

Title: Postcards (From Easy Street)

Author name:  [clex_monkie89](#)

Artist name:  [mashimero](#)

Genre: SPN AU

Pairings: Sam/Jess, Sam/Dean (also Dean/OMC, Dean/Cassie, Sam/Zach)

Rating: NC-17

Wordcount: 43,200

Summary: She's his baby brother's new girlfriend.

He's some stranger who knows more about her boyfriend than she does.






Together they ~~fight crime~~ ~~have sex~~ talk on the phone a lot.

(Oh, and also there's some guy named Sam who keeps getting his ass kicked and has a run-in with some incubi-infected frat guys.)

Notes/Acknowledgments: Betad by  [waterofthemoon](#),  [ashley](#), and  [dea liberty](#).

I knew exactly what I wanted to do for this year's Big Bang. I wanted to give Sam [DID](#) and explore that. Wee!Sam, Stanford, Series, I wanted to do it all. But then I realized this fic wanted to be written in short bursts, because all of Sam's alters wanted to have their say, and I didn't know if I could keep it up for 20k.

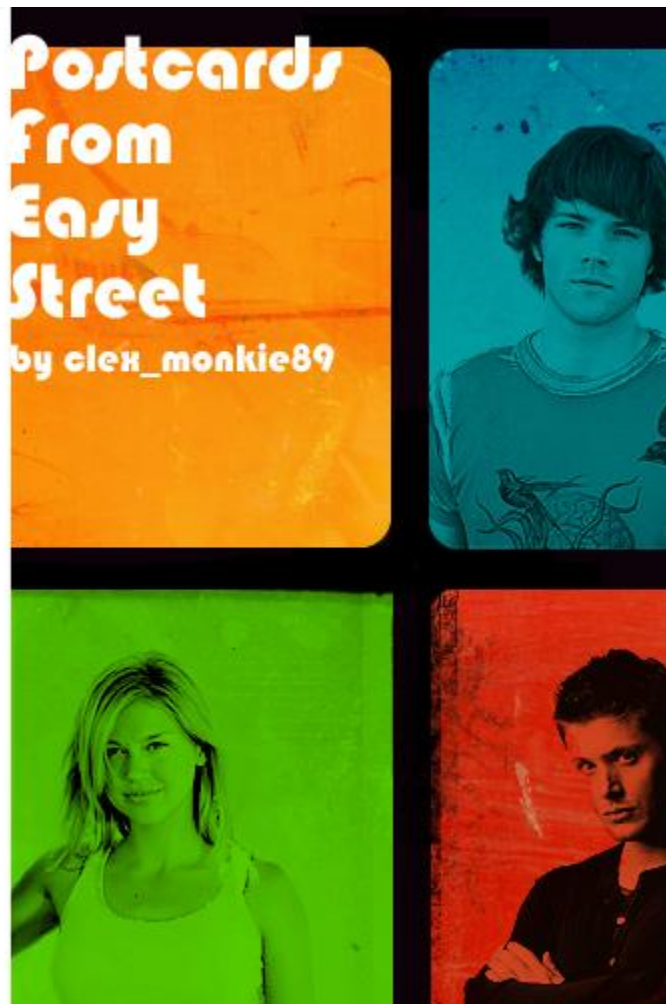
Cue panicking when I realized I had no fucking idea what to do.

And somehow I decided on this. I don't remember exactly how, though I think it's safe to say that the people to blame include;  [waterofthemoon](#),  [ashley](#),  [unperfectwolf](#),  [giggingkat](#) and  [stephanometra](#).

So this is my fic, as it came to be. Sort of. The idea went along the lines of this:

Dean randomly realizes one day that Sam probably wouldn't think to tell someone about his deadly allergy to X. Cue freaking out. Dean sends postcards to Jess, telling her things like that and how to keep Sammy alive, well, and relatively happy. They become letters, which become phone calls.

I'd like to thank all my friends, but  [waterofthemoon](#) specifically, because she's the only reason I didn't just give up several times.



Jess is right in the middle of a *fantastic* dream involving Sam, a pair of crotchless panties, and a lot of ping-pong balls when the shrill ring of her cell phone pierces through her consciousness. She drops it twice before she opens her eyes and realizes she either has to unplug it from the charger or sit up to talk on it.

Halfway through the fourth ring, her eyes adjust to the dark enough that she can see "Cowboy" on her caller ID. She makes a groaning sound into the phone as she rolls over with it.

"It's midnight, baby," Sam tells her from way back in California. His voice is low and deeper than usual, and there's no thumping bass or screaming drowning him out. She could have sworn he said he was working tonight.

"Rabbit, rabbit," she yawns back at him.

They sit in silence for a few minutes while Jess tries to wake herself up more. She knows she should probably feel sorry about making Sam call her, even though he's the one who volunteered to do it, but it's not like he was asleep or anything; it's only nine back there. Besides, he knew she was superstitious when he started dating her.

"Do you really think it works? I mean, has every month *really* been lucky?"

Jess stretches and smiles a little. She thinks it's cute how pessimistic and skeptical he is about everything, even if it *is* a little annoying sometimes. "Well," she starts. "I haven't died yet. So, yeah, I'd say it works."

"Isn't that like saying that since I didn't brush my hair today and I'm still alive that I shouldn't ever brush my hair again or I might die?"

"Did you just compare my health and well-being to brushing your hair?"

"No! No, no, no! I didn't, I was just saying... that you have every right to believe in what you want to believe?" Jess decides to be merciful and let him off the hook this time.

"Why didn't you brush your hair today?"

"Because I am a *man*, and we men don't brush our hair."

"You have no idea where your brush is, do you?"

"I know it's somewhere around here. At least, I think it is. I haven't seen it in a while, but it's not like I take it with me when I leave, so it has to be here somewhere."

"Sam. You need to go buy another brush, then. I bet your hair is all knotted up and tangled-looking."

"I don't need to look pretty for anybody but you, so I figure I've got at least another week or two before I have to gussy myself up again."

"Gussy yourself up? Please stop talking like my grandmother. It's not sexy." There's silence where Jess expects some kind of half-assed comeback. "Sam? Hello, Sam? Are you there?"

"Sorry, sorry about that. Kurt came out to tell me I've got five minutes till I'm late. I'll call you when I get off, okay?" Jess tries to hold back an irritated sigh. She doesn't mind him calling; she loves it, in fact. She thinks it's sweet. It's just that he still thinks has to ask whether it's okay if he does it, because god forbid Sam be anything but absolutely perfect. He *has* made progress, though. Yesterday, he admitted that there was something she liked that he actually didn't, and she hasn't gotten a random two am call from him on his lunch break in at least a month.

"You know you can call. You don't have to ask my permission."

"Are you sure? It's okay if you're not."

Jess can't hold the sigh back this time. "If I didn't want you to, I would tell you. I've done it before, right?" Sam makes an affirmative-sounding noise, and Jess feels like she just stomped all over a sad puppy. How the hell do you train someone out of being a complete doormat? "Go on, don't wanna be late for work."

"Yeah, okay. Good night, babe."

"Good night, Cowboy. Call me when you're off."



Dean's sitting in a Waffle House in Paris, Texas with his dad, getting ready to fake an allergic reaction to the onion in his omelet, when it comes to him. Sam's allergic to blueberries—what if he didn't tell anyone? He could accidentally eat one, and no one would know until it was too late.

