *man*," Dean continues. "What I was doing when I was *your* age! Dude. You remember Fiona Schaefer? Girl had this mouth, like—ridiculous, Sam. First time I'd ever had my balls sucked. She just pulled them right into her mouth, all sloppy. Thought the top of my head was going to blow off."

It's one of Dean's favorite games—to see how quick he can get Sam to freak out, start blushing and stuttering and telling Dean to *freaking shut up* because he's *so gross* and *needs to get a hobby* and *stop it stop it stop it*. Sam freaks out easy. Usually Dean can get there in under a minute.

Sam doesn't protest now, though, just hiccups and exhales. He's sweating through his t-shirt, warm against Dean's arm.

Dean keeps going. "And she fucking loved it, too," he says. "We'd barely get the door shut and she'd have me on my back. Swear to god, like my dick was made of candy or something, like she couldn't get enough. I'd try and take turns—get my mouth on her, get my fingers—but she didn't want to, just wanted to sit there and suck me off all day."

Sam shoves at him. "Dean. You're trying to freak me out."

"It usually works by now," Dean admits. "Is it working?"

Sam shrugs as much as a person can shrug when he's lying on his side with his limbs all over. "Kinda got a boner," he says, laughing, burying his face in Dean's arm.

"You're fun when you're drunk, Sammy," Dean says, but his hands have gone clammy. He thinks, for the first time in history, Sam may have just won the game.

"You're annoying. Pretty much all the time." Sam's breath is hot and beer-soaked.

Dean rolls over and pushes himself to his feet. "Come on, Sam. The bugs are driving me crazy." He offers Sam a hand, pulls him up.

Sam unfolds slowly, and once he's upright, Dean sucks a harsh breath. He takes a couple of unsteady, tripping steps back from Sam.

Sam raises an eyebrow, touches his own face like he thinks it's dirty. "What?"

"You're taller than me," Dean says. In the shadows, Sam looks older, darker. His face has changed a lot, really fast, in the last year. Dean feels caught off guard with the idea that his kid brother is going to *grow up* someday.

"Have been for almost a month now," Sam says. "You didn't notice."

"No," Dean says. He clears his throat. "No, I didn't."

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They move all the time, but no matter what time of year Sam lands in a new school, he always seems to arrive right when they're starting the STD unit in Health. He winces as Mr. Brehm slaps a picture of some dude's genital warts down on his desk. His hangover begins a slow crawl up his throat.

"Enough to turn you off of sex forever, huh," whispers the redheaded girl at the next desk. She wrinkles her nose.

"Yeah," Sam says. He pushes a hand through his hair and his fingers catch on a tangle near the crown of his head. "Well, maybe not forever. Definitely enough to make me lose my appetite."

She grins. "That could also be the smell of the sloppy joes from the kitchen. I think they grind up corpses for meat."

Sam laughs. "They don't smell *that* bad." He hopes he doesn't sound like he knows from experience.

"You want to go get pizza instead?" she asks. "There's a little pizza parlor a few streets down. We can make it there and back during the lunch period." She's not shy or hesitant, just holds Sam's gaze across three pictures of some poor bastard's Chlamydia-swollen testicles.

"I, uh." The lunch Dean slapped together is in a paper bag in Sam's backpack—peanut butter and jelly, the end of a bag of popcorn, probably a beer because Dean thinks he's hilarious. "Yeah," Sam says. "I could do that."

She smiles. There's a tiny gap between her two front teeth - a sweet, almost endearing imperfection, and Sam kind of wants to put his mouth to it. "I'm Laura."

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Dean sees them on the sidewalk while he's driving to the video store and he loses the rhythm he's air-drumming above the dashboard. They're walking and carrying huge slices of pizza. Sam's backpack that used to dwarf him is straining against his shoulders, straps pulling the t-shirt tight across Sam's chest.

Dean almost doesn't recognize his brother. Sam looks long and tall and comfortable with his limbs. He's laughing as he tries to eat and walk at the same time, cupping his hand under his

chin to catch the grease. He keeps trying to toss his head to get the tips of his bangs out of his eyes because both his hands are occupied.

The girl he's with is startlingly pretty, long red hair and tight jeans and sharp elbows. Their arms brush as they walk.

When Sam and Dean went to school together, Dean used to point out squat-looking Velma girls with bad bowl cuts and weird noses. He'd tease, "Sammy, I bet you're just her type. She's got lab partner written all over her. Dude. Dude. Are you getting turned on?"

This girl is *Dean's* type, though. The kind of girl Dean used to chase every so often when he needed a challenge.

She and Sam look good together. It's startling, the way Sam looks nothing like the too-short virgin who used to blush purple every time Dean said the word 'pussy'. It's like Sam's turned into this whole other person while Dean wasn't looking.

Dean lost his virginity over the Christmas break before he turned fifteen. He was more than a year younger than Sam is now.

He's in the car and the light might've turned green but he hasn't noticed. He has this weird, unfamiliar flash of an image, thinking *that might be the girl*, and imagining Sam above her, pushing in.

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Dean feels like he's *buzzing* when he walks into the store, like his veins have skipped over into double-time. The bell above the door makes him jump ten feet and he's the one making it ring.

Holly is behind the counter rewinding *Adventures in Babysitting*. She's got a lollipop shoved into her mouth against the inside of her cheek and she's wearing more eyeliner than she was yesterday.

He nods hello to her, unsure that his voice won't come out squeaky high if he speaks. There's a stack of videos on the desk with torn boxes, soft and falling apart at the edges. His fingers fumble when he reaches for the scotch tape.

"You okay?" she asks.

He turns around. Static rides across the TV screen as Elizabeth Shue argues with a hot-dog vendor in reverse. Dean clears his throat before he speaks. "Sure," he says, "Yeah. Late night last night, that's all."

She raises her eyebrow. "Really? There's not a whole lot to do at night around here."

"Just got wasted with my little brother."

Her voice is teasing when she says, "You're an awesome role model."

"Yeah." He runs his thumb along the now-taped up edge of *Jaws* and puts the video box down. "Your grandma around?"

"Nah. She usually only comes in when we're getting a new shipment. We *never* get new shipments."

"Listen, uh. Nobody rents movies at one in the afternoon, right?" Dean scrubs his palms on the hips of his jeans.

She shrugs. "Nobody usually comes in until after the high school lets out."

His blood is still thrumming through his veins - this hard jealous rush because Sam has a life without him and that's never really happened before. He's not in the mood to be even remotely charming. "So, do you, uh. You want to make out or somethin'?"

She looks a little shell-shocked for a moment, and then her laugh rings out high, the way little girls laugh on Saturday morning cartoons. "Yeah," she giggles. "Or something."

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By the time their shift ends, Dean's already gotten her off twice with his hand, working it into her jeans behind the counter so if someone came in they couldn't see.

"You gonna come home with me?" he asks, pressing up behind her as she's locking the door. It's the kind of thing he usually says after a night of teaching a girl to play pool at a bar, not after a shift at a mom and pop video store. But he wants it, his body begging for it, and something tells him that the kind of girl who lets him into her pants without him buying her a single drink isn't gonna say no.

She releases a shaky breath; Dean can feel it shudder out of her as he runs his palm along her ribcage. He rests his thumb against the wire in her bra through her thin t-shirt.

Twenty minutes later, they're crashing through the screen door back at the house. Sam is reading at the kitchen table, his hand on his forehead, fingers tangled in his hair. When he looks up, he doesn't look surprised.

"Yo," Dean says, grinning with Holly's arms still snaked up around his neck. "This is Holly. Holly,

this is my little brother, Sammy."

Sam stands up from the table, his chair scraping across the floor. "*Sam*," he corrects. "Hi." For a moment he looks like he's going to walk over to shake her hand or something, the dork.

"Your little brother isn't so little," Holly says. She doesn't even address Sam, just keeps half-whispering to Dean, her mouth close to his neck. Sam hears her, though. He blushes red.

"Yeah," Dean says. "He's a freak. He's got, uh. Elephantitis." Dean isn't sure where he pulled that word from, but there it is.

Sam snorts, rolls his eyes as he sits back down. "Just because mine's bigger than yours, Dean," he mutters. "No need to get petty about it."

Dean feels his face drop in surprise, but he recovers. "Holy shit, Sammy," he says, heading for the fridge. "Looks like you grew a sense of humor when I wasn't looking." He meets Holly's eyes and gestures to the stairs. "I'll be up in a minute, sweetheart."

Sam purses his lips and goes back to his book. "Don't be too loud," he grumbles, nose practically buried in the pages. "I have homework."

"It's Friday." Dean grabs a six-pack and slams the fridge hard behind him. It hums angrily. "I'll be as loud as I want."

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Sam acts like a little bitch all weekend for no good reason. He's got his mouth twisted into this permanent snarl, stomping around the upstairs like an elephant while Dean spends Sunday downstairs trying to fix the old broken television.

Dean is *over* it.

The nine-hundredth time Sam slams a door like it just offended his mother, Dean throws his screwdriver down and heads up the creaky staircase. He bursts into Sam's room gracelessly.

"For fuck's sake!"

Sam is flat on his bed, arms crossed and chin jutting up like he's having an angry staring contest with the stains on the ceiling. "Get out. I don't bust in on you without knocking."

"Would you just fucking *jerk off* or something, Sam? I'm trying to cut you some slack here, but your teenage hormonal bullshit is getting out of control."

Sam gets to his feet and kicks weakly at the stack of books next to his mattress before stomping over to lean against the window. "Not everything is about sex, Dean. Jesus!"

"Look, I was sixteen too, I get it. Your life sucks, you hate everyone, you want to burn down the world. Blah blah blah. But I promise you, if you rub one out, your urge to slam your fucking bedroom door off the hinges like a nine-year-old princess throwing a temper tantrum will go away."

Sam just stands there staring at him for a long time. Dean waits for the next part of his outburst. It's usually something along the lines of *I can't believe we're related* or *you're a disgrace to humanity* or, on the really bad days, *you should've just gone on the hunt with Dad, I'd rather be alone*.

Dean remembers a time when he and Sam were a team. They maneuvered around Dad together, they walked down school hallways together, and they pushed each other to pound out the last mile when they were training, *together*.

Now, it's like Dean is just another part of this whole world that Sam is fighting against.

It's exhausting, sometimes.

Today, though, Sam straightens up and shoves his hands in his front pockets. His nostrils flare a few times and his cheeks go pink. "Fine," he says suddenly.

"Fine?"

"Fine, I'll *jerk off*," Sam says. He turns away from Dean, hands still in his pockets and his shoulders climbing up. When he says, "Get outta here," the angry edge is gone from his voice. He sounds a little freaked out, or sad, maybe.

Dean does get out of there. Out of Sam's room, out of the goddamn house. He walks through the spring-wet leaves on the ground to the edge of the property and further, into the woods. He doesn't stop until he reaches a bridge arcing over a pathetic trickle of a stream, rotting wood creaking and moaning like something dying.

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Sam watches Dean take off across the back yard and then turns back to his little mattress on the floor. It sags and he can hear the coils release, pop-pop-pop as they adjust to his weight.

Sam's had to listen to Dean boast about sex for the better part of a decade, ever since that blonde girl in Pastor Jim's congregation let him under her bra the first time. And Dean's *always* talking, always looking for a reaction from Sam. Sam has always given him one, too—general

disdain or anger or embarrassment. Usually embarrassment.

Sam shoves his hand into his shorts and cups himself almost roughly. He's not really hard, yet, but he will be. It never takes very long—running his thumb over the ridge of the head, pulling enough that it almost hurts but not quite.

He thinks of Laura.

She'd grabbed his hand after they finished eating their pizza—she'd been holding the napkins, and she'd rubbed the grease from his palm and then just... held onto his hand, the whole walk back to Panabaker High.

He'd felt stupid, the way that simple, innocent touch had gotten him all worked up. It had been all he could do not to duck into the third floor bathroom and beat off instead of going to civics.

He'd wanted to tell Dean about it that night. He was working out how to bring it up without sounding five years old—*Dean, a girl held my hand and it made me all warm inside!* - when Dean burst in with Holly.

Hanging all over him, pressing her boobs up against Dean's side and whispering in his ear like Sam wasn't even *there*. And then Dean, all—saying he'd be *loud*. Just tossing it out there in the kitchen, making Sam's ears burn.

Sam sits up to tug his shirt off. It's hot on the second floor; wet east-coast humidity arrived too early. He's sweating, already, thin sheen of it across his sternum. His body's getting better—less embarrassingly skinny, anyway. He's almost got a six-pack. His dick feels pretty big, too; it's a good heavy weight in his hand.

And Dean *had* been loud, the other night, so loud Sam was sure he was doing it just to piss Sam off. Sam could hear them from the kitchen easy, even with the mattress on the floor, without a bed frame to squeak across the wall.

Holly had been loud, too, her high-pitched *ah-ah-ah* like something from the scrambled porn they could sometimes get in the motels. They rarely ever got any picture, but the sound was always pretty clear, and Dean would sit and clean the guns and torture Sam with a running narrative of what was probably going on. "Oh, you hear that moan she just made, Sam? That was a he-licked-her-asshole moan, definitely. Probably pulled her knees up to her ears to do it, too," he'd say, delighted, ducking the mechanical pencils Sam would throw at him like darts.

That's what Sam's thinking about when he comes, one hand flying over his cock and the other sweaty and wrapped around his balls. He makes some noise because he knows the house is empty—usually he's got to be dead quiet, so this time he cries out, "Oh, *fuck!*" just to hear it, just to know what he sounds like when he's not biting down on his tongue.

He pushes up on an elbow to look down at himself as he catches his breath. There's come cooling in his belly button, a string from the pool to the tip of his dick as he softens. He keeps one hand on his balls for a little, rolling them, using his thumb to rub his come into his skin.

His body still feels new, like it doesn't belong to him. Puberty was sort of a freight train when it hit him last year. Dean had found it hilarious, Sam's squeaky voice and the growing pains in his shins that kept him up at night—even Dad had chuckled a couple of times.

Sam wipes his hand off on his thigh and tries to remember what Dean looked like when he was Sam's age. He wonders if Dean had an awkward phase where he didn't know what to do with his elbows and where his voice came out of his throat all wrong.

Sam *always* saw Dean as older and bigger and cooler, though, no matter what, so it doesn't surprise him that he can't remember a Dean who was uncomfortable in his own skin.

Knowing Dean, he probably skipped right over adolescence, just woke up one day knowing exactly where to put his hands when he kissed a girl.

-

Sam is in the kitchen making Hamburger Helper when Dean comes back. It's warm outside, but Dean has his collar turned up. He reeks of smoke.

He nods at Sam and grabs the entire carton of milk from the fridge before hoisting himself up to sit the counter by the stove. His boots knock one of the cupboard doors below him loose, and it clatters to the ground. "Whoops." It cuts the tension a little.

"Fucking house," Sam says, some kind of truce. It feels like the first time there's been air in the house since Dean brought Holly back on Friday.

"I hope you washed your hands," Dean says, nodding at the skillet.

"Jerked off right into the pan, actually," Sam says. "Seasoning. Yummy."

Dean takes a sloppy swig from the milk carton and comes up grinning, with a little white Hitler moustache above his lip. "So?" he asks. "You feel better?"

"A little," Sam says. He can feel his face heat up, so he turns down to stare at the food.

Dean echoes, "A little."

"Like I don't necessarily want to burn down the world, but I still kind of want to set all of Panabaker on fire."

Dean laughs and reaches for the stack of paper plates in the cupboard above him. "I could help. I hate towns like this. White picket fences, nobody with a gun for a hundred miles. Beaver Cleaver bullshit."

"And we stick out here," Sam continues, turning the heat off on the stove. He likes this, him and Dean agreeing, stringing each other's sentences together easily. "I like towns where everybody's too busy drowning in their own problems to concern themselves with ours."

"Poetic, Sammy." They sit down at the kitchen table with their dinner. It's quiet, just the obnoxious smack of Dean chewing with his mouth open. They don't bother with cups; they just pass the milk carton back and forth between them.

Finally, Dean uses the hem of his t-shirt to wipe his mouth off and says, "So you want to tell me what your deal is?"

Sam feels his face heat up. He wants to play the game—*what are you talking about, no deal here*—but it's not worth it, now. "I met a girl," he says.

Dean drops his fork to clatter on the table. His face goes slack with mock-shock. "Oh, *man*. You're *right*. That's the worst thing *ever*. The horror! The misery! The tra—"

"Shut up! It's just—I want to—I can't invite her over." Sam flexes his fingers against the edge of the table, cracking his knuckles one by one.

"Sure you can. I'll stay out of your way, kid; you know where I keep the condoms. There's plenty of beer in the fridge if things get awkward."

"She's not like the girls you hook up with, Dean. I can't just ask her to come over and hang out in this house with the empty rooms and the beer cans all over the place and... and my bed on the *floor*, okay? Her dad is the town doctor. She'll take one look at this place and think there's something wrong with me. With *us*."

Sam usually likes it better when they stay in houses. Motels mean he can't get a moment alone, they mean Dean and Dad are always there watching him, crowding him, making him feel like he's going to explode out of their own skin.

Now, though, he wishes it were a motel. He could tell Laura they were staying there while their new house got fixed up, or whatever—anything but this bizarre halfway-life, him and Dean living like runaways on old mattresses.

When he looks up from his plate, Dean is watching him with a strange look on his face. When he says, "Okay, Sammy," it sounds like it *hurts* him. "Okay, I'll tell you what."

Sam waits. "What?"

Dean fills his mouth up with pasta and meat, then grabs for the milk, guzzling it like he's just spent a month in the desert. "I'm the best big brother ever, is what."

"Ooo-kay."

"Say it, c'mon."

"I'm not saying anything until I know what you're gonna do!"

"I'm going to give you a place to hook up with that girl." He winces as the words come out, sucking air through his teeth. "I'm gonna teach you to drive my damn car, is what I'm gonna do, Sam."

"Wait—*really?*" Most kids Sam's age already know how to drive, but Dad usually doesn't leave them with the car. Even when he does, Sam never thought Dean would let Sam behind the wheel without some kind of life-or-death situation. Dean obsesses over the Impala like he gave birth to it or something.

"Say it!"

"You're the best brother ever."

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Just like that, the walls come down between them. Dean practically has to fork Sam in the collarbone to keep him from launching himself across the table for a fucking hug.

Dean hooks up with Holly again at work the next night. She's going down on him behind the counter when the clock hits nine, and he balls up a fist and pounds it against the wall in frustration. "Hey," he mumbles, reaching down to hold himself at the root and tilting his hips to pull out of her mouth. "I gotta go."

She stands up, wiping her mouth with her thumb like a porn star. Her knees are dirty, bits of day-to-day debris from the floor pressed into her skin. "You—what?"

"Our shift's up," Dean says, tucking himself into his pants. The blue balls might actually kill him, but she was taking her sweet time, and he's got to get home.

She steps backward abruptly and collides with the little stand they've got set up for rewinding movies. The VCR slips off its precarious position on top of the television and crashes to the floor, sparking and sputtering.

"I'm pretty sure I saw a spare one in the basement," Holly says, adjusting her skirt around her waist. Her sweater is cut low, and Dean can see the sheen of sweat between her breasts.

"You mind setting it up?" he asks. "And could you close? I kinda got someplace to be." He reaches out to touch her face with the backs of his knuckles.

She looks unhappy. "Well, sure. But I thought we were gonna—do you have a *date*?"

He scoffs. "Nah," he says, grabbing his keys. "Promised my little brother I'd teach him to drive."

She relaxes, then, gesturing to his jeans, "Better take care of that before you traumatize him," she laughs, and waves him to the door. When he glances back through the window, she's watching him with her head tilted, a little smile bending her mouth.

-

Sam is finishing his *Death of a Salesman* essay when he hears Dean pull into the driveway. He peeks through the threadbare curtains and watches as Dean gets out of the car and leans against the hood, his arms crossed over his leather jacket.

Sam pushes the window open. "You need dinner first?" he calls.

"Need you to get out here so we can get this over with," Dean replies, but he's grinning. Sam zips his hoodie and heads outside.

It shouldn't be this big of a deal. Millions of kids' big brothers teach them to drive, Sam's sure. But when he's tripping off the porch and Dean is standing between the headlights pouring light on either side of him, smirking at Sam and fiddling with his lighter, it all feels kind of monumental.

Dean dangles the keys out in front of him. When Sam reaches for them, Dean snaps them away. "Patience, grasshopper. Not yet."

Sam sighs and slams into the passenger side of the car as Dean shrugs his jacket off and gets in behind the wheel. "Dick."

"Loser. Watch me, Sammy, carefully. Are you watching?"

"Yes! Jesus." Sam has been in the car with Dean over thousands and thousands of miles, but he's never sat like this, twisted at the hips so he can watch Dean. Dean's never just *let* Sam stare at him as he wraps a hand strong around the gearshift and pulls.

They ease out of the driveway and make a careful turn onto the road that'll take them up the hill away from Panabaker. They don't make any of Dean's usual, squealing sharp turns or abrupt shifts—it's a smooth, slow ride, with Dean's voice low and warm: "Now you hear that? When you hear that, you're gonna bear down on the clutch and pull down, through neutral, right to the second gear. Sammy, you hear that?"

Sam's eyes move lazily from the road ahead to Dean's face, and always back to Dean's hands, wide fingers around the steering wheel and tugging confidently at the gearshift. He's perfectly aware of it when the arousal flares in his belly, when the back of his neck goes hot.

Muddy Waters is playing in the tape deck—"I Feel Like Going Home." It's one of Dad's tapes, not Dean's. Sam reaches out, looking for a distraction, but before his thumb can hit the eject button, Dean pushes his hand away.

"Hey, hey," he says. "Driver picks the music. House rules."

Sam scowls. "Since when?"

"Since now."

"You pick the music all the time when Dad's driving, Dean—"

"Amendment to the rules! Driver picks the music, and *shotgun shuts his cakehole*."

"But—"

"Uh-uh," Dean says, waving a finger in the air. "Them's the rules, dude. We're here." They pull into a wide, open field and Dean puts the car in park.

"What is this place?"

Dean shrugs. "Some place Holly told me about when she wanted to go hook up. The bad kids of Panabaker come out here and drink Mike's Hard Lemonade until way past their bedtimes, apparently. Okay," he says. "Now it's your turn."

He gets out of the car and walks around while Sam scoots across the bench seat. The wheel is warm where Dean's palms were. Sam feels a little thrill, just being in this spot, like he's lit up inside. When Dean sits down, Sam grins. "How's that seat feel, Dean-o?" he laughs. "You good? You need a booster chair?"

Dean cuffs him on the back of the head good-naturedly, and Sam shoves back. "You're a fucker," Dean laughs, pushing Sam back into place. "Okay, okay. Basics."

"Do I get to pick the music now?"

"No," Dean says. He knuckles the stereo off. "No music at all; you've got to focus."

Sam swallows audibly.

"You nervous?" Dean pokes Sam's shoulder. "Because you should be. You fuck up this car, you're gonna wish you were stuck in this front seat with a rabid wendigo instead'a me, Sam."

"Would you just stop *talking* and get *on* with it?"

It kind of feels like it happens in slow motion. Dean says, "Okay, here, look at the floorboard," and then he reaches for Sam's knee, pulling Sam's legs apart with his hands, spreading them. Sam's half-hard already, so when Dean's thumb touches Sam's skin through the hole in his jeans, he can't help the hitch of breath, the tiny noise he makes and the way his body jerks, hips tucking in away from Dean.

Dean doesn't pull away, but his voice is a little watery when he speaks again, pointing at the foot well. "Uh, so that's the—the clutch there, and then the brake, and the gas."

"Sorry," Sam says. They both know something's up, and avoiding the elephant in the room has never worked with Dean. "I—sorry."

Dean straightens up and scratches at his neck. "Hey, man." He pats the dashboard hard, thump-thump. "She turns me on sometimes, can't blame you."

Sam blushes; he can feel it burning up from his neck. "Shut up."

"Plus! The whole point of these driving lessons is to get you a little tail, right?" Dean elbows Sam hard, probably harder than he meant to. "I'd be thinking about it, too."

Sam shoves his hair out of his eyes with one sweaty palm. He catches his reflection in the rearview mirror, wild-eyed with his bangs sticking up all over the place, and sighs. "Whatever," he mumbles.

Dean smiles weakly. "Okay, so. Again. Left to right you've got your clutch, your brake, and your gas. Now ease down on the clutch, and shift her into first... easy, easy."

They spend ages in the field, turning in circles and reversing and attempting to parallel park between two trees.

They're both tired when they get back to the house—when *Sam* gets them back to the house after a very slow, jerky ride home. They're walking up the steps, Sam still holding the keys, when Dean reaches out and hooks Sam's hood with two fingers.

Sam coughs as it tugs on his throat, but turns around. Dean's hand stays on Sam's sweatshirt, his fingers adjusting the folds around Sam's neck. "It's midnight," he says. "Happy birthday, Sammy."

Then he claps Sam's shoulder, hard, and steals the keys away.

-

Sam grimaces as he tries to fit the condom over the ridiculous banana skewered in front of him. "Gross," he hisses, fingers slippery. Brehm had tossed a handful of condoms on each of their desks; of course Sam happened to grab the pre-lubed one.

Beside him, Laura swings her braid from one shoulder to the other. She's blushing a little, but still smiling at him, teasing with her eyes bright. "Having some trouble, Sam? Brehm says it takes practice, so your first time—"

"Oh, jeez," Sam groans. His fingers are all lubed up, so he tries to use the back of his wrist to push his hair out of his eyes. "It's not my fault my banana's too big for the condom."

She laughs so hard she snorts a little, and then they're both giggling, Sam shaking his head. He knows he's bright red, but he doesn't mind so much, with Laura.

"This is *not* a laughing matter, Winchester!" Brehm booms from the front of the room. Sam's pretty sure he's trying to be intimidating, but after sixteen years with John Winchester, Sam's not so easily rattled. "You won't think this is so funny when you're paying child support to two different exes on a gym teacher's salary!"

"Here," Laura murmurs. Sam's still trying to push his bangs aside with his wrist, but she reaches out and brushes her fingers across his forehead to get them out of the way.

"Thanks," Sam says quietly. He bites his lip and focuses a little, and the condom slides down over the banana easily. "Um. Do you want to go get pizza again?"

She giggles and rolls her eyes a little. "Now I'm always going to remember that the first time you asked me out, you had *lube* all over your hands."

He wiggles his fingers in her face and she whoops and ducks away.

Later, she waits for him outside the boy's room while he washes the slick away.

He grins at his reflection. *I'm always going to remember*, she'd said. He's been a lot of places, attended an endless line of schools, and sometimes he wonders if anybody *ever* remembers him. If he and Dean are just ghosts, moving through people's lives and not changing them at all.

At the pizza parlor, she orders a slice with pepperoni and sausage *and* bacon, and Sam thinks, distractedly, that Dean would love her. It feels like a fist around his stomach, for some reason. He's got to practically choke down his ham and pineapple slice.

They share a Dr. Pepper on the walk back to the school, and she tells him about her older sisters at Columbia and Yale, about how she's going to try for Harvard or Princeton. "If Brehm doesn't fail me for improper condom conduct," she laughs, passing the soda back to him. "So tell me about you! You keep letting me talk and talk."

"I like listening to you," Sam says.

She looks down at the ground but he can tell she's smiling. "Come on! Tell me one thing I don't know about you."

He finishes the Dr. Pepper and tosses it into a trash can as they pass. "Um. It's my birthday?"

She stops walking, her mouth falling open. "Oh, my god! You should've told me!"

He shoves his hands into his pockets and shrugs. "It's not a big deal," he says.

She puts a hand on his shoulder and rises up on her tip toes to kiss his cheek. "Happy birthday, Sam."

As she pulls away, Sam puts a hand on the small of her back and tugs her close again. "Thanks," he mumbles, and then ducks down to kiss her for real. He thinks maybe he moved too fast; maybe she'll pull away. She doesn't. She makes a tiny noise of surprise but leans into it, lets him press her mouth open.

It's not Sam's first kiss—the first one was with Margie Ellis in the eighth grade. She was six inches taller than him and Dean thought it was the most hilarious thing he'd ever seen. Because of *course* Dean saw it, striding around the corner without warning and practically collapsing with obnoxious, loud laughter while Sam stammered out a goodbye to Margie.

Sam's kissed a couple of girls since then, too, but none like Laura—gorgeous and funny and easy to be around.

Somebody drives by and honks their horn. Sam jerks away from her, thinking *fuck, Dean*, but when he looks up it's just some lady pulling past them. There's a "Try Jesus: if you don't like Him, the Devil will always take you back" bumper sticker on the back of her blue Honda sedan.

Sam's still holding onto Laura, his hands resting on her hips. She's got the drawstrings of his hoodie all knotted up in her fingers.

"I," he says. "Um."

She grins at him, and he can sort of see her tongue through the tiny gap in her front teeth. "Come on," she says, untangling herself from him. "We've still got twenty minutes left until next period. I want you to meet my friends."

Sam swallows. "Yeah," he says. He leans in one more time and kisses the side of her cheek. Her eyelashes kind of flutter against his face, like hummingbird wings trembling. "Okay."

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Dean is losing his mind.

They go driving every night now, and it's like no matter what Dean does, his whole day is spent *waiting* to get in the car with Sam.

He works out and runs and cleans his gun and practices throwing knives up against the side of the house. He goes to work and fucks Holly up against the wall in the creepy basement where they keep the broken videos, dark tape spilling out of the plastic casing like guts.

Still, all he thinks about is getting into that front seat with Sam. It's irritating as hell, because they've been in the car together a million times. Dean isn't naïve enough not to know what's different this time, though.

The difference is *Sam*. Sam, who's a hundred feet tall all of a sudden, with his t-shirts straining at the shoulders and his hands big as dinner plates. He watches Dean drive so carefully that Dean can physically feel his gaze, like Sam's *touching* him when his eyes move from Dean's face to Dean's hand on the gearshift, down to Dean's knees as he hits the gas.

There's never been time like this before, three hours of driving every night while they just *stare* at each other—Sam under the pretense of learning by example, Dean under the pretense of supervision. Things are charged as hell. When they're in the car together, Dean feels like he could snap his fingers and send sparks flying.

Sam's a natural, and he should be, spending most of his life feeling the engine purr beneath him. He knows the sounds and vibrations of the car better than any kid on the planet, so it makes sense that he's a good driver in no time flat.

If Dad was here, he would've handed Sam the keys by now, saying, "Looks like you got the hang of it, son. If you scratch her, you're not gonna sit behind another wheel until you're forty."

Dad's not here, though, and Dean is going to make Sam keep up the lessons. For a little while longer, at least.

They're parked out in the field, not even driving, just sitting there drinking cokes. The Panabaker general store sells them in little frosted glass bottles, like they've gone back in time or something, the whole town stuck somewhere else.

Sam's got his knee up against the wheel, jeans pulled tight over his leg. "Tell me about the first time you ever brought a girl out in the car," he says quietly.

Dean laughs and shakes his head. "Like I can remember back that far."

Her name was Annalie, and she didn't have nearly enough appreciation for the fact that she was riding around in a '67 Chevy. She had plenty of appreciation for his dick, though, in the backseat with her fraying jean skirt up around her waist.

"We kissed the other day," Sam says, picking at a hangnail and not looking at Dean. "Me and Laura. And uh, a bunch of times since then, too."

"Yeah? How was it?"

Sam grins down at his hands. "Pretty good."

"You've kissed girls before, Sammy, I know you have."

"This time it feels different."

"Because you made out under the bleachers?" Dean teases, jabbing an elbow into Sam's bicep. "Huh, huh?"

"No! Well... yeah. We did that. But that's not what I meant!"

Dean swallows thickly. He wants to end this conversation, tell Sam to put the car in gear because it's late and there's a *Twilight Zone* marathon on. Instead, he says, "Yeah?" His voice feels like it belongs to someone else. He's been teasing Sam about his virginity for what feels like a million years. He never actually thought about that *changing*. "You gonna sleep with her, Sammy?"

Sam smooths his palms over his jeans. He says, "We're always moving around, sometimes it feels like I'm never gonna get the chance to do *anything*. I wanna do... I want to at least do something. Feel like I'm crawling out of my skin lately."

Dean doesn't say anything. He just stares at Sam, eyes crawling over the profile of Sam's face, the turned-up nose and the way he keeps sucking his lower lip into his mouth and releasing it.

"What," Sam says, finally, turning to look at Dean.

"Nothing. What?"

"You're staring at me. You keep—you keep staring at me lately."

Dean swallows. "*Twilight Zone* marathon tonight," he says, dragging his eyes away to his side-view mirror. "Hit the gas."

-

When they get home, he leaves Sam alone in front of the TV with a bag of Cheetos and goes out back. He sits on the half-rotting pile of firewood with a six-pack and drinks four of the beers, chain-smoking just for something to do with his hands. Old rainwater creeps up and soaks the ass of his jeans.

He's not drunk when he goes back inside, but his chest has stopped aching with tension. He tosses the last two cans into the fridge and shuffles into the living room. Sam's left the TV on, lines of static traveling down the screen. The crumpled cheese puff bag is on the floor and there are lines of orange dust where Sam wiped his fingers on the couch.