Logic smacks into Dean right after that. Blueberries aren't something that people put into everyday foods. And besides, Sam's not deathly allergic to them; he'd just be a bitch and covered in hives for a while. Even so, it freaks him out enough to start thinking.

And as anyone who knows Dean will tell you, that is never a good thing.



Sam wouldn't say that he's panicking, per se. Maybe slightly worried. Freaking out a little bit. Two seconds away from losing it.

But, really, it's not like he doesn't have any reason to; he *did* just get thrown through a window. It doesn't actually matter that it was a first story window or that the cuts were minimal. That takes

force, and hitting the hard ground with that much power behind it just plain hurts.

Sam pushes himself up, ignoring the sharp twinge in his back, and kicks out the remaining shards of glass from the window before climbing back in. His adrenaline's kicking in, making his hands shake and hiding any pain under the sudden rush of endorphins.

The sledgehammer he used to break the wall trips him, and he skids on his hands and knees, then crawls the rest of the way to the body. He manages to empty the bottle of vodka—less conspicuous than a jug of gas and a hell of a lot better smelling, too—on the corpse before the damned ghost comes back.

Another hole gets knocked into the wall as the sledgehammer goes flying and Sam ducks it by mere inches. Rocks and beer bottles go flying at him next, a few hitting him but most missing, broken glass raining down from where they hit the wall and beams. He gets half the salt out of the Pepsi bottle he's carrying it in before the ghost remembers that it can pick *him* up instead of just pelting him with things.

He misses what's left of the window this time but slams into the wall with his back curved just enough for his shoulders to take the brunt of the impact. Everything swoops and goes dark when he climbs to his feet, and his stomach rolls as the world rights itself again. Sam makes his way back to the body as fast as he can, pulling out the matches and snatching up the dropped bottle as he does.

Sam's kneeling on the sledgehammer this time, and he's sure that's the only reason it doesn't go straight through his skull while the fire struggles to take root. "Fuck, fuck, please be enough, come on," he begs as he pours the last of the salt onto the pathetic fire. "It's a fucking full-sized body. I couldn't have missed it all, come on, *please*."

Just then, Sam is knocked flat on his ass again. Before the sledgehammer or the roof or something else can be thrown at him, he takes off, throwing what's left of the vodka and its bottle in the direction of the gaping hole in the wall before climbing back through the window. He can hear the fire crackling behind him as it finally hits the alcohol and gets the fuel it needs. There's no time now to check if he managed to get enough of the body, but he can always come back later to make sure.

The Budget Suites Sam is staying in until the dorms open again is two and a half miles away, Sam's bike is a block away, and Sam is face down in the dirt in front of a half-remodeled dorm. Various parts of his body are numb, throbbing, or shooting with pain. His heart is racing, his head is spinning, and all he can think about is how much *easier* salt and burns were with Dad and Dean.

He's halfway back when it dawns on him that it's Tuesday. He only has two hours until Jess's plane lands, and he didn't even remember to ask *anyone* if he could borrow their car. It takes half an hour to get to the airport, probably forty-five minutes to an hour in a cab at this time of night, so Sam figures he has an hour to get home, lick his wounds, and change his clothes before he leaves.

The cab ride there is spent fighting his way through the adrenaline crash and trying to think up some kind of believable story for Jess as to why he looks like he just had his ass handed to him. Sam succumbs to the crash and falls asleep at some point because the next thing he knows, the cab driver is waking him up to tell him they're at the airport and ask which terminal to go to.

Sam gives the driver half the fare so far and tells him that if he doesn't take off while Sam runs inside real quick, he's got a return trip to the college and a good tip waiting for him. Traffic must've been worse than Sam thought, though, because he doesn't make it to the luggage check. He barely even makes it into the terminal before Jess attacks him out of nowhere in a flying hug that knocks Sam flat on his already abused back.

Jess smiles down at him, two blonde pigtailed framing her shiny and makeup-free face. "Oh, baby, look at you. You look worse than I did during finals. How long has it been since you slept?"

She's still straddling him at this point, so before Sam even begins to answer, he maneuvers them back onto their feet, shoulders Jess's backpack, and takes the rest of her bags for her. "I had a nap on the way here. Don't worry about it."

"Fuck that," she says, climbing in the cab. "We're going back to wherever you got picked up from, we're ordering Chinese on the way, and then I'm going to stuff you full of food, turn something on the TV, and scratch your tummy until you fall asleep like a good little boy, got it?"

"Jess, I'm fine. And also, not five."

"Don't care. The only part up for negotiation is how long you want to wait to order the food. And possibly the TV thing, but it depends on what's on when we get there."



"Becky. Becky! Becca! Becky, Becky, Becky, Becky, Becky, Becky, Becky, Becky, Becky, Becky! Pick up the phone, I know you're there. You have no job, and you're too lazy for summer classes. Becky! *Rebecca!* Zach? Anyone? Fine, if you guys ever come home or whatever, I'm stuck at work, and I need a ride home. Please? Come on, guys, you have to be there. Hello? You both *suck.*" Jess hangs up and tries Becky's cell again.

She tries Zach's after that, then Carrie, Alysia, Evan, Eric, Tasha, Chris, the other Chris, Becky again, and then Zach's house phone two more times before she gives up and goes back inside the

restaurant to wait.

Jess is on her fourth free refill when Becky finally calls her back. "You failure, tell me you're not still sitting at work."

"I couldn't get back to the apartment!" Jess throws a ten on the table for her dollar fifty drink and pushes her way through the doors outside.

"I own a dress that costs more than you've made your entire time working at your job, and you're *still* a million times more spoiled than I am. You won't catch herpes from a cab, Jess."

"Fuck you, I've been in a cab before. I don't know Zach's address. And where the hell were you guys? I called you at least fifty times."

"Zach and I got bored, so we went to a movie."

"You went to the movies with your brother? I know Zach has no life, but don't you have a boyfriend you can go to movies with?"

"Ryan has horrible taste in movies, and he hates when I talk during them. We're on our way to get you. Tell Zach 'thank you.'"

Jess yells, "Thank you, Zach," into the phone, ignoring the stares she gets. "And I think it's clear that you and Ryan should never have kids. The last thing the world needs is more people who shush during movies."

"Yeah, speaking of children, I can't help but notice you haven't bought tampons in more than a month," Becky says. In the background, Zach makes a gagging noise and says something unintelligible. "Oh, be quiet, don't act like you've never bought them for Lisa."

"I don't know why I'm late, but I know I'm not pregnant, Beck, so don't worry."

"You know that condoms aren't a hundred percent effective, right?"

"But not having sex is."

Becky pauses. "You two haven't had sex yet? You've been dating for two months—shouldn't you have done it two months ago?"

"Shut up, Sam wants to take it slow. I think it's sweet."

"Are you sure he likes girls?"

"He's *bisexual*, not gay. Just because a guy likes dick doesn't mean he can't like pussy, too. It's that kind of narrow—"

"Jess! Oh my *god*, get off your soapbox! I've been to the meetings, too. I've heard your screaming—"

"Yelling."

"Whatever. I was making a joke, and it flew so far over your head that it may as well have been a satellite."

"Sorry, you hit a sore spot." Zach's SUV pulls up, so she snaps her phone shut and climbs in, continuing the conversation without missing a beat. "Sam's moved on from the suffocation and smothering, mostly, but he's still all paranoid that I think I'm not enough for him."

"Okay, wait," Zach starts. "I'm lost. I only heard Beck's half of the conversation, so I think I'm missing something."