"Fucker," Dean grumbles, knuckling the power button. He picks Sam's sneakers up and moves them to the bottom of the stairs, where Sam, bleary and sleepy-eyed, will hopefully trip over them first thing in the morning.

Upstairs, Sam's light is off, and when Dean pauses at his half-open door he can hear Sam's breath, the low whistle that means he's deep asleep. Dean tugs the door shut and goes into his room.

He takes his clothes off and lies down, adjusting his sleeping bag so his skin doesn't touch the old mattress.

He puts one foot on the floor, bending his knee, and slips his fingers under the elastic of his boxers. He's only four beers deep, which isn't nearly enough to be drunk. It's enough to ignore the nagging feeling that he shouldn't be thinking about Sam and that redhead while he does this.

It feels dirtier, somehow, because Sam doesn't even know Dean's seen her; Dean didn't mention that day he saw them walking, pizza slices dripping all over the place.

Dean's got a pretty good picture in his head of what she looks like naked. He can't help it—he looks at women and pictures them without their clothes automatically. It's part of his genetic makeup or something. Plus, he saw plenty of sixteen-year-old girls naked while he was in high school—and yeah, okay, maybe a few after—so it's not like he doesn't have a reference point.

Sam is harder, though. He's always changing—body shifting right in front of Dean's eyes, muscles rippling up out of nowhere, veins in his forearms surfacing overnight. The baby fat's already hollowing out from his cheeks and the bones in his face are sharp and angular now, so his smile almost looks too big.

He wonders what it'll be like, Sam and Laura in the back of Dean's car, on seats where Dean's spread out naked dozens of times with dozens of women. He wonders if Sam's hands will shake when he touches her, what Sam's back will look like as he arches over her, shoulder blades moving like wings under sweaty skin.

Dean's too far gone to notice the noise at first—it's an old house, it groans and shifts all day long—but when the light from the bathroom door opening draws a slow stripe across his chest, he's back to reality.

His eyes snap up to Sam's silhouette and he twists away to hide himself. "Sam! What the *fuck*?"

Sam swallows, still in the doorway. Dean flips onto his belly and wrenches the sleeping bag out from underneath himself. Sam doesn't move—he just clears his throat and keeps his eyes on Dean. "Dean, I could... I mean, I heard you and—"

"Quit stammering and get the fuck *out*, Sam!"

Sam's eyes are dark and wide. "You want me to?" he asks. His voice is low and Dean imagines Sam as an adult, maybe ten years from now, tall and broad and using *that voice* all the time.

"Yes, I fucking want you to!" Dean grabs one of his boots from beside the bed and hurls it at Sam's head. Sam doesn't wince or even duck, but Dean's aim is a little off and the shoe clobbers the doorframe instead of Sam's face.

Dean wakes up to a loud thump from downstairs—Sam tripping over his own sneakers. He hears Sam's hiss of, "Shit fuck ass ouch *ouch*," but it's not nearly as gratifying as he'd imagined it would be.

Dean's watch says he's got half an hour before he has to drive Sam to school, so he gets dressed slowly. Layers on layers, even though it's mid-May, his undershirt and his t-shirt and his button down and his jacket.

When he gets downstairs, Sam's already halfway out the door. He turns beet red as soon as he sees Dean. "I, um. Was going to, uh, take the bus," he says.

"Oh," Dean says, hand freezing as he's reaching for the fridge door. "I—wait. I can drive you?"

Sam shrugs, backpack heaving. "A bunch of—I've got some friends in—these guys from my gym class - they take the bus every morning," he says. "It's not a big—it's fine, Dean."

Dean grabs some orange juice and opens the jug with his back to Sam. "Good job with the sentences there, Sammy," he says. "Way to keep the awkward level to a minimum. Appreciate it."

He hears Sam's long-suffering sigh. "It's not *like* that."

"It's not?" Dean turns around. "What, you can't be in the car with me for the ten minute drive to the school?"

"Just trying to make friends, *Dean*. Don't want to be the creepy kid who sits in the back, for once, okay? Let it go." He slams the door behind him, and then turns to look at Dean through the screen. "I'll see you tonight," he says, quiet. "For driving lessons."

Dean takes a gulp of the juice. It's gone bitter, too long in the fridge. Dad's been gone a while now. "Have a good day, Sam."

Sam nods, his movements jerky. "You too," he says, and then turns and jogs down the driveway.

It's not fair. Dean's the one who should be pissed, but he feels like he's being punished. He'd just been minding his own business, doing his thing, and Sam had busted in like he owned the whole world. And *yeah*, maybe Dean was thinking about Sam and his girlfriend, so maybe he doesn't have a whole lot of room to talk about violation of privacy, but *Sam* doesn't know that.

At least, Dean doesn't think Sam knows that.

They've walked in on each other plenty of times before. Sam's walked in on Dean with girls, and one morning Dean shoved into the bathroom to find Sam sitting naked on the edge of the bathtub with a ruler in his hand. But before it was always, "*Aw, jeez!*" and a slammed door. None of the hovering and *looking* that Sam was doing last night.

Dean's riddled with tension all day. He's almost glad when Holly calls in sick and leaves him out

to dry on their shift alone, so he can spend the day slamming tapes onto shelves and crunching down angrily on lollipops until his jaw aches.

It's still early in the afternoon when Dean happens to look up as Sam walks past their front window. Laura's with him, tiny fingers tucked into Sam's hand.

Sam meets Dean's eyes and his cheeks go pink. This isn't the quickest way back to the high school from *anywhere*, and Dean wonders how Sam convinced Laura to take the roundabout route.

Sam stops walking and lets Laura's hand go, bending down to tie his shoe. He keeps looking at Dean, though, staring up past the heavy ridge of his eyebrows. Laura stands beside him, still talking and laughing.

When he gets up, he gives Dean a little wave. Dean jerks his head toward Laura, arches his eyebrows and offers what he hopes is an approving smirk. Sam went to all the effort of coming around to show off his girl; the least Dean can do is acknowledge her undeniable hot factor.

Sam grins and ducks his head a little before putting his arm around Laura's bony shoulders and continuing down the sidewalk.

Dean swallows and tugs the lollipop out of his mouth. It tastes like cotton.

-

That night, when they reach the end of the driveway, Sam starts to turn the wheel to head up the hill to the deserted fields and roads they've been practicing on, but Dean stops him. "Make a left instead," he says. He sounds tired, and Sam briefly considers offering to skip the lessons tonight.

"Why?"

Dean shrugs. He's leaning against his window, his temple resting against the glass. "Taught you everything. Time to test it in traffic."

So Sam hits his left turn signal and they drive into town, where there are streetlamps and people and other cars passing them. Dean stays crowded against the passenger side door, pulling at the fraying knee of his jeans and staring straight ahead. Every once in a while he'll mumble, "Slow down into the turn," or, "Easy on the clutch, Sammy, Jesus," but mostly he just sits there, breathing and not looking at Sam.

The silence carries on until Sam steers them home. Back in the driveway, he's about to get out of the car, one foot already out on the dirt, when Dean says, "What are you gonna do with

her?"

Sam settles back into his seat and runs the edge of his thumb along the ridges and lines of the key in his hand. "Everything," he says finally. "If she lets me." He's grinning, but when he looks up at Dean, Dean isn't smiling.

Sam feels his face fall. Dean's eyes on Sam are cool and shuttered-off. "You even know how? How to make a girl moan? With your fingers? You gonna use your mouth on her, Sammy?" he asks. He's teasing, but there's an unfamiliar meanness in his tone. He sounds like... like a demon, or like Judd Nelson in *The Breakfast Club*, talking with a cold little edge that makes Sam's eyes burn.

"It's not like that," Sam says. But it's kind of like that.

-

On Thursday the weather is gorgeous, so Sam spends lunch outside, sitting on the bleachers with Laura and her friends. They're all the kind of people Dean would've hated in high school. Dean would've called them jockstraps and prepsters and he would've stolen their girlfriends and put his cigarettes out on the hoods of their Audis.

Sam likes them. He knows all their names, now—Ryan and Jake and Maggie and Daniella—and they nod to him when they pass him in the halls, save him a spot when they're sitting in the cafeteria. Still, they're Laura's friends, not his. He knows he doesn't fit with these people.

Summer is creeping in, and after Sam finishes his peanut butter and jelly, he leans back on his elbows, tipping his face into the sun and stretching his legs down across another row of the bleachers. Laura's sitting at his hip, and he touches the ends of her hair, pulling his fingers through it idly, just because he can.

Ryan smacks at Sam's sneakers. "Lanky-ass motherfucker," he laughs. "You play basketball, Sam? We could use you next season."

Won't be here next season, Sam thinks, but Laura's looking at him expectantly, so he says, "Nah, man. Soccer."

Jake is sitting next to Ryan, wound around Maggie. "Yeah? You fast?"

"The fastest," Sam says.

"Uh-oh, Jake," Daniella laughs. "Competition!"

Jake extracts himself from Maggie and stands up, brushing off the seat of his pants. "Well?" he

says to Sam. "Come on, let's race!"

Sam feels his defenses go up. He's used to people feeling threatened by him—he's the perpetual new kid, so no matter where he goes or what he does, he's always stepping on someone's toes. But Jake is grinning, so Sam rolls his shoulders and they all head out to the track, tossing crumpled paper bags and soda cans in the trash cans as they go.

Sam lets Jake win, which would've pissed Dean off tremendously, but at the end of the track, Laura winds her arms around his neck and kisses his flushed cheek and whispers, "You have physics last period, right?"

Sam nods. She's wearing a fraying denim skirt, and when he brushes the back of her bare thigh with his knuckles, she doesn't even blink. "Physics," he says dumbly. "Yeah."

"Do you have a quiz or anything?" Her breasts press against him through their shirts and he's hyper-aware of it, the rush of the run and the smell of her hair speeding his heart up.

"Lab report due," he says. He tries to pitch his voice low, like Dean's, to make up for how completely *not* sexy lab reports are.

She kind of deflates against him. "You could go turn it in now. Tell your teacher you've got a dentist appointment, or something. Come on, Sam." She winks and then laughs at her own cheesiness. "Skip class and make out with me."

He presses his thumb against her hipbone through her skirt. He's never skipped a class voluntarily in his life, but he wants to, now; he wants to spend an hour sucking a hickey onto her perfect pale neck.

"I can't," he says. "I really can't."

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Holly is Dean's favorite kind of girl. She doesn't care that he's practically ignored her all week, or that he hasn't called her back once since they met. She's perfectly happy to sit on his lap behind the counter, letting him push aside her panties and finger her as she grinds down against him.

He's got her breathing hard, making porno-movie noises into his ear, when the bell above the door chimes. She squeaks and pitches off of him immediately.

"Jesus," Dean barks, left with one wet hand and a hard-on that could win a swordfight.

When he looks up, Sam's in the doorway, his school bag dangling from one shoulder. His eyes track Dean's hand as he wipes Holly's mess off on his jeans.

"Hi," Holly says.

Sam glances at her, then back at Dean. "Gross," he says, not addressing Holly, as Dean wipes his hand off on his jeans.

Holly straightens her dress. "I'm, um. I'm going to go down to the basement and do some rewinding."

Sam just hovers there, looking at Dean.

"So?" Dean says finally. He grabs a stack of videos that need to be re-shelved and walks purposefully over to the comedy section. He's probably putting everything back in the wrong place, but he doesn't care. "Gonna tell me what you're doing here? Wanna smell?" He wiggles his fingers in Sam's direction.

Sam, to his credit, doesn't flinch. He just looks vaguely nauseated and deposits his backpack on the counter. "I missed the bus," he says. "Figured I'd just come do my homework here until your shift was up so you could take me home."

Dean glances over his shoulder as Sam hoists himself up on the counter. "Well," he says, "You were kind of interrupting something, in case you didn't notice."

Sam doesn't speak, but he tilts his head up slightly, jutting his chin out the tiniest bit like he used to when he was a kid and didn't want to eat his vegetables. Being that defiant all the time must be exhausting.

"Here," Dean says, walking over and handing Sam half the tapes. "Make yourself useful."

They're quiet, replacing the tapes. Dean could almost relax, working side-by-side like this with Sam, if he didn't still have a hard on and if Sam would just... work on the *other* side of the store, or something.

"I didn't know you have porn here," Sam says, staring down at the video on top of his stack.

Dean rolls his eyes. "Yeah, Sammy, even people in Pleasantville need to get their rocks off. It goes in that section over there, behind the curtain."

"Huh," Sam grunts, but he doesn't move. He just picks up the VHS and flips it over, studying the back of the box, and then looks at the front again. "Are they really twins?"

"Who? Oh, yeah," Dean says. He waggles his eyebrows lewdly. "Identical."

Sam drags his eyes away from the tape and looks up at Dean. "You think it's hot?" he asks. Dean

can tell he's trying to sound nonchalant, but his voice is high and reedy.

"Sure," Dean says. "Everybody does."

"They're related," Sam says. "Is that even *legal*? Shouldn't this be, like, banned?"

"They don't—oh, for fuck's sake." Dean grabs the video away from Sam and digs into his pocket with his free hand. "Here," he says, pulling out his car key and slapping it against Sam's chest. "You can drive yourself home."

Sam takes the key and looks at it like he's never seen it before.

"I'll get a ride," Dean continues. "Go, Sammy, c'mon, let the grown-up do his job. Go pick up that girl of yours! Take her for a spin, I don't care."

"Dean—"

"Really, Sam? You want to take my car out by yourself, finally? Or do you want to stand around and wait me to change my mind?"

"I want... I want to take the car."

"Then *go*."

Sam sighs and grabs his backpack. "I'll see you," he says. The bell above the door jingles behind him as he leaves. Dean sighs and sags down, pressing his forehead to the cool countertop.

-

Sam feels like a prowler, driving past Laura's house, afraid to park the car and knock. It's not like she invited him in the first place, and for all he knows, she could be pissed at him for not skipping class with her.

When he finally rings the doorbell, though, Laura answers it grinning. "Oh, my god," she says, grabbing his hand and squeezing it. "I saw the car pull up and I was like, *no way that guy's got the right house*, and then you got out - what is that?" She peeks over his shoulder. "Is that yours? I've never seen a car like that before."

"It's my brother's," Sam says, "It's a '67 Chevy Impala. He's letting me drive it." He puffs his chest out a little, proud as hell, and for the first time in his life he understands why Dean calls the car 'baby.'

"I didn't even know you had your license!"

"Uh, yeah, I just got it. Today," he says. It's pretty close to the truth. If Dean's gonna let Sam tool around in the Impala now, he'll probably make Sam a fake license, too. Dad and Dean don't have any real identification, so Sam won't, either, he figures. "Do you, um—can you come for a drive?"

She tugs him inside. "Yes! I just—here, come meet my mom and dad. We're making dinner," she says. "Well, I'm making salad, because I'm a crappy cook, but still. You want to stay and eat? And then we can go driving, if my dad says it's okay."

The hallway is lined with years of school pictures, Laura and her three sisters smiling in gold frames, growing up as Sam gets closer to the kitchen. Sam's never had a school photo taken. He always arrives in time for sex ed, and never arrives in time to be anything other than *not pictured* in the yearbook. It's just how it goes.

"Mom," Laura says, as they enter the kitchen, "Daddy, this is Sam."

Sam feels like he's sleepwalking through the introductions. Laura's mother is wearing an apron and her Dad has spaghetti sauce on his work shirt. He teases Sam a little, pretends to be intimidating and then laughs, says "Call me Carl," and asks Sam if the spaghetti sauce needs more oregano. Laura's younger sister is working on a diorama at the kitchen table, carefully painting bricks on the side of her castle.

There's a weird, churning feeling in Sam's stomach. Laura's life is this simple, cookie-cutter thing, with a kitchen that smells like garlic and a dad who has tassels on his loafers. And Laura's hand in his is so small, and her laugh is so delicate as she blushes under her freckles.

It's all so innocent, with her. Everything, from the actual welcome mat out on her front porch to the way his heart raced the first time she let him put his hand under her shirt—it's normal, the way that things are supposed to be. Sam feels like he's been pasted onto her life, like he's this crazy, fucked-up thing that doesn't belong.

He says, "How can I help?" and they hand him a knife and steer him to the cutting board, tomatoes for Laura's salad waiting on it. Sam wonders belligerently what they'd think if they knew what he could do with this knife, what he could kill. He wonders what they'd say if they knew that the guy their beautiful daughter invited to dinner spends most nights jerking off, thinking about the way his brother smells after a morning run.

-

They take the Impala out for ice cream after dinner, and Sam drives to one of the empty fields, mostly just to see what she'll say. Laura seems like she's having fun—she eats all of her ice cream and steals the end of Sam's, crunching on the cone. They listen to a couple of tapes and

make fun of Dean's taste in music, and then they slide into the back seat.