"No, I'm lost, too. I think she skipped a sentence somewhere."

"I'm the first girl Sam's ever been with or dated." Jess fishes around for the exact word, the right way to explain it. "I'm the only girlfriend he's *ever* had."

"Really? I mean, I know Sam's kinda weird, but he's not ugly or anything."

"No, he's had tons of boyfriends, just nev—wait, did you just admit that you think my boyfriend's hot?"

"Jess, I swear, if you start talking about my brother and anything even resembling him having sex, I'm going to throw myself out of this car."

"Sorry, sorry. Like I was saying, Sam's had boyfriends. He's been with guys before, but I'm the first girl he's ever been with," Jess explains. "Not 'been with' been with, but you know. Anyway, I know this, and he knows that I know this. And he's Sam, so now he's all terrified that I don't think I'm enough for him."

"Not to sound obnoxious or anything, but is it possible that maybe he's worrying so much because you *aren't* enough for him?" Zach asks. "Don't start yelling, I'm not done talking! I'm just saying that maybe he likes you and your brain all well and good, but your body just doesn't get him going."

"No, Zach, trust me. He likes my body just fine. The problem isn't Sam not getting it started; he just backs away before it gets really good."

"Yeah, okay. I love you, Jess, you know that, but I think this might be crossing a line. I mean, Sam's my friend, too, and I don't think he'd be all that comfortable with me knowing this kind of stuff about you two."

"Oh, please, it's Jess," Becky scoffs. "If he doesn't expect everyone she's ever met to know their

sex life, then he's obviously delusional or retarded."

"Still. I don't feel right about it."

Jess huffs impatiently. "Then sing a song in your head or something, I'm not gonna be offended if you wimp out. Girl talk is scary to the untrained ear."

"I'm not scared."

"Yes, you are," Becky disagrees.

Jess smiles at him from the backseat. "Wuss."

"Scaredy-cat."

"It's a wonder I still like girls after you two."

"You know, if you ever feeling like trying out for the other team—"

"I'm unlocking the door, Jess." Jess stops, even though she knows Becky probably isn't actually going to throw herself from a moving car like some idiot.

"Fine, fine. I'm stopping. Except to ask Zach how long he's ever waited to have sex with a girl and why."

"*Jess*, come on!"

"It's the exact opposite of asking about him having sex! And you know what, go ahead and throw yourself out of the car. Sam and I have been dating for two months, and I've never even seen him shirtless. Hell, I've never even seen him wear short sleeves. I just want to have some kind of clue as to why my boyfriend will only occasionally try for second base with me."

"He's gay."

"Shut up, Zach, he's shy," Becky says. "He's practically Amish. They barely even kiss."

"Yes, or he's shy. Go with that."

"We kiss! We kiss a *lot*—just not in public."

"Well, okay, you said he just had a bad breakup, so maybe he just wants to take it slow right now."

That makes no sense at all to Jess. "He's a *guy*; what kind of guy wants to take it slow?"

"A gay guy."

"We're ignoring you now," Becky tells Zach, voice sing-song and teasing like Jess's little sister pretty much every time she opened her mouth until she turned fourteen.

"You guys are no fun."

"I'm gonna tell Sam you think he's gay," Becky threatens him.

"So?" Zach shrugs it off. "Guys say things like that."

"*Children*. This is serious. I'm talking about my sex life here."

"You know what you should do? You should 'accidentally' spill something on your shirt and then—"

"Did it. Didn't work."

"Really?" Becky pauses for a moment, trying to think of something else. "Okay, I know what to do. You need to get him to go swimming with you. Try it in the middle of the night when there's no one else around, you in your bikini, him in his trunks...."

"Tried that, too. He pulled off his jacket, emptied his pockets, and jumped in fully clothed. It was sweet and romantic and all that but not really conducive to sex."

"You could always just ask him."

"Oh, yeah, that's a great idea. Zach, what would you say if your girlfriend asked why you wouldn't have sex with her?"

"Well, if I were Sam, I guess I would say something like, 'I'm sorry, Jess, but between working my fifteen jobs and studying for my seven classes this quarter, along with the time for emoing and being mysterious, I just don't have time for sex. And you don't have a cock, either, so that's a deal breaker.'"

The kick to the back of Zach's seat, when it comes, surprises no one.



Dean is drunk off his ass in Oklahoma—because there's nothing to do in Oklahoma but get drunk and pretend Kansas is farther away—when he writes the first version of the letter.

He's smart enough to get trashed in his room and not some random bar in this little podunk, piece of shit town, but that's the only thing smart about him that night. He has a bottle of rum next to him on the bed—fucking *rum*, what kind of liquor store doesn't take credit cards—and a half-bent notebook in front of him.

The letter starts out, *You stupid bitch, you took my brother*, and goes downhill from there.

Dean wakes up in the morning to John kicking his bed. The TV's going full blast on some shitty rap video on MTV, ten thousand bad drummers are all playing the *Wipeout* solo in his head, and his mouth is the level of slimy that usually only happens when he gets sick. He has a *hangover*. He hasn't had a hangover since Sammy was thirteen and broke both his arms falling out of a tree. Kid might be a pussy lightweight, but he matched Dean swig for swig that night, and together they polished off almost an entire bottle of whiskey.

Dean braces himself for the ass-chewing he's about to get, but it never comes. John just tosses the remote on the bed and tells him that he better be ready to go get breakfast by the time John's out of the shower. Dean waits until he hears the creaky groan of the pipes before he pushes himself off the bed. His stomach lurches once he's upright, and sheer force of will keeps him from throwing up all over himself and the bed.

He finds the notebook under the sink next to the bathroom, pages bent and splayed open like it was thrown there—probably in a fit of rage, if Dean's honest with himself. He's not sure what makes him go over there and pick it up; maybe some random pain-loving part of his brain leaps up and takes control of him, because the next thing he knows, he's halfway under the sink and reading the damned thing.

He tries to skim it, but he can't tear his eyes away. It's like watching a car accident. Or a video of a car accident he was in, that he caused, possibly involving nuns or orphans or small puppies or all three.

It's that bad.

He starts with Jessica—*You don't even feed him, what the fuck is wrong with you*—and rolls from her into Sam—*You ungrateful asshole, how could you just leave like that?* Dean's mouth goes dry, and it gets hard for him to swallow. There are three pages devoted to what a horrible little brother and human being Sam is, how hard Dean wants to hit him, and just how much Dean still hasn't convinced himself that he doesn't care about him anymore.

The next page and a half is rage at his father—*You can't just leave me here like this*—followed by another two pages of drunken wallowing—*Why couldn't you just stay, damn it, it's only one night*.

The last four pages are variations of *I miss my mom* and *I can't remember her voice*, and Dean's

thankful that he doesn't have the energy to cry or sob like he knows he wants to.

When John comes out of the bathroom, Dean's no more ready to leave than he was when John went in. He's still in last month's jeans and the same foul smelling shirt he had on last night. He's pulled himself out from his cramped hiding space, though, and is instead sitting next to the sink, the pages from the notebook torn and shredded around him as he rests his head in his hands and tries to will away the stinging itch in the back of his eyes.

This is what Dean really hates about hangovers; not the nausea or anything like that, but the way they drain all his energy and then turn him into a girl without even having the fucking decency to give him tits.

Dean doesn't resist when his dad pulls him to his feet or shrugs him into his jacket. He lags behind a little on the way out, though, confused when his dad heads towards the Impala rather than the truck.

"I'm driving," is all the explanation Dean gets with his raised eyebrow. He thinks he's doing okay at hiding what a stupid mess the alcohol has turned him into, but his dad's proving him wrong with a hand on the back of his neck. It makes him feel small again and reminds him of when he was getting his words back, coming home from school with this big ball of anger inside him.

Dad was still "Daddy" then, and he used to let Dean hold Sammy, pull them both into his lap, and rub Dean's neck. And he'd keep rubbing his neck, no matter how long it took, until all those stupid teachers and stupid kids and their stupid mothers all just went away, and Dean's world was nothing but Daddy's deep breaths under his head and Sammy's wet fingers at his neck.

Between the safe feeling associated with his dad's touch and the exhaustion that comes after a night of drunken, fitful half-sleeping, Dean has no chance at all and is asleep long before they get anywhere near the diner.

He writes the second version of the letter in Idaho. He's bored again but not nearly fucked up enough to go buy a bottle of rum to chug like an angry teenager, so this time, the letter gets written while he's sober.

He spends three hours on two pages and another week thinking up excuses not to send it. It's too short, it's too long, his handwriting is crap, he spelled "asparagus" wrong, he uses her name too much, he repeats himself, he had to use two different pens, half of it is in red ink, there's a rip in the corner, it's got coffee on it, she could get a paper cut while opening it and it could get infected and she could *die*.

Or she could open it and show it to Sam, and he could find out it was Dean and continue never speaking to him again.

Three days later, he's stuck in a graveyard without any accelerant because he forgot to fucking fill the car before he left and "accidentally" uses the letter for kindling.

The third letter is crumpled up into a ball and shoved under the front seat. He was drugged or something when he wrote it, maybe watched too many borderline chick-flicks on Showtime. He got to writing the letter, and before he knew it, he went from, "Don't let him near the stove," to, "He sucks his thumb when he's really exhausted, so don't make fun of him, just make sure he gets more sleep."

It's too close, crosses too many lines, and cuts too close to the bone. Or maybe hits too close to home. Something like that, with rhyming pairs and other girly poem things.

He finally sucks it up and grows some balls halfway out of West Virginia, where he snatches up a postcard from a gas station and writes down a quick note on the back. Dad calls him once they cross the state line to tell him they're pulling over at the next truck stop to gas up and get some grub.

Dean takes it as a sign, and while Dad's gassing up the girls, he sends off the postcard from a Flying J in Winchester, Virginia.



It's a really, really lame and weird prank. That's Jess's first thought when she sees the postcard in her mail. Come on, it's a West Virginia postcard with a black and white cannon on it. Can you say random?

And the writing on the back—*He likes that pasta shit with the spinach, take him to an Italian place.*—chicken-scratch and cryptic and just plain fucking weird.



She's positive that it's Zach at first. He watches all those weird-ass independent films like *Donnie Darko* and *Memento*, and this is the kind of vaguely avant-garde thing he's been known to do when he's bored or drunk, so she tosses the rest of the mail on her bed and asks Becky where her idiot brother is. It takes a surprisingly long time to find him—what is *wrong* with that boy, can't he stay in one spot for more than ten minutes at a time?—and it's almost dark by the time she does.

She kind of wishes she hadn't, though, because if she had looked at the damn postcard a little more closely instead of worrying about finding Zach, she might've noticed the Virginia postmark on it. Who the hell looks at postmarks anyway?

She still thinks it's a prank. She's not positive anymore because she can't name anyone she knows in Virginia—*Winchester*, Virginia at that—but she's pretty sure. If it *is* a prank, her main suspect is now Sam because he's that adorable sort of dorky who would think that the Winchester thing was hilarious, plus she's pretty sure he moved around when he was little. It still begs the question of why, though. She would say that maybe he's spending too much time with Zach, except that she *knows* that all Sam does is work and study.

It's obviously *about* Sam because when she hears "he" without a name attached, Sam is the first person who comes to mind. Anyone who's spent more than two days with her knows this. Therefore, using a complex algorithm and a lot of eenie-meanie-minie-moe, she's decided that if it's *not* from Sam, it has to at least be from somebody who knows them. Which means it's safe.

Becky tells her that she's completely insane, and not in that cute, quirky way she usually is.

"You are a *sociology* major! Do you even pay attention in class? The Milgram Experiment? The *Stanford* Prison Experiment? You aren't supposed to do things just because someone tells you to!"

"The Stanford Prison Experiment was actually a psych study on the psychology of imprisonment."

"Oh my *god*, I *so* don't care! You *do not* follow the directions of a fucking postcard that doesn't even have a return address on it."

"Breathe. It's noodles and spinach. There's nothing to worry about. Worst case scenario, Sam hates it, and I've wasted about ten dollars."

"What if he's allergic, huh? You could kill him."

"For the seven millionth time; it's noodles and it's spinach—"

"That doesn't mean he can't be allergic to it!"

"Let me finish talking. Damn. There's no other ingredients except for water and butter. If he's allergic to either of the two things in the food, I'm pretty sure he'll see them and tell me. Okay?"

"You need to be committed."

"You're overreacting *so* much."

"You are following instructions on a postcard from absolutely nowhere and making food for your boyfriend because of some half-assed logic that tells you the thing must be serious and trustworthy and about him."

"I didn't say I trusted the card, just that there's not a big downside to listening to it."

"I just can't even talk to you right now. I'll end up doing something stupid like knocking you out and taking you to the hospital to check for a brain tumor or something."

It ends up taking a little more than a week for Jess to make Sam the dinner. She has to get Becky out of the townhouse, he has to get someone to cover a shift for him at one of his way too many jobs, and then there's the part where she has to convince Sam to actually eat in front of her.

Sam's really lucky that he's hot because she barely tolerates that whole supermodel, "Oh, I don't eat much," thing with girls, and she's put up with it a *lot* longer with him.

He likes the dinner, though, even though it's plain, and eats three helpings before he smiles that sheepish smile of his and finally fills himself up.

Jess tells Becky there was nothing to worry about.



"Do I have to go, Jess? This is a family holiday, right? So it should be just your family."

"It's Thanksgiving, Sam; it's barely even a holiday. It's just an excuse for friends and family to stuff themselves full of food and try to pass out before the fighting starts."

"But—"

"And besides, Zach and Becky and Alissa and Aaron are all coming, too. And Becky's bringing a date I haven't even met yet, so you have no excuse not to come."

"I just..." He trails off, and she feels his thumb rubbing across the back of her hand. "I don't do good in those kinds of settings. Parents don't like me."

"Baby, my parents are gonna *love* you. You're polite, and you treat me well, so you've already got my dad right there. And you're gorgeous and smart, and you tell me not to waste so much money, so Mom's already threatening to leave Dad for you."

"Can't I just stay here? I'm sure I can pick up some extra hours at work."

"Sam, no. Look at it this way—I like you. *A lot*. And the odds are in your favor that you're gonna have to meet them eventually. Would you rather do it later, alone, with no one but me there to detract attention from you, or now, with so many people in the house that you'll be lucky to get ten minutes alone with them all weekend?"

Sam gets this small, slow-spreading smile on his face as he looks up at her from under his dirty, floppy hair. "You and your wacky Earth logic," he teases her.

"Hey, that's my line," Jess pouts at him. And really, the puppy eyes aren't fair when they're aimed at him.

"Stop using my eyes against me, and you can have it back."