She's laid out flat in the seat and he's stretched over her body, her legs wrapped around his hips. Sam's so turned-on he's crazy with it, feeling like the simple act of inhaling and exhaling is the wildest feeling in the world. Their shirts are somewhere in the front seat and the bottoms of her feet are flat against his thighs, pressing him into her. He's spent his whole life desperately hiding every boner he gets; this is new, being able to press against her like this, *wanting* her to know.

They've been back there forever, it feels like. It's long dark and they can hear the crickets humming through the open front windows when she reaches for his belt.

He props himself up on his elbows and watches her fingers fumble with his buckle. Her chest is flushed and heaving, small breasts right there in front of him, like her body doesn't belong only to her anymore—like she's sharing it. He can lean in right now and press a kiss to her collarbone and it's *allowed*, she's *offering* it.

When he looks up at her face, though, her expression is unfamiliar. Her mouth is pursed in displeasure and concentration and he can feel her hands tremble, low on his belly.

"Hey," he says, redistributing his weight so that he can reach down and take her hand. "Hey, we don't have to."

She swallows and looks up at him. "I—I do want to, Sam," she says. There's a 'but' coming somewhere, he can hear it in her tone, so he preempts it. He doesn't want her to be embarrassed. He doesn't want her to be scared.

"Me too," he laughs, "Trust me. But we don't have to right now. We can—maybe next time."

She struggles under him, and he moves so that she can sit up. She uses her arms to cover herself as she feels for her bra in the dark foot well. "I don't want you to think I'm a tease," she says finally, when she's got the clasp done. She laughs uncomfortably and pushes a hand through her hair. "But I don't want you to think I'm slutty either."

He hands her shirt to her. "I don't think you're slutty," he says. He reaches out and touches the bumps of her spine. "I think you're—I think you're like, exactly the person I should be with."

But, he thinks. Only she doesn't hear it coming; she doesn't preempt it. She just smiles and leans over to kiss him again. "I could, um... with my hand," she mumbles into his mouth.

He draws back and studies her face, but doesn't find any apprehension there. "Yeah?" he asks. His voice cracks and she laughs at him, biting her lip.

"Yeah," she says, and this time when she reaches for Sam's belt, he's the one trembling.

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When Sam turns into his driveway, Holly's on her way out of the house. The buttons of her shirt are done up wrong, the fabric straining across her breasts. Sam feels his lip curl in a sneer as they pass on the porch steps.

Inside, the house is dark and quiet except for the hum of water riding the pipes. Dean's in the shower, washing Holly off his body, and Sam's downstairs still weak-kneed from Laura's hands on him.

Sam waits until the water cuts off before he goes upstairs and straight into his room. His whole body feels like it's on overdrive, feeling too much at once. Laura had smoothed her clothes and kissed his cheek before running into her house. Her little sister had waved to him from the window. Inside, their house probably still smelled like garlic bread. They were probably going to watch Leno, or something, sitting together as a family, laughing at stupid jokes until they went to bed.

And Sam's sitting here in his empty room with a bare bulb and an old mattress and three different knives in his backpack. He wants to cry or punch something; he wishes his dad were here so Sam could pick a fight.

It's as if he's two people—Sam, the new kid at school with a pretty girlfriend and good grades, and Sammy Winchester, shadow creature. If anybody could see into his head they would hate him. If *Laura* could hear his thoughts, she'd never speak to him again.

Sam crouches on his mattress. His back faces the bathroom door, but he hears Dean open it slowly, without knocking, of course. "The door-slamming is getting old, Sam. You want my attention, all you gotta do is..." He trails off, and Sam hears him sigh. "Whatever. Point is, you've got my attention, Sam."

Sam stands up and whirls around. Dean is leaning against the wall. His wet hair is still flattened down over his forehead, but he's dressed, boots and all.

Sam chokes on his own breath. "I hate this," he says, spitting the words out. "Everything about it."

Dean is trying not to get pissed off. "What? This house? Panabaker?"

"My whole *life!*" Sam shouts. He's probably being irrational, overreacting, but his girlfriend just jerked him off in his brother's car and his body feels like it belongs to somebody else. He doesn't want to make sense. "This isn't how people live, it's not how people *are*. I'm all—I'm all fucked up, okay, and I just want something normal, you and Dad have to go *fucking everything up.*"

"Sam—"

"I'm going to go to college," Sam blurts. He's never said it out loud before, but he says it now just to see the look of shock on his brother's face. Dean doesn't disappoint—his mouth falls open a little and a muscle in his neck jumps. "I'm going to get away from all of this."

Dean recovers, narrowing his eyes. "You're a little shit, you know that?"

"You and Dad—"

"Just shut up! I'm sick of you sitting there, judging this family like you're some kind of *observer* instead of a participant. You're part of it! Welcome to reality, Sam, you're in this family whether you like it or not. And yeah, things are fucked up and weird, but you're definitely not helping any."

"I'm going to leave," Sam says stubbornly. "You want to spend your life squatting in abandoned houses and—and lying to people, and sleeping with a new girl in every town, that's fine, but I—"

"You what?"

Sam swallows. The words taste bad in his mouth, and he should swallow them, he should shut up, but he doesn't. "I don't want to be like you," he says. "You're pathetic. You're twenty years old and you're working at some video store doing *nothing* all day, just stagnating like—"

Dean surges forward until he's barely inches from Sam's face. "Fuck you," he says. "If it weren't for you, I'd be out there with Dad right now, saving people and making a difference, but I have to sit around and babysit your ass instead."

They're too close to each other. Sam can see the dark circles under Dean's eyes and the bitten-raw parts of his mouth.

Dean takes a step back. "Everything I do is for you," he says, most of the razor-edge gone from his voice, but Sam isn't finished fighting.

He opens his mouth to shout, but he's out of insults and threats, so he puts both hands flat on Dean's chest and shoves him backward, as hard as he can. Dean just adjusts his balance and holds Sam's glare.

Sam makes a noise in his throat, a frustrated growl, and he pushes Dean again until he's got him flat against the wall. Sam's expecting Dean to fight back, to send Sam reeling and take him to the floor, but when Dean raises his hands it's not to hit Sam.

He just grabs onto Sam's shirt, gathers the fabric in his fist and wrenches Sam forward, draws him up until their chests are pressed together with Dean's arm flexed between them.

They're breathing hard; Sam's pretty sure he's crying. He can hardly tell. Dean smells scrubbed clean and his lips are tense and flat, eyes violent, glaring up at Sam. Sam has to do something, his face is hot and his whole *body* is burning. Time drags and Dean's waiting, waiting for Sam to say something or pull away.

Sam leans down and Dean's eyes widen. He thinks Sam's gonna kiss him, probably, but Sam doesn't. Instead he crushes Dean against the wall with his whole weight and bends down and *bites*. He sinks his teeth into the spot where Dean's neck meets his shoulder and feels Dean freeze beneath him. He feels the veins and the tendons and the skin under his teeth. He touches Dean with the tip of his tongue.

"*Fuck!*" Dean shouts, loud enough for the whole town to hear, shoving Sam so hard that Sam's on his ass before he realizes he's moved.

Dean stares down at him, mouth open and hands up. "Fuck," he says again, quietly this time. Then he turns around and kicks a hole in the wall. His boot crashes through the plaster like it's papier-mâché.

Sam waits until he hears the screen door slam before he gets up off the floor. He walks to the window and watches Dean climb into the car and pull out a cigarette.

-

Dean stays in the car most of the night, but he doesn't sleep. He just lies on his back listening to Blue Oyster Cult and running the engine, feeling it rumble under him.

Sam's hoodie is inside-out on the floor and there's a girl's earring on the backseat. It's small; Dean thinks it might be a diamond. It's not the kind of earring he's used to seeing on girls in his car.

His neck kind of hurts, where Sam bit him. Dean wonders if there's going to be a mark, but he doesn't sit up to check the mirror, doesn't touch it to feel the ridges where Sam's teeth were.

Sam used to be a biter, when they fought as kids, scuffling over the remote or the last generic Oreo while Dad slept off a few too many beers. Once, he got his teeth into Dean's forearm, the pale underside of it. It hurt like hell. Sam's jaw had been locked so tight that Dean swore he'd come right up off the floor for a moment when Dean lifted his arm up to try and get away.

It's almost morning when the cell phone in Dean's jacket pocket rings. The sky has lightened to a steely gray, and it's freezing in the car.

"Hello?" Dean says. "Dad?"

"Hey, son." There's static crackling over the line and John sounds far away, voice like ten miles of bad road. "How's Sam?" It's always his first question, every time.

Dean ignores the question. "Where are you? Are you finished yet? You were supposed to be back—" He cuts himself off.

Dean doesn't like to bother his dad much about always coming home late. He knows how John just loses time once in a while, how every hour looks the same as the last one and how sometimes John has to spend days on end tacking things to the wall and *staring* at them before the answer comes to him. There's a reason John and Dean get along well—Dean forgives his dad everything. Sam complains and complains, but he isn't old enough to remember when John was *really* bad, downright scary, locked up in his fear. Dean's just glad it's better now.

"Had a few setbacks," John says. "It'll be a few more days."

"Are you hurt?"

"No, no. Just a dislocated shoulder; it's nothing."

"Dad..."

"You boys are okay for a little while longer, right? The credit card still working?"

"Sure."

"And how's Sam?"

"He's—Sam's good. He's got some girl he's following around. He's good."

John laughs, low and full. "And you? You keeping the entire female population of Panabaker company?"

Dean smiles and scratches at his head. "Yes sir," he says, because it's the answer John's expecting.

"Good boy," John says. The phone crackles in Dean's ear. "Losing service, son. I'll talk to you soon."

"Yes sir," Dean says again.

Sam's shoving books into his backpack after physics when Ryan flicks his earlobe. "We're going to drive up to the woods and smoke a bowl," Ryan says. "My truck's in the parking lot. Meet you there in ten."

Sam hesitates for a moment. It's Dean's day off at Panabaker Video, so he'll probably be home all afternoon, avoiding Sam's eyes and trying to fix every wobbly piece of furniture in the house. Sam should probably sack up, go home, and face the music. The sooner he sees Dean, the sooner they can shoulder through the awkwardness, the sooner Sam can stop blushing every time he thinks about Dean's skin under his teeth.

Everyone's already in Ryan's truck when Sam gets out there. It's crowded in the backseat, so Laura pulls herself up to make room for him to sit before plopping down on his lap.

The radio's set on the top 40 station, and everyone sings along to Eminem and Lauryn Hill as they drive away from town. Sam leans in and presses his face against Laura's back. Her t-shirt is thin and he can feel the straps of her bra against his cheek. He can smell her skin. He's half hard underneath her, and he's pretty sure she can tell, but she just looks down at him over her shoulder and blushes. "Don't like this song?" she asks. He's the only one in the car not singing.

"It's fine," he says. He hadn't really been paying attention. "I just don't listen to the radio much."

"Dude," Jake says, twisting around in the front seat. "You don't know the words? It's Limp Bizkit. You're like the weirdest kid I know."

Laura leans forward and smacks the back of his head. "You're a dick. It's a song about shoving a cookie up someone's ass; it's not exactly a classic."

"I know the classics," Sam says, before he really thinks about it. "My brother's big on the classics."

"Isn't your brother the kid who works at the video store?" Maggie asks. "I thought I saw him dropping you off a couple mornings ago."

Sam nods, cheek against the warmth of Laura's back. His hand is on her leg, now, pressed against the inside of her thigh in this car full of her friends and she doesn't even mind, she's just letting him paw all over her. It's unfamiliar to him—wanting to touch someone and then just being able to do it, without having to look for flimsy excuses.

"He's kind of weird," Maggie continues. "He totally stares at us while we pick our movies. My sister says he reminds her of a serial killer or something. No offense or anything, Sam."

It's not the first time Sam's heard that. A hundred towns, a hundred variations. *Your brother always smells like fire, dude. Does that guy ever take off that retarded jacket? Oh, my god, he won't stop staring at our table, Sam. You guys, I think I saw the new kid at the graveyard last night—with a shovel. Don't take this weird, Sam, but Gina Maloney said she saw your brother peeling an apple with an actual dagger.*

Sam usually just changes the subject, maybe glares a little if the person who says it is a particular kind of asshole. Today, though, he surprises himself. "He's my best friend," comes out of his mouth before he even has time to *think* it.

Maggie blinks. "Oh," she says. "I... sorry."

Laura squeezes Sam's hand and looks back at him, trying to catch his eye, but he just looks out the window, blinking as they pass their dilapidated old house. The Impala is gleaming in the driveway, buckets and sponges still sitting out on the porch.

It's almost dark when they finally drive home. Sam's so high he can barely keep up with conversation—he hears the sentences, but they don't connect. Laura's stoned, too, warm and pliant against Sam's side in the car. "Hey," she whispers. Her breath is hot against his ear. "I want to take your car out soon."

He turns his head toward her. *That* sentence comes in loud and clear. "Yeah?"

"I want to do stuff," she exhales, and then she kind of collapses against him, giggling. He tips her chin up and kisses her, using his tongue right away. In the front seat, Ryan groans and turns up the music, but Laura doesn't pull back, so Sam just keeps pressing in.

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Dean isn't really a stop-and-smell-the-roses type, but on his run that night, even he can appreciate how *nice* out it is. A little cool for mid-May, maybe, and when it gets dark Dean can see fireflies pulsing in his peripheral vision.

He walks the last quarter-mile home, feeling the sweat cooling on his skin and the breeze against the back of his neck. In the shadows, the house they're staying in doesn't look as ramshackle—he can ignore the dangling shutters and the sagging left side of the porch.

Inside, Sam's asleep on the couch with a heavy textbook open on his chest. Dean opens one of the kitchen cupboards, slowly because it creaks and he doesn't want to wake Sam up. There's no mark on Dean's skin where Sam's mouth was, but Dean can still feel it, angry and wet under his shirt.

He's pouring a couple cans of soup into a pan when he catches a whiff of something weird. He

smirks and picks his brother's hoodie up off the kitchen counter, holds it to his face to smell the weed, and then longer, long enough to smell Sam (boyish sweat and the shaving cream he doesn't actually need yet) and that sickly-vanilla teenage girl smell that Dean knows miles away.

He tosses the sweatshirt over to the table and opens the fridge. Sam's gonna want grilled cheese.

When dinner's ready, Dean strongly debates banging the saucepan against the sink to wake Sam up, but Sam's curled up on the couch like a little kid, his hands tucked underneath his cheek and his hair falling over his face.

Dean sighs and puts their bowls on the table, then walks over to the couch and sits down on the edge of it. "Hey," he murmurs, jiggling Sam's shoulder. "Hey, Sammy."

Sam presses his lips together and swallows before he forces his eyes open. "Dean," he says.

Dean starts to stand up, saying, "Dinner's on the table," but Sam catches his arm.

"Dean," he repeats, his thumb resting over the veins in Dean's wrist, "I'm sorry for—I'm sorry."

Dean shrugs and tugs his hand back. "Come on," he says. "Grilled cheese." He hopes Sam takes it for the apology it is.

Sam's sleepy and sated while they eat, his eyelids hanging a little lower than usual. Dean wants to tease him about being a damn lightweight, but he kind of likes their amicable silence and the way Sam's got this tiny, stoned smile on his face. He probably doesn't even realize he's smiling, but Dean isn't used to Sam going this many minutes in a row without a scowl, so he bites his tongue.

They stand side-by-side at the sink, after; Sam is washing and Dean is drying. "Can we go driving?" Sam asks, handing Dean a bowl.

Dean looks at him, and then darts his eyes away. He still isn't used to looking *up* at his brother, and he can usually avoid it, but they're standing too close. "You already know how, man. You can probably get a real license when Dad gets back."

Sam shrugs. "I still want to go," he says.

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Sam isn't stoned anymore, but when Dean offers him the keys, he shakes his head. Like Dean said, he knows how to drive—he doesn't want a lesson tonight, he just wants to be on the road next to Dean, with the summer air coming in and the music up. He almost misses the

passenger's seat.

Dean hits the highway for the first time since Dad dropped them off. The wind is so loud outside it drowns the radio out.

It's a little bit past nine and the roads are mostly empty. They've been driving for almost an hour, kind of making a sloppy circle around Panabaker. The point isn't the distance they're covering, just the time, the way the night feels under the wheels.

"Here's good," Sam says eventually, like he had a destination in mind, and Dean takes the next exit. They drive until Dean finds a place to pull over beside the Merrimack and then they pile out, leaning up against the hood and feeling the engine's heat against their legs. The river is wide and rocky. There are lights from towns across the way, but where they're standing it's dark and loud with crickets.