"Fine, fine, I'm not above sharing."

"Oh, gee, thanks." They sit there for a few minutes, and Jess enjoys the quiet and the feel of Sam's rough hand in hers.

"You know, psych boy," she starts. "If I was taking your classes, I might say that you waited until an hour before we left because you really *do* want to go."

"No, it's not that—not that I don't want to go—I just thought that something would come up, you know?"

"Not really."

"Well, I just... like your dad deciding that he doesn't wanna deal with all the people there right now and making it a family thing, or... you might decide that you want to wait to introduce me to your family—which would be okay, you know, I wouldn't mind."

Jess is *such* an idiot. She forgot that this isn't just her boyfriend coming to meet her parents or her friend coming because his parents gave the okay—this is *Sam*. Sam, who she's pretty sure sleeps at work over winter break and who she *knows* stayed with an ex he can only barely stand over the last summer break.

This is her boyfriend, Sam, who has only mentioned his family twice in all the time she's known him, making a trip up to spend four days with nearly everyone she's related to. His backup plan isn't even to go home or to another friend's; it's to *work*.

And all that is completely ignoring the part where Sam thinks she's going to uninvite him. Jess knows that most of his exes are "straight" guys; she knows Sam's used to being hidden away.

"Listen here, Cowboy," Jess starts out. She uses her sternest voice and makes her face as flat and cold as she can, overacting by miles so that Sam knows she's teasing him. "I like you. A lot. But I don't love *anyone* enough to let them off the hook for this thing."

Sam laughs at that, and she squashes the urge to do something stupid like telling Sam that she loves him. She smiles again and leans in, butting her forehead against his. "Becky is practically my sister, and I'm still making her come. Every new person there is another hour I'm not tearing out my hair."

"Fine, then," he sighs, all big and dramatic. "I guess I'll go. But only to save your hair."

"Good, because you wouldn't like me bald. I've got a weird shaped head. It's all bumpy."

Sam draws her closer, wraps his arms around her waist, and kisses the spot right behind her ear that he loves to nuzzle. "I promise I would still like you if your weird, bald head had razor burn and a point."

Jess's hands come up around his neck, and she rubs at the short fuzz there. "You are, without a doubt," she says, brushing her lips across his, "the *oddest* person I have ever met. You freak."

"Takes one to know one."



They rent a van because between the six of them, they have one car that seats four, one car that refuses to start, and nine bikes that are of absolutely no use to them right now.

"It's not even a minivan! You could fit a fucking dorm in there. Why didn't you get an SUV or something?"

"It's the day before Thanksgiving, and we're in a college town." Zach climbs out of the huge, white monstrosity they own for the next four and a half days and slams the door. "Be glad I didn't have to rent a U-Haul and throw all your dumb asses in back."

"Rawr, testy, testy."

"Fix your fucking car."

There's a small fight over who gets to drive—Sam wants to drive because he thinks Zach drives like a little old lady, Zach's never driven with Sam and plans to keep it that way, and Alissa is threatening to throw them both in the back and drive them all herself, suspended license be damned. Sam ends up driving once he swipes the keys from Zach's pocket and makes a mad dash for the driver's seat.

It's only a three hour trip, but Sam enjoys his staked claim of the radio all to himself, which lasts until Jess begs and he caves to the evil sounds of the Backstreet Boys, Boston, and Aqua all on the same horrifying CD.

It's actually kind of a fun ride, despite what Sam first thought about three hours in a vehicle and just how much he was sure it was going to remind him of pretty much the entire first eighteen years of his life.

It probably doesn't hurt that everyone seems to mentally regress about ten years in age, playing games like I Spy, License Plate Bingo—Becky actually made boards for everyone because she's the most anal person ever—Twenty Questions, and Geography, which Sam learns is *much* more fun when it's not entirely in Latin or the names of creatures in their native languages.

Eventually, they move on to Truth or Dare, and Sam is glad he's driving because it gives him an excuse not to play, since he can't really do any dares without possibly crashing the car and horribly disfiguring them all. Over the course of that game, everyone moons oncoming cars at

least once; Zach tells everyone about how he messed around with a guy back when he was a freshman ("And I didn't like it, so, sorry Jess, still straight."); Jess admits that if it wasn't for Becky, she probably would've dumped Sam back when they started dating—Aaron is a *dick*; and Alissa describes one of her favorite fantasies in graphic detail, involving Jess, of course, because God forbid Sam should be able to concentrate on the road while driving.

Becky makes Sam stop and pull over no less than eleven times. "It would've been nice if someone could've warned me about how badly she got motion sick before I let her ride shotgun."

"Let?"

"Hey, do you guys know why they call it 'shotgun'?"

Sam pipes right up with that answer; he's known this one since he was about six. "Back when everyone was still riding around in stagecoaches, the driver had to keep both hands on the reins. So whoever rode up front with them had to keep hold of the shotgun in case they were ambushed."

"Really?" Alissa asks with genuine interest in her voice. For all her possibly clinically verifiable insanity, she's got that ravenous appetite for new knowledge that might make her attractive to Sam if only she weren't so damn scary.

"You weren't supposed to know that," Zach pouts.

"My dad's a Marine. I know more about guns than probably anyone who lives in California and doesn't battle gun laws should."

"Really?"

"Can you say anything but 'really'?" Becky asks.

There's a dull thudding sound as Alissa kicks the back of Becky's seat. "Shut up."

Becky winces as she gets lurched forward from the force of the impact, and Sam's pretty sure her stomach just rolled *hard*. And, see, that right there is one of the things that bothers Sam about Alissa. He knows it was a friendly kind of kick, but that's exactly the problem; she's violent with her friends, and every time she socks Sam or kicks him, he has to pull in every instinct he has so he doesn't retaliate in some way that would cause lasting harm and a *lot* of questions.

Zach laughs that stoned-sounding laugh of his and snaps Sam back out of his head. "Apparently, she can."

"Did you know that if it weren't for monks, we might not have guns?" Sam asks them all.

"No."

Sam waits for someone to ask for more, mostly because he wants to see how long they can be quiet.

Jess breaks the silence, of course. "How did that work?"

"Thank you for asking, Jess. The first formula for gunpowder that was ever written down was written by a thirteenth century English monk. And the first person to use gunpowder as a projectile was a German monk—I don't remember what century he was from, though."

"You know, you're really kind of scary sometimes."

"I'm a guy; we think guns are cool."

"It's true," Zach agrees. "We totally do. They make loud noises and hurt people."

"I bet if you were one of those people who was hurt by them, you wouldn't think they were so cool anymore," Aaron pipes up from behind Sam. Sam's getting some good lessons in restraint on this trip—has it really only been an hour and a half?—and he uses it to keep from shooting back that he has, in fact, been shot, pistol-whipped, and once had a gun jammed so far down his throat that the guy holding it should've at least bought him dinner first.

Instead, what Sam says is, "You know what? You aren't allowed to use that argument until you've been shot, okay? So find something else to bitch about." It might not be *much* better, but it's a start.

Jess, who has had the bad misfortune on several occasions to break up the fights between Sam and Aaron, jumps in early this time. "Both of you are going to stop *right now*," she tells them. "It's Thanksgiving; there's already going to be enough fighting without you two idiots trying to kill each other in the living room."

"Tell him—"

"*Sam!* Zip it! Listen closely; this applies to everyone, but mostly to the two of you. If anyone tries to pick a fight this weekend, there will be hell to pay. Aaron, I promise that I will do my best to make sure no one at Stanford has sex with you ever again if you start. And you, Sam...." She trails off, and Sam tries to pretend that he's not suddenly very uncomfortable. "I'll find a way to punish you."

The silence that descends in the car is awkward, to say the least. That is, until Alissa speaks.

"I love that you're such a nympho that you can't even withhold sex from him."

Just when Sam thought it couldn't get any more awkward, it does.

Sam knows it's a little weird that he wants to wait, but he's a psych major. That pretty much requires a little bit of self-analyzing. So Sam knows that he has, or had, this problem where he

would sleep with someone right away and then mistake them liking sex whenever they wanted with them liking him. He's getting better, though. Kind of.

He's had many hypothetical conversations with the Dean in his head about this. Dean's responses range from the realistic, "Cry me a river, build a bridge, and get the fuck over it, you fucking pussy. What more do you need than awesome sex?" to the blatant lies he knows are his own thoughts trying out the Dean voice. "It's understandable that you want to wait; you want to know that Jess likes you for you and not because you're good in bed."

That last one is even creepier when he pictures Dean being all soft smiles and caring voice when he says it.

"We're not talking about sex while Sam's driving, so pick a different subject."

"Why not? Come on, this isn't like Truth or Dare. He doesn't have to move around or do anything."

"Because I want my dad to like him, and if we start talking about sex, I'm going to say something that will make him whip around and do that kicked puppy glare at me. Then we'll hit a Toyota or something, and it would make a very bad impression if their first meeting was while my parents were visiting all of us in the hospital."

"God, you have an overactive imagination. We're in a van the size of Canada—Alaska, at least. If we hit a Toyota, we won't know until we get to your house and notice an unusually shiny bug stuck in the grille."

"Bite me."

"Hey, no sex talk!"

"Sam, pull over."

"Again?" he asks, but Becky's already scrambling at the door, trying to get her door unlocked. As quickly and smoothly as he can, Sam cuts over two lanes of traffic and onto the shoulder, pulling the car to a stop just in time for Becky to wrench open her door and practically throw herself out as a siren flares up behind him.

Well, at least he's already on the shoulder.

"I hate you all."



Dean only sent her one letter.

He was completely sober when he wrote it. It took him a full week to do and was ten pages, front and back, of every single thing he could think of about Sam that he thought Jessica should know.

He had intended for it to end right there. He only put a return address on it—Bobby's, 'cause Dean knew he would call the *moment* Dean got a letter and would never tell Dad it was from Stanford—because she might have a question, and he wanted Sam to get treated right. And fuck knows Sam would never bother to tell her about the Cabbage Patch Kids doll he's slept with ever since Dean got it for him back in his freshman year.

And man, he *knows* Sam still sleeps with her, probably still has her—it—in that fairy outfit and everything. Sam never did know how to take a joke.

Six days after Dean drops the letter in a mailbox, Bobby calls him up in the middle of the afternoon and says he's got a letter for him that he might wanna come by and pick up ASAP, so he begs Dad for a few days off. "Bobby's got something for me at his place that I've been waiting on for a while."

Dad lets him go, but he tells him to just leave her there if it's another Russian bride. You misunderstand *one* ad when you're thirteen, and you never live it down.

They're only a few states away, but Dean floors it to South Dakota and only avoids a truckload of tickets by luck and the skin of his teeth.

The envelope is big, square, and pink. Not just any pink, either—a fluorescent, neon pink that makes him think of flamingos and Good & Plentys. The address is written in big, bubbly print with black pen, and the back has, "I couldn't find anything else," in rushed, lengthened cursive in sparkly purple ink.

He doesn't open it right away. No matter how many times he tries, he can't make himself. There's a car show in town, so Bobby's entire week looks like it's going to be answering the phone a lot and tell people when they can come by to root for parts. He points Dean towards the beers—"You take a cold one out, you put a warm one in."—and tells him not to trash the room this time.

Dean spends two days in the room he and Sam used to share when Dad would swing them all by, leaving for barely anything but beer, food, and pissing. At least Bobby's put in a TV since last

time, with cable, even.

He opens it during breakfast on the third day, in between the first and second rounds of six-egg bacon and sausage omelets. The letter is only a little more than half a page long, but he rereads it at least a dozen times right there at the table.

There's one line that sticks in his head like a shitty song off the radio.

What's Sam's brother like? If you know him. It's right there on the page in that same round, bubbly script from the front of the envelope, so random and unassuming and traitorous. Dean guesses he should be thankful that she even knows he exists, and *fuck*, that hurts a lot more than he'd ever like to admit.

Dean hates letters, fucking *hates* them, always has. He thrives on that face-to-face interaction, reading body language and facial tics and all those other silent cues Dad taught Sam and him. Written word is too ambiguous—"Fuck you," he tells the Sam in his head. "I know what that word means."—and he always drives himself insane trying to decode it.

Like now.

Is she being sarcastic? Does she know who he is, or is it an honest, curious question? Did Sam tell her what he—they—did? Is she suspicious? Does she think he hurt Sam? If he lies, will she know it? What if he tells the wrong lie and contradicts something Sam told her? What if he tells the truth?

Dean doesn't write her back that day or the next one or the one after that. He doesn't even try. Every time he gets near the letter, all he can think of is *why* she wants to know. What she might already think.

He wants to know what Sam says about him. Not even just to her, but in general. They didn't exactly leave on good terms, and he's got this voice in his head—that fucker's right up front, kicking and screaming, wondering if maybe Sam hates him, if he tells people shit about Dean like he does about John.

So the man gets drunk sometimes; three times a year does not an alcoholic make. And the fact that they both know ahead of time when he's going to be drunk has got to prove something good, or at least something not entirely bad.

A week and a few days after Dean gets the letter, he and Dad get a case in Yuma, and Dean sees her on their usual swing through Stanford. She's asleep at a table in the library, face buried in a book and pen still dangling from her hand. For half a second, he's tempted to go wake her up.

He doesn't, though. He doesn't even know what he would say—has no idea if she's ever seen a picture of him, even. She could wake up screaming for the cops or Sam, or she could be like Dad, one of those people who come up swinging. And that's completely ignoring the fact that he's not sure if he should introduce himself as Sam's big brother or as the random stranger who

tells her how to feed Sam.

He was looking for Sam, actually; he figured the nerdy little bookworm would be holed up in the library on his day off like a good little freak. He wasn't expecting to see Jess when he turned the corner.

She looks different up close and in person: blonde pigtails French braided down the sides of her head, a pink hoodie, and some kind of weird skirt that looks like it was made out of three different pieces of fabric pulled from the scrap bin at Goodwill. But, hell, her legs look hot in it, so Dean doesn't care what the hell her clothes are made out of. Well, except maybe if they were made out of human skin—other human skin, not hers. Dean's been watching too much Sci-Fi.

There's a voice in the back of his head that sounds like Sam telling him to take it as a sign to go over there and talk to her. Dean takes it as a sign, all right; he takes it as a sign to turn tail and get the fucking hell out of there before she wakes up.

He has a few more close calls. Once at her work, where he chickened out and split before she could take his order, and once near her and Sammy's place. Sam was with her, coming out of a class. That one was another accident; he got turned around while trying to find some professor's office.

Dean keeps the radio silence even after they leave California, unwilling to write another random postcard and unable to make himself answer her question.



It's not that he doesn't like Zach.