Sam says, "it's pretty," and waits for Dean to call him a girl, but Dean just nods and says, "we should do this more."

Sam snorts a little. "What? Drive? We do it plenty."

"Fucker," Dean says, cuffing him on the back of his head. Sometimes Sam thinks Dean does that just to mess up his hair, because Sam can't actually do that back. "I meant *stopping* for a minute, enjoying what's around. Highways aren't so bad when you stop."

Sam knows what he means. Dad stops when they have to, for gas and bathroom breaks, but that's it. He doesn't love the drive the way that Dean does—everything is about the next destination, and every destination is about achieving the goal. A few years ago, Sam wrote some bullshit what-I-did-on-my-summer-vacation essay about the road trip he took with his dad and his big brother. *We got to see the most beautiful parts of the country*, he'd lied, thinking about the way gas station bathroom graffiti doesn't change at all, from one end of the country to the other.

"Sometimes," he says now, leaning into Dean's shoulder just because Dean's letting him, "I pretend we're just on a road trip. A normal one."

Dean reaches into his pocket and pulls out his cigarettes. "Someday we will be," he says. His lighter makes a tiny hiss-pop beside Sam's ear.

Sam looks at him skeptically. The way they're leaning on the car, Sam with his legs stretched out in front of him, Dean is taller again.

"Seriously, man. We're gonna find the thing that killed mom, okay, and we're gonna kill it, and then you and me, Sammy. We'll drive down California or something."

Sam smiles down at the ground. "California, huh?"

"Yeah! We'll get stoned in Berkeley and drive the 101, all along the coast. We'll go to LA and hook up with Jennifer Love Hewitt and we'll go surfing in the Pacific Ocean."

"Where's Dad gonna be?"

Dean shrugs. "Dunno," he says. "Maybe on vacation, or something. *Resting.*"

Sam tips sideways and puts his mouth against Dean's, lips parted. It's just a fraction of a moment—not a big deal, just two pairs of dry lips pressing together before Sam pulls away and looks back out at the river. Then they both stand there, toeing at the roadside dirt. When Sam looks over at Dean, Dean is staring down at the ground. He doesn't look angry or freaked out, but he looks *sad*. If Sam didn't know any better, he'd swear Dean was about to cry.

He reaches out and plucks Dean's cigarette away, takes a drag. He's always hated the smell of them but he kind of likes the taste.

Dean lets him take one more puff and then he takes it back and flicks it out into the dark. "I was gonna do some work on the engine tomorrow," Dean says. His voice is steady, like Sam didn't just kiss him. Sam *kissed* him. "But if you want to take the car out with Laura on Sunday, you can."

He flicks his eyes over to Sam, but when he finds Sam staring back, he looks away again, turning his whole head so Sam can't even see his face.

"Well?" he prompts. "You want to or not?"

Sam swallows and thinks about Laura. *I want to do stuff*, she'd whispered in the car. "Yeah. Kind of."

-

Dean spends the next day buried in the Impala, bent beneath the hood and rolled under the car. He's out there before Sam's even awake.

Sam comes outside twice—once with lunch, once with a cold Dr. Pepper—but Dean doesn't actually see him either time. He keeps the metal between them because he doesn't know what would happen if he looked at Sam right now.

Sam *bit* him on Thursday and kissed him on Friday and now it's Saturday and Dean still feels like his entire body has melted away except for the places where Sam put his mouth.

That night, Dean takes Holly to a movie. She blows him in the back row and he's so distracted that he surprises *himself* when he comes, biting down on his own tongue so hard the taste of copper bursts into his mouth.

He leaves the car key on the counter before he goes to bed that night, and on Sunday, he stays in his room until he hears Sam leave.

He feels like a caged animal all day. It's raining, and the car's gone, and there's nothing on TV. He still doesn't know when the hell his dad is going to be back.

He's in the room that probably used to be an office, throwing his knives at a target he drew on the wall, when he hears Sam get home. He swallows and braces himself for Sam to come into the room, swinging through the doorway all freshly-fucked and "you shouldn't draw on the walls, Dean, it's disrespectful."

Sam doesn't come to find Dean, though. He just walks right past the door and up the stairs. Dean hears the shower start while he's tugging his knives out of the plaster.

He brings them upstairs and sits on the edge of his mattress. Sam left the door between Dean's room and the bathroom open just a little—he probably didn't even notice, and Dean should probably stand up and press it shut, but he doesn't. He just sits there, swiping a rag over the blades and listening to the water run. The steam carries a soapy heat into his room through the crack in the door; he can hear Sam opening the shampoo bottle and letting it drop to the floor.

It's been two days since Dean's talked to his brother and he's going crazy with it. He wants to be the person he was a month ago. That person would've barged into the bathroom by now, would have sat down on the sink and demanded that Sam tell him everything, *and don't skimp on the dirty details, Sammy*.

He's not that person anymore. Instead, he waits until the water cuts off, and then longer, measuring out the time it'll take for Sam to pick at his face and flex in the mirror and brush his teeth and get dressed.

He's left enough time for Sam to put on ten layers of clothes, but when Dean finally pushes the door to Sam's bedroom open, Sam's only in his boxers and an undershirt. He's sitting cross-legged on his mattress, reading one of the Montague Summers books he's always lugging around. Dean gulps audibly. He could've had this conversation if Sam was fully dressed, probably. As is, he's ripping at the seams, wishing he could turn his ass around and leave the room without Sam being able to see right through it.

"So?" he asks, hovering in the doorway. "What'd you do?"

Sam glances up at him and, probably without even realizing, reaches up to touch his own neck,

covering a hickey. "Not everything," he says. His voice cracks, and his obvious discomfort makes Dean feel a little better.

"Some things, though, eh Sammy?" he teases, shoving his hands in his pockets and leaning back against the wall. "She blow you? Did you eat her out?"

"Dean," Sam says. He swallows hard and pushes his wet hair up off his forehead. "I - we did some stuff, but I. I want to, um. I want you to show me."

Dean feels his face heat up and his palms go clammy. It's a thin guise, like something out of a bad barely legal porno—Sam sitting there with his bony shoulders and his big hands, chewing on his lip.

Dean scowls and crosses his arms over his chest. He looks at the floor, the wall, the window. Anywhere. "I think you can figure it out, Sam," he mumbles, but it doesn't come out light-hearted like he wants it to.

Sam purses his lips and glares at Dean. He's pissed off, Dean can tell; his muscles look like they want to climb out of his skin and make a break for it. "Christ's sake, Dean," he says. "Don't make me ask you for it, *please*."

"Ask me for what?"

"To - I want you to—damn it."

"Sam."

"Touch me," he says quietly. He pushes the book away and it slides off of the mattress, fluttering closed on the floor. Dean stares down at the cover, and a vampire stares back at him through red eyes.

"Jesus," he says. He wants to bolt. They've gone up against witches and werewolves, but this right here—this is fucking scary. And, as usual, Dean's first reaction to being scared isn't to protect himself; it's to make sure Sam's okay.

Dean can't leave Sam alone in this feeling. He can't walk out of the room and let Sam sit here by himself with his hands shaking.

He walks over to sit down on the floor beside Sam's mattress, his back sliding down the wall. "Jesus Christ, Sammy," he says. He draws his knees up and rests his forearms on them, letting his hands dangle. He tries to catch his breath.

They sit there quietly for a long time, with Dean staring at his hands and Sam picking at a scab on his leg.

Dean is looking for something that he can say to brush this off—*man, you really need to get laid*—or *I think this house is fucking cursed*—when Sam reaches for Dean's zipper. Dean's entire body reacts, jerking away, and he grabs Sam's wrist almost violently. "Sam," he whispers, like there's someone else around to hear. He knows he's got a horrified, wild-eyed look on his face. He also knows he's still holding onto Sam's arm.

Sam slides off the mattress, landing in a messy heap of limbs and angles next to Dean. He's brave, almost shameless if it weren't for the hot red of his cheeks when he presses against Dean's side. "Show me what to do," he says. He presses his mouth to Dean's neck. "C'mon," he mumbles, the inside of his lower lip dragging over Dean's pulse.

Dean doesn't move. He can't grab Sam close but for the life of him, he can't get up. He can't be anywhere but where he is.

When Sam reaches for Dean's fly again, he's not gentle about it. He presses the heel of his hand down firmly, grinding down against Dean's cock. The noise Dean makes, the way his head knocks back against the wall—that's it. He's got no hope, ever again, of pretending he doesn't want this from Sam.

Dean closes his eyes for a moment, trying to reason with his heart, trying to talk it into slowing down. Sam's hand stills against his jeans.

Dean turns his head a little bit, and Sam pulls away from his neck so that they're facing each other. Dean's clutching his own knees, fingers digging in so hard he can feel his kneecaps sliding, but he's almost calm as he looks Sam dead in the eye.

Sam's got this pissed-off, determined look on his face, and Dean doesn't know what he's so mad about. Dean's here, isn't he? He's not going anywhere. "Hey," he says quietly. "Sammy."

Finally, Sam takes his hand off Dean's dick and reaches for his face.

Dean lets Sam pull him in; he licks his lips just before their mouths touch. It's a careful, slow kiss at first, wet with saliva but there's no tongue. Dean has always been a careful kisser. He likes to stay in control of the situation, and if there's ever been a situation where Dean needed to keep his cool, this is it.

But Sam makes this noise in his chest and knocks their foreheads together so hard Dean's teeth clack, and Sam's hand moves from his cheek to the back of his neck, fingers clenching in Dean's hair, and Dean can't help it. He opens his mouth for Sam's tongue and grabs Sam's undershirt at the armhole and hauls Sam in.

Sam groans, "Fuck, Dean, I want you to," kissing sloppy across Dean's chin as he grabs at Dean's shirt.

The floor is cold and hard under Dean, dusty beneath the hand Dean puts down to keep himself upright. He shoves Sam back a little bit, toward the mattress, but Sam takes it the wrong way and growls, "*No, Dean, please,*" and throws a leg over Dean's knees.

Dean puts a hand in the tangle of thick wet hair at the back of Sam's head and tugs until Sam's chin is pointing up and his neck is all exposed to Dean. "Get on the bed," he says against the ridge of Sam's Adam's apple, and adds, "you've got to calm down," though he's not entirely sure that he means it.

Sam doesn't move for a moment. He waits until Dean licks out at his neck, just his tongue, before he backs up and lies out flat on the mattress.

He's always hiding in giant hoodies and baggy jeans, and now he's stretched out on his sleeping bag in thready boxers, his undershirt all stretched out around the neck from Dean tugging at it. His hipbones are sharp angles bordering his belly, and below that, he's hard under his clothes—the bulge of his cock is *obscene*. It makes Dean's entire body go hot and quaky, but it also makes his stomach hurt, because this is all so ridiculous.

Sam. Spread out and panting, the determined set of his jaw familiar and foreign all at once.

Dean's too far in it now. He can't go back. So he crawls over and sits on the edge of Sam's mattress, leaning over Sam. He scratches the back of his own neck. "What's going on with you, Sam?" he asks.

Sam licks his lips. "Same thing that's going on with you," he says, breathless and brave. "Are you gonna jerk me off?"

Dean's wrist brushes against Sam's erection as he moves to push his hand under Sam's shirt. He lays his palm flat on Sam's belly and feels Sam tense his abdominal muscles reflexively. "That what you want?"

Sam nods. "You want it, too," he says, confident. He moves Dean's hand lower and rubs up against it, twists his hips up into Dean's palm shamelessly.

Dean shakes Sam's hand away and lies down on the mattress next to him, propping himself up on one elbow so his chest is pressed all against Sam's side.

He uses his free hand to tug Sam's shirt up, bunching it up around Sam's armpits. Sam tries to sit up to pull it off, but Dean thumbs his nipple and presses him back down. "Dean," Sam chokes, making a grab for Dean's shirt. His hand closes around the amulet, instead, and he pulls, hard enough that the cord burns against the back of Dean's neck.

Dean lets Sam draw him down. He presses his face to Sam's chest, bony ribs and the brand-new

hints of muscle over his pecs, wide hard nipples against Dean's cheek.

Dean closes his eyes and opens his mouth to Sam's skin as he finally pushes his hand underneath Sam's shorts.

"Sammy," he mumbles, and Sam says, "I've wanted this, Dean."

Dean can't look, can't make himself open his eyes to his hand on his little brother's dick. He can feel it, though: the outrageous heat and surprising heft, Sam solid and slick as he pushes himself up into the circle of Dean's fingers.

Sam's hand that isn't tangled in Dean's necklace comes up to curl around the crown of Dean's head, pressing Dean's face down on his chest. Dean must look ridiculous—his eyes screwed shut and his mouth sliding over Sam's body, tasting the sweat on his just-washed skin.

"Dean," Sam gasps, "look at me," but Dean won't, and doesn't even as Sam starts trembling, not until Sam says, "please, *please*."

And then Dean opens his eyes. There's late-afternoon sun coming in through the window, dust dancing in the brightness, and Sam's flushed and strong under him, his bottom lip caught between his teeth, his eyes murky green and focused desperately on Dean's face.

Dean sees the strain in the way Sam's eyebrows are creeping together, and he surges up to kiss Sam's mouth. He says, "Come on, baby," before he can shut himself up.

Sam says "Jesus," and arcs up off the bed, his prick jerking reckless in Dean's grip, drawing thick lines of come across the flat of Sam's belly, where it dips between his hips.

Sam's face is ruddy and slack, his mouth open and his eyes closed. He keeps licking his lips, over and over, and he won't let Dean pull away. His fingers stay twisted up around Dean's amulet, his other hand still smoothing over Dean's hair. After a moment, Dean stops struggling and just leans down, resting his chin against Sam's sternum and watching the color change in Sam's cheeks.

Dean's so turned on he's shaking. He hasn't even been touched, not really, but he can feel his balls drawn up tight against his body; he knows Sam can feel his erection.

Sam's eyes open, finally, blinking slow and unfocused. Their faces are really close together, and Dean thinks he'll be just fine to sit here staring at Sam and never getting off for the rest of his life.

"Will you kiss me?" Sam asks, all the desperation and fight gone from his voice. He just sounds genuinely curious.

Dean nods and leans forward to catch Sam's lips. Their mouths come together a few times, slow and lazy.

Sam says, "Can I," gesturing at Dean's dick, but Dean shakes his head slowly and kisses Sam's cheek, high up next to his eye.

"No," he says. "Don't."

Sam gets this flicker in his eye like he's going to argue, going to protest and ask questions, but eventually he just nods a little and sags deeper into his sleeping bag.

Dean untangles himself, gets on his knees and wipes his hand on his shirt and finally tugs the hooks of Sam's fingers out of his necklace. "I'm going to shower," he says. He grins and whips his hand around in the universal gesture of whacking off, trying to make Sam laugh or crack a smile or something. Trying to make himself stop freaking out.

Sam just nods. He pulls the side of his sleeping bag over himself, but his leg is still hanging over the side of the mattress. It's impossibly long, muscles curving, and for the thousandth time this week Dean is struck by how much Sam *isn't* his tiny little brother anymore, that kid bobbing behind him in the school cafeteria line. Sam is this whole new person, his own person, separate from Dean, and catching up.

Dean turns away, but he pauses with his hand on the bathroom door and sighs. He doesn't turn back to Sam, just stares at the door, when he says, "You're the only thing I ever think about, man. You know how screwed up that is?"

He doesn't wait for Sam's answer.

Holly barely looks up from her magazine when Dean walks into Panabaker Video the next afternoon. "Your turn to call the delinquents," she says, nodding at the stack of overdue slips on the desk.

"What," Dean says, leaning over the counter toward her, leering down the front of her shirt. "No hello?"

She raises an eyebrow at him. "I called you yesterday," she says.

"Oh. I was busy." Busy throwing knives at the wall and wearing the floorboards thin with pacing, but still busy.

"Yeah? I saw your car up at the fields."

Dean swallows. He feels the blood drain from his face. "What'd you see?" he asks. The way his voice cracks, squeaking at the end, makes her roll her eyes.

"Foggy windows, rocking wheels." She waves a hand around. "Whatever. I don't care."

Dean swallows. He wants to ask her if she heard anything. He wants to know what music Sam was listening to and how long the car was *rocking*. Instead, he mumbles, "What were *you* doing up at the fields, anyway?"

She looks back at her magazine and turns a page, cool as a cucumber.

Dean's on his second overdue notice when the bell above the door rings. It's just after one, and when he looks up, there's Sam, standing in the doorway with the redhead hanging onto his hand.

"Hey," Dean says, raising his eyebrows. He puts the phone down slowly. Sam's been in the room for three seconds and already Dean's entire body is in overdrive, like he can feel every hair follicle and vein and muscle just *begging* for his brother. It's overwhelming.