Sam considers him a friend; hell, not counting Jess, Sam thinks Zach might just be the best friend he's ever had that he's not related to.

Jess is a different kind of best friend, the kind someone you date defaults to when they know about that baby-doll you carried around with you everywhere until you were eight and how much you hate showering.

Zach is the platonic, buddy cop kind of best friend Sam's never really had before, the one who gets you arrested on a drunk and disorderly charge and sits next to you in the cell giggling like a little girl about how damn hard you hit when you're pissed off.

Anyway.

It's not that he doesn't like Zach. It's just that they're different people. When it comes to school, Zach reminds him a lot of Dean in that it comes easy to both of them. Not that it doesn't come easy to Sam, too, but Zach cares about his grades about as much as Dean ever did, which means only as much as he absolutely has to.

Dean kept a 4.0 GPA only because Dad required it—"Winchesters don't do *anything* half-assed, boy"—and studied maybe a half dozen times in his whole life. Zach studies for about an hour a day, then goes and slacks off. He spends most of his free time playing video games and going to movies. He's even on the damn basketball team, and the only reason he doesn't have a 4.0 is because he slept through a final last quarter and tanked the class because of it.

If Sam's not studying, he's working, and if he's not working, he's in class. Sometimes, he even studies while he's at work because juggling twelve scholarships means "free time" is one of those things he only hears about, like CIA triple agents and bad cafeteria food. So when Zach tells—not asks, tells—Sam to come out and do something with him, nine times out of ten, Sam has to say no.

Sam's not sure how they got onto the topic of morning rituals. It was probably Jess and Becky, just like nearly every other strange and random conversation he has lately. When he mentions that he runs in the mornings, though, Zach perks right up like a dog smelling bacon. Sam bites at the soft foam of his cup, teeth sinking in to make perfectly even marks.

He doesn't like running, not really; he just can't stop himself from doing it. All those years of waking up hours before the sun even thought about rising and stretching tired muscles into shapes they keep trying to forget, of pushing past the stabbing cramp near his kidney or the ache of his bladder and ignoring the sore, burning pain in his chest that comes with breathing in air so cold and early.

He fucking hated morning runs growing up, and the ultimate "fuck you" from Dad was the fact that once he got to Stanford, he realized he couldn't just stop them. If he didn't run in the morning, he would have too much energy the rest of the day and wouldn't be able to sit still or concentrate. Running doesn't calm him down like it does some people, not if he actually thinks anything deeper than, "Left, right, left, beat. Left, right, left."

Which is exactly why he doesn't like to fucking talk about it.

"I run, too," Zach exclaims. He's probably excited to *finally* have something he thinks he might be able to talk Sam into doing with him. "How much do you run?"

Sam doesn't want to crush the guy, but he knows where this is going, and running isn't exactly something he likes to do with other people. It might be different if he thought Zach had a chance of keeping up with him, but he routinely outruns the ROTC kids, and, well, Sam knows he's not exactly the most patient person in the world.

He's pulling at the little bits of Styrofoam with his hands, sliding his nails into the teeth marks around the rim and tearing them off. "I don't know. It takes me forty, forty-five minutes, so... about ten clicks."

Zach blinks at him for a moment. Out of the corner of his eye, Sam can see Jess dragging her finger across the table, probably trying to remember how to convert kilometers into miles. "How much is that here on Earth?"

"On Earth, it's still ten clicks, but outside of the military, it's about six miles."

Becky takes advantage of Zach's distraction to steal the mostly uneaten half of his pastrami sandwich, taking a big bite out of it before swallowing and asking, "Wow, so you can run a mile in, what, seven minutes? That's really fast, right? It sounds fast."

"Six minutes." Not that he's nitpicky or anything. "But I can do it in four if I've got the right motivation." Like a pissed off brother with a paint-balled Chevy dented in the parking lot.

Sam fidgets with his coffee cup, and he tries not to remember the lectures Dad used to give him about false body cues. *"If you can't stop fidgeting, then you've gotta focus on your hands, Sammy. That'll make you look embarrassed, and people change topics when they think they're making someone uncomfortable. If you just keep trying to ignore the twitching, you look nervous, and nervous people get asked questions. Are you listening, Sam? This isn't a game."*

Perfectly maintained French tip nails snap in front of his face and yank him back to the present. *Nice job, Sam, I said "stare," not "zone out and look suspicious."* Sam's sure he's never gotten that particular piece of advice from his father, but hell, if he can have conversations with Dean in his head, why can't he get lectured by his dad there, too?

"Earth to Sam." Becky snaps her fingers again. "Are you back here with us again? Hi. How was your flight?"

"It sucked; they played *Officer and a Gentleman*."

"Ooh," Jess squeals, eyes wide and excited. "The movie or the porno?"

"The movie, obviously."

Jess rolls her eyes at his lack of imagination—it's a thing with them—and slides his half-destroyed coffee cup toward her, nudging her own in his direction. "Well, that blows. I don't think you should fly Air Winchester again. They suck."

"Air Winchester?"

"You don't like it?"

"It sounds like a shoe," Becky pipes up.

"A bad shoe. That gets recalled for its sole falling off or something," adds Zach.

"Winchester Air?"

"That just sounds pretentious."

Sam chokes and nearly spits out his drink. "Ugh, sick. What the hell is this?"

"A white chocolate mocha frap."

"Why would you do that to coffee?"

"It tastes good!"

"You don't drink coffee for the taste."

"No, *you* don't drink coffee for the taste. I enjoy getting my energy from something that tastes good. Otherwise, I might as well just snort Ritalin."

"Oh, what, speed not good enough for you?" Becky teases.

"Ritalin *is* speed," Jess tosses back. Before Sam knows it, Jess and Becky have their own completely random conversation going on. He tunes them out after the meth but sometime around the talk of apple bongs.

"So, come on," Zach pushes. "You never have time to hang out and do shit anymore. Let me come running with you. I totally promise I won't show you up and make you look like a fool."

"You're from Missouri. Stop saying 'totally.'"

"Blow me, asshole."

"Really not helping your whole 'I'm straight' campaign."

"I don't care. Take me running with you."

Sam knows it's a bad idea, but he can't find it in himself to say no.

They go running the next morning, and from that first moment at four-thirty when Sam pounds on Zach's door and gets yelled at, he knows this was a bad idea.

It's five by the time Sam finally manages to get Zach outside and ready to go. Except then Zach decides he has to stretch first. And then do jumping jacks. And then run in place for a few minutes. "Gotta get the feet warmed up; it's like the pop quiz before the test."

Sam knows Zach's just trying to get him to crack a smile, but he just really is not in the mood today. He traded off his hours at the bar and club because his boss at the restaurant, Trevor, *begged* him to come in tonight and pull a full eight hour shift. Then at eleven o'clock last night, after his shifts had already been filled at his other jobs, Trevor called again. "Never mind, Casey's just gonna come in for me. Thanks anyway." Fucking bastard managed to not only kill his overtime but short-change his check at two completely different jobs at the same time.

They jog for a bit. Sam lets Zach set the pace and tries to figure out how to make up the lost money without skipping classes, while Zach opts to go as slow as he possibly can without walking.

And that's when Zach makes his big mistake.

"I was on the track team in high school, you know. If we're going slow for me, we don't have to; shit, I can probably run rings around you. And if we aren't going slow for me, then I just gotta tell you, man, I have *no* idea how you could think you can do a mile in six minutes."