Sam's eyes flick over to Holly. She's got her legs kicked up on the counter, long stretch of smooth skin right by Dean's elbow. "Hey," Sam says. "Um, Dean. This is Laura."

She waves, a little awkward and half-hiding behind Sam, but her smile is big and generous and confident. "It's nice to meet you," she says.

"I just—I wanted to introduce you." Sam shrugs. Dean's got to give him credit—he looks pretty collected, none of the stammering awkwardness Dean would've expected the day after... well.

"Sure," Dean says. He walks over to the door, side-stepping Holly as she pops her gum, and offers a hand for Laura to shake. "Really nice to meet you."

She's got to let go of Sam's hand to shake Dean's, and Dean can see Sam hold onto her for a beat too long, not letting her go. Her hand is small and a little clammy in Dean's. "You, too," she says. "Sam talks about you a lot."

"We were getting sandwiches," Sam interrupts. He holds out a paper bag. "Brought you one."

"I already ate," Dean says, thinking about the Twinkies he stuffed into his mouth on the drive into town.

"You know you want it anyway. There's extra sausage," Sam says, and for a half a second Dean thinks he's *flirting*, but his face is neutral. "And there's a piece of pie in there. The bag. Not the sandwich."

Dean grabs the bag and grins toothily at Sam. "You kids want a lollipop?" he asks, gesturing at the stand behind him. "Old lady says that when kids come in, we're supposed to give 'em a

sucker," Dean continues.

Sam rolls his eyes. Dean's not even sure what he's doing here. Leave it to Sam to be the only sixteen-year-old kid in the entire universe who *wants* to introduce his girlfriend to his family. Dean only ever introduced girls to Sam and their Dad when it was a necessity, like if Dad had to save her life or if Sam woke up to use the bathroom in the middle of the night and found some hot bartender in their shower.

Dean clears his throat and pulls two blue cotton candy flavored lollipops off the stand. "You got plans after school? You guys, uh, want to take the car?"

Sam looks stricken for a moment, and Dean thinks maybe he said the wrong thing. But then Sam puts his hand on Laura's back and straightens his shoulders. "Yeah," he says. "You can get a ride home?"

Dean smiles at Holly, and she rolls her eyes. "Fine," she says, dropping her feet off the counter.

Dean throws the keys at Sam, followed by the lollipops in quick succession. "Thanks," Sam says. He hands his girl the candy and shoves the key in his pocket.

Sam is on his way out the door, Laura's hand in his, when Dean calls out, "Actually, Sammy."

"Yeah?"

"How about you come back and get me when my shift's up? I'm done at nine."

And that's when Sam's face kind of falters, the tips of his ears going pink and his hand slipping on the door handle. He nods abortively and kind of trips out the door.

"Your brother's a mess," Holly says.

"You pretty much always have lipstick on your teeth," Dean replies.

-

Sam gets back to the video store four minutes before Dean's shift ends and gets out of the car to wait. He's hyperconscious of his body, leaning against the car with his legs stretched out in front of him, tucking his chin to his chest. He's still getting used to himself, the length of his body and the strength of his hands.

The lights go out in the video store and Dean comes out, whistling as he locks the door behind him. His smile is a little watery when he sees Sam. "Yo," he says. "That sandwich was really good. Thanks."

Sam shrugs and tosses Dean the keys.

Dean catches them with just one finger, looping through the ring. "You sure you don't want to drive? You can."

"No," Sam shakes his head. "I like it better when you drive."

When they get in the car, Sam feels himself blush bright red. He hadn't realized, until he got a little fresh air - the car still smells like... well, like him, and Laura, musty heat and sweat and sex. The back windows might still be fogged up; Sam's too mortified to turn around and check.

Dean notices, too, and Sam's expecting some kind of offhand, lewd comment, but instead Dean just pulls both his lips into his mouth and focuses really hard on getting the key into the ignition.

They don't talk on the drive home, and Dean doesn't move to roll the windows down. They just sit there with the air full of sex and the radio off, eyes straight ahead on the road.

It doesn't surprise Sam when Dean keeps driving right past their house, but it kicks his body into high gear. It feels like he's got a hummingbird trapped in his belly as Dean pulls up onto the fields. Sam's only been in Panabaker a few weeks, but every town's got a make-out spot, a place where kids go to get laid and get high and toss beer cans out of car windows. This is that place.

When Dean puts the car into park, Sam slides across the seat a little and puts his hand on Dean's thigh. The denim is rough under his fingers; they haven't done laundry in forever.

"Sammy," Dean says. He touches his fingers to the back of Sam's hand, lightly at first, and then he shoves at Sam's shoulder until Sam moves away. "We're not... we're not going to do that anymore."

It goes through Sam like a shiver, and he hopes his face doesn't fall too much. He angles his body away from Dean and looks out the window. It's not like he didn't know this was coming all day. He knows how screwed up it is, and he knows what's at risk. In the end, if things change—if Sam leaves for college and things go to pieces—he doesn't want to be the one to blame. He doesn't want Dean to ever be able to say, *see, I told you we shouldn't*, while he's walking away from Sam.

Sam sighs and lets his head fall against the window. "Yeah," he says. "Figured."

"So did you sleep with her?" Dean asks. "The car reeks." He's got the most obvious tells, when he's nervous—scratching at the back of his neck, his leg jiggling in the foot well, his eyes darting around like he's trying to follow a gnat.

Sam's seen him like this a million times, with girls and with Dad and with Child Protective Services in principals' offices. But this is the first time, with Sam.

Sam opens the glove compartment and pulls out a pocket knife. He opens it, flicking each blade out neatly and then tucking it back in before repeating the cycle. "Yes," he says finally. He looks at Dean.

Dean nods, and Sam can tell that he's forcing his smile because his jaw bulges where he's grinding his back molars together. "Congrats, man. How was it?"

It was weird, Sam wants to say. The condoms he'd pocketed in health class had spermicide already on them, and they smelled kind of gross, and she was slippery everywhere and he was awkward, sweaty and nervous. She'd said, "Okay, okay, just do it," and she didn't really look like she was having any fun. She didn't look happy until it was over, until Sam curled around her and kissed her for a half an hour.

"I was thinking about - I was thinking about you," Sam says. It's the most honest thing that comes to his mind. He tries to keep his voice steady, and confident, but he's failing miserably. "And how you've done it there in the back seat, too. I was thinking about whether you were on top of her or underneath her, and how many times and with how many girls. I was thinking if - if there's ever been a guy, back here, with you."

Dean coughs and his knuckles go white on the steering wheel. "Why'd you think that?"

"You touched me last night like you knew how."

"I did know how. Been doing it myself for like a decade," Dean laughs. He still won't look at Sam.

Sam pushes both his hands through his hair. It's a little stringy, sweat drying in his bangs. He tries to think about the calculus assignment in his backpack and not about ten years of Dean jerking off.

But his backpack is on the floor behind them, and his papers are probably crushed from where he had dropped his knee down, putting his mouth to the crease of Laura's thigh and wishing he was tasting his brother instead.

"I've got homework," Sam says.

Dean clears his throat and wipes his palms on his jeans. "Okay," he says. "Okay."

Sam can't sleep. He's too hot, too itchy, too restless. The springs in his mattress are starting to wear through the padding and the house keeps making noise like it's trying to shake free of its foundation.

His watch says it's just after four when he finally gets up and shuffles through the bathroom to push Dean's door open. The light catches the whites of Dean's eyes right away—Dean's been awake, too.

Sam leaves the bathroom door open, letting the light spill across the floor to Dean's mattress. "Hey," he says, leaning against the wall farthest from Dean. It feels like there are miles of dusty floorboards between them. "I can't sleep."

"Scared of the dark?" Dean asks, teasing, and then more seriously: "The house is clean, dude, salt and iron all over the place."

Sam wraps his arms around himself and squeezes his own chest tightly. "Dean, I want to see you."

Dean raises one eyebrow and gets an elbow underneath himself. The sleeping bag falls away from his shoulder, revealing the sharp line of his collarbone. "I'm right here."

"Look," says Sam. "I want to—I *want* to, but I know we can't. But it's not fair that you got to see what I look like when I'm doing stuff and I didn't—I didn't get to see *you*. I want to know what you look like, too." He swallows and forces the last words out of his mouth. "When you come."

Sam prepares himself for Dean to pull his sleeping bag up and tell Sam to fuck off and go to sleep, but somehow he's not all that surprised when Dean sits up and whispers, "God, Sam."

"Please," Sam says. He tilts his chin up—it's a reflexive move, one he always makes when he's getting ready for an argument. "Jerk off for me, Dean."

Dean's mouth falls open slowly, his lips kind of clinging to each other for a moment before they part. "Because it's only fair?"

"I won't touch you," Sam promises. "I'll stay over here."

Sam knows what Dean looks like when he's scared. Dean doesn't like to believe it, but he carries his emotions right on his face; he always has. So Sam knows the look that Dean gets when he's worried that their Dad isn't going to come home, or when Sam is bleeding, or when some monster has its claws in Dean's neck.

Dean looks like that now, wide-eyed and slack-jawed, but he unzips the side of his sleeping bag

anyway.

Sam can't breathe; it's like the entire world is trying to stuff itself into his lungs as Dean blinks at him.

Dean has a stripe of hair from his belly button to the elastic of his boxers. Sam remembers the first time he noticed it, fighting for elbow room in some motel bathroom while they brushed their teeth. He could've sworn it just showed up overnight and he remembers thinking about how Dean was practically an adult, how he was speeding up ahead and leaving Sam behind.

The air in the room rockets up ten degrees when Dean pushes his boxers down. He's seen his brother's dick before, but not in a while, and not like this. It's slender and long, resting against Dean's thigh, and when Dean finally touches himself Sam can tell he's already a little hard, turned on.

He goes slowly at first, tugging at himself lazily, and if it weren't for the tension in Dean's shoulders and the worry all over his face Sam would swear he was perfectly relaxed. Dean's mouth is pinched in concentration and he's not looking down at himself. He's just looking at Sam.

It doesn't take long for him to get hard. His chest starts to rise and fall rapidly, and he bites down hard at his lower lip, pink flesh pressing against the glint of his teeth.

Sam slides down the wall and sits on the floor, pulling his knees up to his chest. He's hard already, aching with the urge to touch himself, but he doesn't want to be distracted. He wants to watch carefully, so that he can file this away for later—for when Dad comes back and they leave Panabaker and Dean stops looking at him like he has been.

Sam's trying to be quiet. He can't believe Dean's actually *doing* this—he can't even believe he actually asked—so he doesn't want to move, or speak, or do anything that might set the world back on its axis and make Dean change his mind.

He can't stop himself, though, can't hold all the words in his chest, and "God, you're hot," tumbles out of his mouth unbidden.

It's not something Sam would usually say. It's something *Dean* would say, whispering to some girl, sneaking her into the motel room while Sam lay pretending to sleep and trying to stifle the sick, jealous curiosity threatening to drown him.

He's not trying to be salacious, though—just honest, because Dean's the hottest thing he's ever seen, with the sweat gathering in the curve of his clavicle and his forehead creased with tension. "Oh fuck, Sam," he chokes, a hungry gasp of a breath between the words.

Dean likes it hard, obviously. He's rough with himself; tugging so fiercely that he's got to be

walking a thin line between pain and pleasure. The veins under the pale skin of his forearm are standing out, blue in the bare light of the bathroom. Sam can smell the clean sweat he's working himself into, like after a morning run.

And now that he's spoken—said *Sam's name* while *jerking off* and Sam's going to remember it forever—he can't really shut up. Sam's head is flooded with a cacophony of noises Dean is making, everything from low throaty grunts to the choked-off, high "oh" noises that Dean tries to swallow down.

He puts both hands on himself: one at the base of his darkening cock, curled around his balls, the fingertips kneading down at the dark space below them, and the other speeding up, pumping wildly at the top.

Dean's eyes squeeze shut and he arches, his lower back coming right up off the bed. He spreads his legs even wider, feet planting down solidly as his mouth opens and his tongue swipes restlessly over his plump lower hip.

"Yeah," Sam breathes, and Dean climaxes with his voice over Sam's name, squeezing his balls and wringing jets from the head of his cock. His stomach twitches violently, his lower belly clenching as his come hits it, thick and white.

Every time Sam thinks he's done, his dick jerks again and Dean makes a surprised sound in the back of his throat. It feels like ages before Dean's feet slip against the sleeping bag and his spine unbends. Even then, a few stray spasms ripple over his body before he finally relaxes, rubbing slowly at his balls and easing himself down from the high.

He has a plain, startled expression on his face, like he didn't know his body could do that. Sam thinks, *maybe he's never come that hard*, and he has to press a hand against his own hard dick to keep himself together.

Dean finally looks over at Sam, his hand still dragging through the mess on his belly. He lies there panting, staring with wide eyes as his chest spreads and contracts.

Sam waits for Dean to get up, to go for a towel or a shower or outside to smoke a cigarette alone. But Dean just looks at Sam for a long time, an unfamiliar expression on his face. He looks like he's battling with what to say.

"What do you want, Dean?" Sam says after a while. His voice breaks and crumbles like he hasn't spoken for a year.

Dean's lower lip flexes, like he's about to speak, but he doesn't.

"Say it," Sam rasps.

It's practically slow motion, in the harsh light from the bathroom, when Dean finally jerks his head. "C'mere," he says. His voice is dark and low and it hits Sam like a freight train.

Sam springs into motion, scurrying across the dusty floorboards on his hands and knees because it'll take too long to stand up. The mattress groans as he sinks down beside Dean, but Sam can barely hear it over Dean's breathing. He's hit with the smell of Dean's skin right away, and he chases it, shoving his face down and dragging his bottom row of teeth across Dean's freckled shoulder.

"Fucking biting," Dean says, warm and affectionate.

Sam shrugs. "I like it."

He reaches for Dean's hand, still resting low on his stomach, and pulls it up between their faces. The come on Dean's fingers has gone cool and tacky. It's pretty gross, but Sam pulls Dean's hand to his face anyway, letting the backs of Dean's fingers skid over his cheeks.

Dean's breath catches and his touch becomes more purposeful. His eyes are wide as he flips his hand over to cup Sam's face. Slowly, watching, he rests the pad of his thumb on the fullest part of Sam's lower lip, just enough pressure for Sam's mouth to kind of tug open a bit.

The whole world stops for that moment—Sam swears the crickets outside go silent—as they're just lying there on their sides, curled toward each other, with Dean's thumb inside Sam's lip. Then Sam rolls his tongue out, drawing it slow across Dean's thumb, tasting the drying come and feeling the ridge of Dean's fingernail.

Dean makes a strangled, startled noise and tips over onto Sam, pressing his body across Sam's like a blanket. His thumb slips out of Sam's mouth as he pushes his hand up into Sam's hair and pulls him in, kissing him hard and deep. He's torturously slow but wide open, no hesitation or doubt as he fucks his tongue lazily into Sam's mouth.

Sam wraps a leg up around Dean's hips and grinds up, but he doesn't care about getting off; he's just looking for some slow friction as he focuses on Dean's tongue and the low, satisfied noises Dean's making into his mouth.

They kiss for a long time, there on the old mattress. Sam falls asleep with Dean's mouth still sliding sloppy over his.

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Dean wakes up to the sound of gunshots. He's still naked, and the side of the bed Sam was sleeping on is cool.

Dean pauses at the window on the way to the bathroom. Outside, Sam is shooting beer cans off the edge of the fence. He's a good shot: *pow pow pow*.

Dean gets this strange, unbidden image in his head of him and Sam, maybe five years from now, circling back-to-back and shooting out an army of zombies or werewolves or something. *Pow pow pow*, and they all go down one by one until Sam and Dean are the only ones left standing.

Dean finds his jeans and a wrinkled t-shirt and goes outside barefoot. He moves across the lawn quietly, waiting until Sam's finished his round before he steps up behind him and brushes his knuckles over the rise of Sam's shoulder blade.

The sun is bright on Sam's face when he turns around. He puts a hand against his forehead to shield his eyes. "Hey."

Dean squints back at him. He knows he probably looks ridiculous, one side of his face all squinched up against the light. "Hey. Gonna be late for school."

"Skipping," Sam says. He's probably waiting for Dean to give him shit for it, because Sam's never *wanted* to miss school in his life, but it's sunny and Dean is happy and he doesn't feel like pushing his luck. Sam holds out the gun. "You want to go a round?"

Dean shakes his head and steps back, shoving his hands into his pockets. Sam's gaze trips like a skipping stone over Dean's hips, the bare line where Dean is pulling his jeans away from his body. It makes Dean's chest hot, makes his toes curl against the dewy grass.

He stands back and watches Sam take the next. Sam's shoulder takes the kickback pretty easily, loose and strong. Dean remembers when just firing a gun always knocked Sam on his ass, but now Sam is bigger, built like he was engineered for battle.

Dean waits while Sam shoots, adds more cans to the fence, and shoots again. Finally, Sam fixes the safety and puts the gun down on the ground. Dean is kind of struck dumb when Sam turns around, the sun on his face and his lip between his teeth. They just kind of stand around like idiots for a minute, shifting their weight from side to side and watching each other.

Finally, Dean scratches at the back of his neck. "What are you thinking about?"

"Being taller than you," Sam says immediately.

Dean rolls his eyes and Sam's grin is blinding and instant, too big for his face. "Fucker."

"I just never thought it would happen, is all," Sam says, laughing a little. He spreads his arms out, palms to Dean, and for the second time today Dean sees the man Sam's going to grow into, tall and broad and powerful. "I mean, I thought one day I'd maybe be *as* tall as you. I always

kind of hoped I'd be strong as you." He shrugs, embarrassed. "Never thought I'd be *taller*. It's weird."

"It happens."

"I know, it's just - you're always taking care of me, you know? And protecting me."

"Just because you're a circus freak doesn't mean that's not still my job."

Sam kicks at the dirt. "Yeah?" he says. "Good."

"You want breakfast? We've got eggs."

"Okay."

"Okay." Dean starts to walk toward the house, but Sam catches his elbow and, gently, turns him back around.

They're right out in the open, the middle of the morning with birds chirping and a whole huge blue sky above them, and Dean doesn't even care. He just sinks his fingertips into Sam's bicep and lets Sam crowd up against him, lets Sam tilt his head back with one hand and lean down to suck on his tongue. They kiss until Dean doesn't know which way the ground is, until he's pretty sure the only reason he's still standing is because Sam's holding him up.

They separate slowly, like pulling two magnets apart. "Eggs?" Dean says stupidly.

Sam winds both his long skinny arms around Dean's neck and shakes his head. He laughs, "No, Dean."

He kisses Dean again - quick and firm like a snap decision - and then turns to walk inside.

If Dean were the praying type, he'd probably do that now. As it is, though, he just grins a little and follows his brother.

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There aren't any blinds on the windows in Sam's bedroom, so the light cascades over the floor heavy and hot. Dean leans against the doorframe and smirks a little, watching Sam bend over to carefully straighten the corners of his sleeping bag.

"You trying to impress me with your neatly-made bed, Sam?"

Sam darts a look at him and promptly turns a hilarious shade of pink. "Kiss my ass."

Dean bites his tongue against the lame joke caught in his mouth as Sam shrugs out of his t-shirt and tosses it aside.

Dean has their mother's complexion, light and freckled and sensitive to the sun, but Sam's is different—even and warm-colored all over the place. Dean watches him move, the pull of his skin across his ribs and the ridges of his stomach. Sam is still skinny, but his torso is starting to fill out with unfamiliar cuts of muscle that draw lines down his body to his hips. Dean makes an approving noise, a hum low in his throat, and Sam raises an eyebrow. "Well?" he asks.

Dean shoves his hands into his pockets. "What?"

Sam sighs and makes one of his horribly put-upon faces. "Are you gonna get undressed or what?"

"Nah. Think I'll just hang here for a while."

"Dean."

"What?" he repeats, grinning. He's going for some kind of cocky bravado, because really he's embarrassed by how badly he needs Sam to take the lead here. He's been having sex for a million years, and thinking about sex for a million years before that, and here he is leaning against the wall in a ramshackle old house in New Hampshire freaking out because he can't really remember the right thing to do with his hands.

Sam runs a hand through his hair and walks up close to Dean, stepping on the mattress in the way. "You nervous?" he asks.

Dean shakes his head because he can't really bring himself to lie out loud.

He can see Sam's Adam's apple bob as his eyes drop over Dean's body. Sam touches the hem of Dean's t-shirt, just for a fraction of a second before he drops his hand away. He whispers, "You wearing underwear?" and Dean's world grinds to a halt as all his blood rushes to his dick.

He shakes his head, *no*, and Sam kind of gasps and closes the space between them, pressing his hips up snug against Dean so hard and fast that the unexpected pressure kind of hurts. Dean drops his forehead down against Sam's shoulder and splays a hand across Sam's bare lower back, pulling him in.

"Come on, Dean," Sam whispers, in a voice like he knows exactly what he's doing. "Take off your clothes with me."

Dean nods and is about to pull away to get out of his shirt when Sam bites his ear and shoves a hand down the back of Dean's jeans at the same time. "Oh *fuck*, Sam!" Dean says, feeling Sam's

dry palm skate over his ass cheeks.

"Kiss me," Sam mumbles, pulling his hand out. Dean feels like a blind man fumbling as he opens his mouth for Sam's tongue and hooks an elbow behind Sam's neck to keep him there.

They're still vertical, just making out, but everything is going much faster inside Dean's body. His heart is hammering, and he's been bordering on turned-on all morning but now his dick is racing for the finish line. He wants to wrap his legs around Sam's skinny little hips and just do whatever it takes to get some friction.

Sam pulls away so abruptly that Dean's still pitching forward to find his mouth again when he says, "Hang on, okay?"

His backpack is on the floor. When he squats down to rifle through it, his jeans gap away from his back and Dean's eyes follow the line of his black boxer briefs. It takes everything Dean's got to turn away, to focus on getting his shirt off. He tugs the button on his jeans open but he doesn't push them down.

Sam comes up with a strip of two condoms, the third one torn away. The wrapper's probably still somewhere in Dean's car, knowing Sam, under the seats or discarded in the foot well.

Dean clears his throat. "What're those for?"

"No offense, but whatever Holly's got, I don't want it," Sam says. He's smiling, though, looking kind of proud of himself as he flips the packets between his fingers.

"No, asshole," Dean says. "I mean—we're not... doing that."

"You can do it to me," Sam says quietly. "I don't care which way we do it. I just want to."

It's weird. Dean's spent the better part of a month trying not to think about getting his kid brother on his back, and they've been hurtling full-speed toward this moment for weeks now, but he never actually gave himself enough time to think about the mechanics of it. He's thought about being underneath Sam, about being beside him and above him, but never really inside him.

Sam must see the hesitation in Dean's face because he tosses the condoms back down by his knapsack. "Can I at least suck your dick?" he asks bluntly.

Dean almost laughs, but he's too busy nodding so enthusiastically that he almost chokes on his own tongue.

It's not the most graceful thing ever. Sam kind of trips as he's hopping out of his jeans and Dean almost misses the mattress because he's trying to kiss Sam at the same time he's trying to sit

down. They make it, though; Sam with his long legs bare except for his boxer-briefs and Dean sprawled out lewdly with his jeans open, their hands on each other's jaws and in each other's hair as they kiss. Dean lies down and spreads his legs, and Sam settles between them, eager and rocking against Dean, their stomachs undulating together every time they breathe.

"You're kinda clumsy," Sam laughs, and Dean says, "I'll show you my acrobatics some other time," his teeth scraping against Sam's jaw.

When Sam pulls away to move down Dean's body, Dean has to cover his eyes with his hands. He's sure he looks like an idiot, but it's too much to look at, Sam's lips all kiss-swollen and wet, sliding over the skin below Dean's belly button.

"Lift up," Sam says, without a doubt the one in control of the situation. Dean lifts his hips obediently and Sam tugs his jeans down, just far enough that he's bare-assed.

"I've thought about this," Sam says, and then that's it. He doesn't touch Dean's cock with his hands first, just braces his body against the mattress and leans in to press his whole *face* against Dean, the crease of Dean's thigh. The slippery inside of Sam's lower lip catches and slips against the side of Dean's cock, which is burning up and harder than it's ever been, making a valiant reach for Dean's belly button.

Sam touches the base of Dean's dick and moves it, just enough that he can lick at the slit delicately, just a tiny taste at the tip of his tongue.

Dean doesn't want to tell Sam what to do, doesn't want to push him or pressure him, but there's only so many tiny dainty girly licks a guy can handle against the head of his cock. "*God*, Sam," he groans finally, loud enough that his voice fills the whole empty room. "Would you just—"

And Sam interrupts, sliding his mouth down over Dean's dick as far as it'll go. Dean's hands have been resting on his stomach, but when his cock hits the roof of Sam's mouth and slides backward, his arms fly out to his sides and he grabs the mattress like he's afraid it's going to sit up and tip him off.

Sam pulls off and looks up at Dean. "That good?" he asks, and when Dean nods helplessly, Sam goes back to work.

It's sloppy and wet, uncoordinated, and every so often Sam gags and pulls off and wipes his mouth on the back of his hands. Sam doesn't have any of the technique down, and Dean knows that's not only because he's never given a blowjob before. It's also because his history of *getting* them is limited to the last two weeks in the back seat of the Impala with an inexperienced girl who probably doesn't know her way around a popsicle.

Still, Sam keeps making these eager little noises, like he makes when their dad shells out for

steak, and the way his hair's falling in his eyes, the perfect line of his spine and the way the muscles in his forearms strain as he crouches over Dean—it's the best head Dean's ever gotten, hands-down.

He's stupid with it, the way he wants Sam's mouth all over his body, the way he wants to be surrounded by Sam and smothered by him, the way his brain skips wildly, like a scratched vinyl. Sam's thumbs are digging bruises into Dean's hips when Dean thinks, almost hysterically, *I'd die for you*, and he doesn't even know where it came from.

"Hey," Dean says, barely able to choke out the word around his own groaning. He reaches down and rubs a thumb under one of Sam's eyes, slowly pushes until Sam pulls off. It's the most obscene thing in the world, Sam hovering there above him, watching him as Dean's dick twitches back toward his mouth.

"I've thought about this," Sam says again. "All the time. I was—when I was with Laura, I just wanted to know how you'd taste and smell; I couldn't even *hear* her because I was thinking about those sounds you make. Spent my whole life listening to you come, hearing you jerk off in the shower and listening when you brought girls back and—"

Dean says, "Sam," his thumb still skating over Sam's cheek, "I want you to fuck me," and Sam finally stops talking.

He jerks back, sitting on his haunches with his hands still heavy on Dean's upper thighs. "Really?" he asks, and then he says, "Yeah, okay," quickly, like he's afraid Dean's going to change his mind.

Dean grabs his own dick and squeezes the base, hard, trying to slow himself down. "I don't really, um, know exactly..."

"I don't either," Sam says warily.

"But I want you to," Dean assures him. "God, Sam, I really fucking want you to, so we'll figure it out, okay, I mean—I can figure out the basic mechanics of it, and... what?"

Because Sam's kind of got this little smile on his face, warm and happy, the way he used to look at Dean when they were kids, when Dean was still his hero and not his weird older brother whose behavior he always had to explain to his friends. "Nothing," Sam says. "Just—you really want this."

Dean rolls his eyes and kicks at Sam until he moves off of Dean's legs. Dean stands up, wincing at the feeling when his jeans brush against his sensitive dick. He shoves his pants down in one quick motion and smiles smugly to himself when he hears Sam breathe, "*oh*."

There's lube in his bag, an old tube that's still mostly full. Dean bought it a while ago, last

summer when Pastor Jim was always around being churchy, cock-blocking Dean with every girl in Minnesota. He used it a couple times to jerk himself off, just for a little variety, and then lost interest. He's glad he hung onto it.

When he gets back to Sam's room, hard-on leading the way, Sam's sitting on the mattress with his back to Dean and his head hanging low.

Dean's stomach drops. "Shit. Sam, shit, don't—don't get upset, alright?"

Sam twists around, his face looking a little pinched. "I'm not freaking out, Dean," he says, in that comfortingly familiar my-brother-is-an-idiot tone he has. "I'm just trying to calm down so I don't come just from looking at you."

Dean feels his mouth drop open, his laugh sputtering out as he drops down beside Sam gracelessly. "This is the weirdest day of my life," he blurts.

Sam grins. "Dunno. We've had a pretty weird life."

Dean wouldn't ever say it out loud, but he kind of likes the way Sam says it, *life*, not lives, like they're sharing one road and they're going to keep sharing one road forever.

"This is still the weirdest," Dean says. He nudges Sam aside a little and then lays back down where he was before. He's totally naked, spread out without clothes or darkness or a sleeping bag over any of him. Sam touches Dean's nipple with his thumb, rubbing it with a relaxed look on his face like he's doodling in the margins of his math notes or something.

Finally, he stands up and pulls his underwear off. His dick is red and already leaking, straight out in front of him. Dean suddenly wants it in his mouth so badly he can already feel himself choking on it, but when he starts to sit up and reach for it Sam backs away. "No," he says, knocking Dean's legs apart and getting to his knees between them again.

He reaches for the lube in Dean's hand. "This from Minnesota?" he asks.

"How the hell did you know that?"

"You were jerking off all summer," Sam says. "Plus, you always hog the clean socks in your duffel bag. I see things when I steal them back." He puts one big, solid hand down on Dean's thigh and squeezes the muscle there. The touch finds Dean right where he lives, just the heavy solid *presence* of Sam is enough to make Dean close his eyes and lick his lower lip inadvertently. "This is gonna be weird," Sam warns as he pushes Dean's leg up until it's folded against his body.

"It's okay," Dean says, voice shaky and uncertain. "We've had a pretty weird life."

He takes the lube back from Sam, freeing up Sam's other hand so that he can take hold of both of Dean's legs, spreading them and pushing them up to his chest.

Dean is more than a little uncomfortable. Sam's looking down at Dean's *asshole*, spread wide for him, and there's nothing about it that Dean has ever been prepared for. Sam squeezes his eyes shut tight for a fraction of a second and Dean thinks, for a moment, that it's because Sam doesn't like what he sees, and then he realizes that Sam's just trying to keep himself composed.

"You do it," Sam says, looking up at Dean through his bangs. "I want to watch."

"You got some weird voyeur thing going on?" Dean says, his voice coming through husky and dark.

"Come on," Sam says. "Finger yourself."

Dean does. He slicks up while Sam watches, still holding his legs open, and he eases his index finger into himself. It's bizarre; his body keeps trying to resist and his arm is caught at a strange angle. At first, the discomfort overwhelms Dean's arousal, and he starts to go soft. He doesn't really care, though. He's too focused on Sam - the way the flush on Sam's chest and neck is deepening, how Sam keeps absently licking his lips in concentration.

It's when Dean lets out a long, shuddering breath and pushes a second finger into himself that Sam makes a noise and scoots close enough that his cock is snug against the curve where Dean's thigh meets his ass cheek. It's clear that Sam is trying to restrain himself, but his hips keep kind of lurching forward. Dean starts to get hard again just watching, just thinking about what it's going to feel like when his fingers are replaced by Sam's dick.

Dean twists his fingers a little harder, a little deeper at the thought. "You like that?" Sam asks—not talking dirty, but genuinely curious.

"I think," Dean stutters, "I think maybe, yeah. Oh, fuck."

Sam bends over, pressing Dean's legs back even farther, and kisses him. It's a soft kiss, startlingly sweet in the context of Dean fucking himself with his lubed up hand while his kid brother holds him open brazenly. "You look really good, Dean," he says, and again, it's like he's not even trying to be sexy, just sincere, wide-eyed.

"Oh, god, Sam. Fuck me, come on."

"Put another finger in first."

"No," Dean insists.

Sam sits back on his haunches and Dean squeezes his eyes shut. He's at full throttle again,

dangerously close to bottoming out, and then Sam mumbles, "Let me," and—*fuck*—squeezes the tip his index finger in alongside Dean's fingers.

"Sam," Dean gasps, "Sammy."

Sam blinks a little, frozen by the sight, and then springs into motion. "Yeah. Yeah," he says, grabbing the condoms he dropped earlier and tearing one open. His inexperienced fingers fumble a little; he's overly cautious, pinching the tip neatly and rolling it on like he's studied the diagrams for hours. Dean watches Sam's cock bob and twitch as he smooths the latex over it.

Sam's dick inside him is startlingly intrusive, even in comparison to his fingers. Sam only gets the head inside when Dean pulls away reflexively.

"Sorry," Sam says, at the same time Dean blurts, "sorry," and they both laugh uncomfortably.

"A little more lube," Dean says, slipping into older-and-wiser-brother mode easily. "Go slowly, give me a second to—*oh*—to get used to you."

It takes them a while, Sam slipping inside, and when he finally gets there, he folds his body down over Dean's, his shoulders under Dean's knees. "This is unbelievable," he whispers with his mouth pressed to Dean's throat.

"Come on," Dean coaxes. "Fuck me."

Sam starts to move instantly, eager. Dean reaches down to rest his hand against Sam's ass and feel the tight muscles there bunching and releasing. Sam's cock is stretching him, filling him up, Dean could swear it takes up all the room in his body and he loves it. When Sam shifts his weight a little, the whole room tilts on its side; he's drilling down over Dean's prostate. It's almost too much, at first. Part of Dean wants to tear away from Sam and take off—out the door, in the car, AC/DC and a pack of reds—just so that he can remember who he *is*, so he can stifle this desperation in his chest. He stifles the urge and grabs his dick instead, jacking himself hard and fast in time with Sam's strokes.

Sam bites him, rasping his teeth against the tendons where Dean's neck meets his shoulder. He's making noise: gasps and grunts and the occasional whimper, buried in Dean's skin.

Dean finds Sam's lips just before he comes. He sucks Sam's tongue into his mouth as his body takes over, arcing up and curling in as the liquid jets up between their stomachs, spreading thick wetness as they slide together.

Dean can't find words. He just pants out harsh breaths and keeps his hands on Sam, sliding through the sweat on his hot skin.

"I love watching you do that," Sam murmurs, his eyes squinting like he's in pain. "You don't

know what you look like, Dean." He starts to pull out, slow and careful, but Dean squeezes his bicep.

"No," Dean says. "Come on, keep going." He's worn out and oversensitive but he wants Sam to come inside him.

Sam shakes his head, though, and pulls the rest of the way out. He's trying to control himself, measuring long, deep, shuddering breaths. "I want," he says.

Dean waits, but Sam doesn't finish. "Anything you want, Sam," he says, "but I can't read your mind."

Sam smiles weakly and, with shaking hands, pulls the condom off his dick. He must be going crazy right now, so much stimulation and no release. He didn't even come last night. Dean feels a surge of almost disturbing pride in his brother's endurance.

"I want your fingers," Sam says. He grabs the lube and presses it to Dean's chest. "Inside."

Dean blinks up at Sam for a moment. There's no one in the world Dean knows better, but Sam's still full of surprises. Ridiculous, crazy, *wonderful* fucking surprises.

He moves over so that there's enough room for Sam to stretch out beside him. They both lie on their sides, facing each other. Dean grabs Sam by the back of his neck and kisses him. It's a dirty kiss, their tongues battling between their mouths, lips just barely moving.

Dean is drunk on the whole day. Sam should be in school right now, learning about imaginary numbers or something ridiculous, but he *skipped* it. Sam Winchester ditched school so he could stay home and get sweaty with his brother.

Sam wraps his leg around Dean's body, resting it over Dean's flank. His cock is hard and insistent against Dean's belly, but Sam is trying to stay still and avoid humping into the mess of come between them. Dean can feel Sam's body trembling with the effort of it as he tries to kiss him and open the cap of the lube at the same time.

Once his hand is wet, he kisses Sam a few more times and then drags his mouth away. Their foreheads rest together and his eyes cross trying to watch Sam's face as he trails his slick fingers down over the base of Sam's spine to the crack of his ass.

Sam clenches his ass for a moment, but it's excitement, not fear.

"You good?" Dean asks. He rubs his index finger over Sam's tight hole, feeling the furrow of skin.

Sam nods and bites his lip. His hair is stuck to his face, sweaty and long.

Dean pushes his finger in, just the tip, and Sam throws his head back and groans deeply. Dean can't resist the long damp stretch of Sam's neck; he leans in to suck a hickey there as he pushes his finger deeper into Sam, just up to the second knuckle.

It's all Sam can handle, though, he squeezes his eyes shut and tightens his leg around Dean's torso and comes in violent waves, his entire body pulsing with it as his mouth opens on a silent cry.

Dean holds onto Sam as he comes down, body still twitching. Finally, when Sam catches his breath, Dean starts to pull his finger out, but Sam tosses his head against the pillow and says, "No, no, more, come on."

"What?"

"Keep going," Sam says, his voice hoarse and foggy. "Put another finger in."

Dean works an elbow underneath himself and sits up as much as he can with one hand still buried in the crack of Sam's ass. "Oh my god, Sam," he says, lust and awe creeping into his voice. His cock is up again, the hunger returning at breakneck speed.

Sam looks at him with lazy, hooded eyes, and grinds forward into him again. "I want you to make me come again," he rasps. "You can."

-

Sam should probably be embarrassed by the way his feverish cries ricochet around the whole house when Dean wrenches a second orgasm out of him, but he's too distracted by Dean's two fingers driving up into his body and Dean's tongue on his balls to care.

Afterward, Dean licks up the whole slough from Sam's stomach, his tongue trawling across Sam's skin like he's covered in barbecue sauce instead of cooling come.

"God," Sam pants, watching him, drawing his palm over the sweaty spikes of Dean's hair. "Fuck." He wants to tell Dean how long he's wanted that, and how it was better than any of his thousand fantasies combined. He'd like to come up with some actual *words*, but it's like his entire vocabulary is packed away in some corner of his brain that Dean has managed to completely turn off.

Instead of talking, he just rolls them over and presses Dean down into the mattress, tucking his head under Dean's chin and curling into him.

Dean kisses his forehead and tangles a hand in Sam's hair. He'll probably deny it later, if Sam

ever has reason to bring it up.

"Better than third period geometry?" Dean says after a long stretch—ten minutes, maybe fifteen—of silence.

"I finished geometry in the eighth grade," Sam says, smiling into the dip under Dean's collarbone.

"Smartass." Dean runs his fingertips down Sam's arm, so lightly that Sam shivers from the touch.

It's a long time before Sam trusts his legs enough to stand up. Even so, he almost tips over when he's stepping into his sweatpants. Dean laughs from the bed, still naked and confident in his skin as he scratches at his belly. "Shut up," Sam says.

"Hey, it's cool. I wore you out; it happens."

"You were ready to quit after round one. But don't worry, Dean, you can work on your endurance."

Dean laughs and chucks the tube of lubricant at Sam because it's the closest thing within reach. "Where you going, anyway?" he asks, and if Sam didn't know better he'd say there was a thread of worry in Dean's expression.

"Downstairs," Sam says. "I want something to drink."

"Bring the orange juice up."

Sam's quadriceps muscles tremble as he makes his way down the stairs. Out from under Dean's gaze, he smiles hugely—and he probably looks ridiculous, with his wide, unfettered grin that's about to break his face in half, but he doesn't care.

He expected to feel grown-up and mature after sleeping with Laura, but he didn't. He felt the same as always - nervous and small and clumsy in his own existence.

Now, though, he feels *different*. His biggest secret is out in the open, and he and Dean are sharing it. He told Dean what he wanted, and Dean gave it to him. He didn't get freaked out or scared and he didn't scare Dean away. He made Dean *come*.

He's on his way back upstairs with the orange juice carton in his hand when he hears their cell phone ringing in the pocket of Dean's jacket, tossed over the back of the couch.

Dean stretches his arms high above his head, listening to the *pop* of his spine. He's riding a foggy buzz, like a hit of really good pot, enough to have him stupid and smiling at himself in the mirror while he washes his hands and face.

He runs a damp washcloth over his chest and down between his legs, but he's not exactly taking great care. He smells like his brother, all over. He doesn't want to shower.

He has to be at the video store at two. Getting dressed feels strange—he puts on his same jeans and laces his boots the way he always does, but today he's doing it with the taste of Sam's come heavy on the roof of his mouth. The whole world feels a little different now that Dean knows what it feels like inside Sam's body.

Downstairs, Sam is sitting up on the kitchen counter next to the sink, scraping his thumb against the price sticker on the juice carton. "Yo, Sammy. Quit hogging all the OJ."

Sam slides to his feet in one fluid motion and drags Dean in close by the shirt collar, kissing him hard. When he pulls back, his pupils are dilated. "You taste like my..." He looks down at the floor almost shyly. "Um."

"You like that?" Dean laughs, sticking his tongue out. "Jizz and orange juice make a good combination?"

"Don't think people are gonna start ordering it with their pancakes," Sam says quietly. "But it's not that bad."

Sam's grinning, but his voice is a little uneasy. Dean pushes his bangs up off his forehead and smoothes them back, holding Sam's head in his hands. Sam doesn't shake him away or try to duck out of his grip.

"Dad called," he says.

Dean steps back, arms dropping to his sides. "Oh." Usually, when Dad is gone, Dean can't wait for him to get back so that the anxious knot in his stomach can settle and so Sam can quit pretending he's not worried. Plus, staying in one place too long makes Dean feel caged and stifled. Not this time, though. For a while, the entire world was this house, him and Sam and the mattress on the floor, and Dean didn't need anything else. "Fuck." He takes another clumsy step away from Sam.

Sam grabs Dean's t-shirt so it bunches up around his ribcage and doesn't let him move any further. "He'll be here before dark, and then we're gonna head toward Pastor Jim's." He rubs the cotton of the shirt between his fingers, his brow furrowed. "You need to go pick up your paycheck," he says. "And I need to get my records from the school."

Dean grabs at Sam's hair again, not running his fingers through it or smoothing it back but just *grabbing* it, a thick hank of it in his fist. He wants to pull Sam in and kiss him again, but it's probably time to practice not doing that every time he wants. "Okay," he says, turning back upstairs to start packing. "Okay. Get dressed, we'll head into town in ten minutes."

When Sam doesn't follow him, Dean turns around expectantly.

Sam has his arms crossed over his chest. "I think I should see Laura," he says.

"Okay," Dean says, shrugging.

Sam just blinks at him, like he was waiting for something else.

Dean asks, "What'd you think I was going to say?"

"I don't know. Something... I don't know. This is weird."

"Yeah, well. There's not exactly a manual for this kind of thing. No *Sleeping with Your Brother for Dummies*." He pats down his jacket until he finds his keys and holds them out for Sam. "It's fine, dude, go talk to your girl. Pick up my paycheck from Holly on your way, yeah?"

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Sam's stomach aches the entire drive back from Laura's house, a dull twisting pain low in his belly. He wants to pull over and press his face to the steering wheel, just catch his breath, but instead he pops Dean's tape out of the deck and fiddles with the radio until he finds something he recognizes.

The way she looked at him when he said he was leaving Panabaker tore through him like he was paper. "But you just got here, Sam," she'd said, her face this mess of nauseous confusion and hurt, with a hint of fear clouding her eyes.

The sun is starting to dip behind the trees when he pulls up the driveway. Dean is on the front steps with his elbows on his knees and a bottle of Fat Tire in his hand. He smiles a little when Sam gets out of the car, and the knot in Sam's gut loosens a little bit.

There's a six pack on the porch by Dean's hip, but Sam takes Dean's bottle instead, stealing a sip before handing it back. Dean doesn't protest. Sam sits down on the step below Dean's, right next to him so that Dean's knee is about level with Sam's shoulder. They look out at the road as

the sky is turning pink, and Sam remembers when they were little and they'd crowd up against the window at Jim's church, waiting side-by-side for their dad to get back.

"Well?" Dean asks finally, knocking the cold bottle lightly against the back of Sam's neck. Sam shivers a little. "How'd it go?"

"She doesn't understand," Sam says.

"What is there not to understand? We're just hitting the road, it's not your fault."

He reaches down to scratch at dried mud on his sneaker. "She just... she looked like she was scared or something. I don't know. I feel like crap about it."

Dean's fingers brush against his neck, at first just wiping away the condensation from the beer bottle and then sliding up to curl into his hair. It's getting even longer than usual. Dad is probably going to tell Sam to cut it. "People get freaked out," Dean says. "They think that when someone skips town without notice, it's because they're running from something, because they did something wrong and they're hiding. Don't let it bother you, Sam. Judgmental idiots, they make stupid assumptions—"

"She's not an idiot," Sam says. He closes his eyes and leans back into Dean's touch, his elbows resting on the step behind him. "I think that too, sometimes. That we're running and hiding."

Dean sighs overdramatically, imitating Sam. Yesterday it would've pissed Sam off, but he's got Dean's fingers combing through the tangles in his hair, and he can still feel the weird dull throb of Dean's fingers in his ass. It's not yesterday anymore. "Come on, then," Dean says. "Get all your bitching out now, before Dad's back, please."

Sam starts to talk but snaps his mouth closed. Finally he says, "I just didn't like the way she looked at me. Made me feel guilty as hell."

Sam hears Dean set his empty bottle down and then the pop-hiss of Dean opening a new beer—all one-handed, because he still hasn't stopped touching Sam.

Finally, Dean says, "That's why I never say goodbye to people."

"I had sex with her, Dean," Sam says, and then winces because maybe Dean didn't want to be reminded of that. Dean's fingers in Sam's hair don't still, though; if anything, Dean edges closer,

the whole length of his calf along the outside of Sam's bicep. "I don't want to be that guy who just takes off without saying goodbye."

Dean laughs a little, under his breath. "Hey," he says. "You and I both know you won't ever be that guy. You and your freakin' bleeding heart."

Sam swivels around to look at Dean. He's got stubble on his upper lip and his chin, and with the dusky orange light casting shadows across his features, he looks a little bit older. Sam thinks about the road trip they were talking about and tries to imagine him and Dean, a few years from now.

Maybe they'll finally finish the thing that killed their mom, and Dean will come watch Sam graduate from college—wherever he goes—and then they'll hit the road. Just a road trip with his brother before he starts his job or grad school or whatever.

They'll pull over next to lakes and trees to eat lunch and laugh, and the trunk will be full of their dirty laundry and Sam's books and Dean's maps instead of weapons. They'll take turns driving and choosing the music. They won't have to worry about their dad, either, because he'll be safe, working in some auto shop somewhere in the Midwest.

And one day Dean will say, "Yo, Sammy, you remember how to kill a werewolf?" and Sam will rack his brain and reply, "Damn! I forgot! Man, that's gonna drive me crazy. I haven't thought about that stuff in years," and they'll laugh and turn the radio up.

There's a hole in the seam of Dean's jeans, at the side of his knee. Sam wriggles the tip of his index finger in against Dean's leg, making the hole bigger, and then leans in and presses his mouth to the fabric just because he can. "Maybe we've got time before Dad gets here," he says, slipping a hand under Dean's jeans at the ankle, rubbing his thumb over the ridge of bone.

Dean runs a finger over the top of Sam's ear. "Yeah," he says. "But maybe we don't."

Humming in disappointed agreement, Sam props his chin on Dean's knee and looks up at him. "But we're still going to do this though, right? You and me?"

Dean only hesitates for a minute, biting the inside of his cheek. "Yeah," he says, then. "I mean, until you don't want to anymore."

"Or until you don't," Sam adds.

Dean looks out over Sam's head, at the road, a tiny sad smile curling his lips. He doesn't say anything for a long time, and just as he looks like he's about to speak, his whole face is lit up by bright white headlights sweeping into the yard. He blinks and grabs Sam up in a rough headlock, his elbow tight at Sam's neck. "C'mon," he says. He lets go of Sam and tosses the two beer bottles into a bush.

Dad looks a little stiff as he gets out of the pickup truck, his journal tucked underneath his arm, but he doesn't have any visible injuries other than a dark bruise over one cheekbone. Damage inventory is always the first thing Sam does when Dad gets back from a hunt. The more beat up their father is, the more Sam is going to have to fight—to insist on recovery time, to try in vain once again to get their dad to slow down. Dean always thinks Sam's just being difficult, but really, Sam feels like he's fighting for their lives.

"Boys," Dad says, gruff, pulling his baseball cap off.

Dean says, "Hey, Dad," as Sam replies, "Sir."

"You packed?"

Dean jabs a thumb in the direction of their duffels, sitting on the porch next to the rest of the six-pack. Sam wonders if John is going to say something about the beers, but he just nods and kicks unhappily at the truck's front wheel.

"Damn truck's a piece of junk," John says. "Glad to leave it behind." He pulls his bags out of the seat, handing one to Dean and passing his thermos and books over to Sam.

It feels strange to watch Dad put his stuff into the Impala. The car means something different to Sam than it did when Dad left Panabaker, after so many nights of driving alone with Dean, wanting to burn like an invisible ball of fire in the car beside them.

"I'm beat," John says, opening the door and getting into the back seat. "Dean, you drive for a few hours."

Dean pulls the key out of his pocket and tosses it in the air a few times before he bats it over to Sam. "Sam can do it," Dean says.

Sam is careful, pulling out of the driveway. He does everything right—his hands at the ten and

the two, hitting his signal even though there aren't any other cars around for miles. He keeps the radio low enough not to bother Dad and he's careful not to hit the brakes too hard.

It's ten minutes before Dad seems to relax. He lies down in the back, using his jacket as a pillow, and says, "Not bad, Sammy. Must've gotten lots of practice."

Sam glances at Dean. He's slouching in his seat, smiling out at the road.

Sam says, "Yeah, well. There wasn't much else to do at night."

THE END.