Now, Winchester pride is a double-edged sword. It makes them keep good grades and manners, but it also gets them more shotguns, shovels, and battle-axes (on two separate occasions) swung or leveled at them than can possibly be healthy. It can also end a half a mile down the road with Zach dry-heaving into the grass while Sam stands off to the side trying to pretend that he has no problem breathing or remaining upright.

And this right here this is why Sam believes in karma. Three minutes ago, he set out to make Zach look like an ass—and okay, maybe hurt him a little, too—and now Zach's on his hands and knees, panting and groaning with no ability to say anything other than "Jesus Christ" and "Sam." Sam looks around and adjusts himself, thankful for his jeans and their sturdy, thick denim.

"You know." Sam has to bite his lip to keep from laughing and wasting more precious air when Zach flops onto his belly and then rolls to his back, head moving *just* enough to get Sam in his line of sight. "I feel like I should be petting your head and giving you a treat."

"You could always rub my stomach. That doesn't require Snausages."

"This is why Jess doesn't believe you're straight."

"Jess doesn't believe I'm straight because Jess doesn't believe in heterosexuality."

"She believes in it. She just thinks it's not the default setting."

"Whatever. You're a dick."

"What? Why?"

Zach shoots him a glare from his patch of grass. "My heart just exploded in my chest."

"You were asking for it."

"I was not!"

"You called me slow."

"Whatever, you *were* being slow."

Sam grins. "You wanna race again?"

"Fuck, no, do I look retarded?"

"Yeah, a little bit."

"If I could feel my feet or move my arms, I'd be throwing my shoe at you right now."



"It's easy, Sam, just pretend that I'm there and tell me what you're doing to me."

"But you aren't here."

"You're being difficult on purpose, aren't you?"

She can hear his huff of laughter on the other line, can just picture him relaxing in bed with that big, gorgeous smile on his face. "I can't help it. You're just so cute when you're annoyed."

"I am not *cute*, I'm hot. You do not have phone sex with people who are cute; you give them cookies and hold hands in the park. Stop laughing, it's not funny!" He's laughing harder now, cackling, that bastard.

"It really is. You're so serious about this, treating it like it's some kind of project for class. It's sex, it's supposed to be fun."

"I'd be having more fun if you would just cooperate and tell me how you want to fuck me."

"I'm sorry, it just... it feels weird. I feel stupid."

"You don't have to feel stupid, it—" Jess pauses and takes a breath. She doesn't want to start a fight; she's cranky and edgy and hasn't been sleeping well, nerves getting the better of her. "I'm sorry, babe. I miss you, is all. I wish you were here. I've got this *big* bed, and it feels so lonely without you in it next to me."

Silence stretches out for a long moment before Sam pipes up again. "Oh, it's my turn? I, I like lying next to you, too. You look pretty when you're relaxed like that."

Jess has to place a hand over her mouth, pinching her nose to keep from letting out any kind of sound that resembles laughter. He's trying, at least, and that counts for something.

When she's sure she can keep her voice steady again, she continues. "You know I took one of your shirts, right? I'm wearing it right now. It's that light blue one with the little white stripes. Just that and a pair of panties. Tell me what you'd do if you were here, Sam."

"God, Jess." He lets out this shuddery breath, panting a little. She can tell he's hard, maybe even touching himself already. "I'd kiss you. I really love kissing you; you're so good at it. And I'd slip my hand up my—your—shirt and, and, touch you. I'm sorry, Jess, I—"

"It's okay," she cuts him off. "You're doing fine, just relax."

"Why do we have to do this? You're gonna be back in two days; why can't we just wait until then?"

"Because I've been gone a week, and I've been really good. And because if I don't get off soon, I'm going to go do something drastic like buy a hooker, and then I'll catch herpes, and then you'll get herpes, and it won't be fun for anyone."

"Jess—"

"No! Listen, I'll do all the talking, okay?" She knows she's begging, but, *fuck*, Sam is making this a thousand times more difficult than it should be. "You are just going to lay there and touch yourself and make noises that aren't creepy and maybe say something now and then if the urge strikes you." She can tell that he's nodding. She can't see it, of course, but he does it all the time—forgets he's on the phone and nods or makes random hand gestures as he tries to explain something complicated to whoever he's talking to.

"Help me set this up. Where are you? Are you lying in Zach's bed?"

Sam sputters, making this choking, spitting sound that does nothing for her mood. "What? No! Jesus, Jess, you don't—I'm not jerking off in my friend's bed, that's creepy."

"You're denying a little too emphatically there."

"Because it's gross, okay? I'm on the pull-out in the living room."

"Ooh, kinky."

"It's ten-thirty at night. No one's gonna come pounding on the door or anything, and everyone knows Zach's not here, anyway."

"I bet you wish he was, though, huh? Him sitting there between your legs, pinning you and biting at your neck—"

Sam's voice cuts through the line, loud and hurried with just the slightest tinge of panic. "No, baby, you *know* you're—"

"The only one for you, the sun and moon and sky, the one the sun rises and sets on, yeah, I know. This is a *fantasy*, Sam, stop ruining it."

"Oh, right, sorry."

"As you should be. Now, like I was saying, you're on your back, and Zach's biting your neck, not hard, just enough, like you like it." Jess hears what might be a soft grunt when she pauses. It's either that, or Sam just cleared his throat. Either way, it's a good sign. "It's okay if this is getting you off. That's the point. If I wanted to get off by myself, I wouldn't have called you."

"I know," he says, his voice cracking. "Keep going?"

She smiles into the phone and continues. "Zach's hands are running all over you, and he's kissing his way up your neck. When he gets to your mouth, it's this—" She pauses, shivering. "It's this really slow kiss, like one of the ones you like. Then he's moving, you're both moving, and he's sitting on the edge of the bed, legs spread wide, and you're crouched between them." Sam's groan is audible, and his breathing picks up.

"He runs his hands over your face, your mouth, your cheekbones. He pushes your hair back off your face and cradles the back of your head with one of his hands." Sam makes another noise, and Jess pauses, sure he's going to say something. He doesn't, though, only makes more of those garbled sounds, like the words are caught in the back of his throat.

"You kinda, mmm, you meet his eyes when you go down on him. And Zach, he just, he keeps touching your face, and his thumb's rubbing up and down your throat while..." Jess trails off, biting her lip to keep from moaning. "He's coming, and you're drinking it down, swallowing and pumping his cock—"

Sam interrupts her. "No."

She can't keep the whine out of her voice, doesn't even bother trying to hide it. "What? *Sam*, please."

"No, no, my—" He's gasping, long pauses between words, and she can hear him panting and groaning. "My face, he comes, *fuck*, he comes on my face." A full-body shiver rolls through Jess, and she has no idea what the hell sound she just made, but, *damn*, that might be the hottest thing she's ever heard. "And then, and then he, fuck, *fuck*."

"Wait! You have to wait, you can't come yet, Sam. Babe, please, please, just hold on a little longer, I know you can do it." He struggles to get his breath under control, taking in large gulps of air and swallowing. "Can't come yet, Sam," she teases. "Zach still has to fuck you."

"Jesus *Christ*. You know he can't actually get hard again that fast, right?"

"Shut up." She laughs back at him. "My reality here, not yours. You close?"

He stammers a little, trying to say too many things at once. "Yeah, hurry."

"He's got you on your knees, and he's right behind you. You're rocking on the bed, grabbing at the sheets and cursing, sweaty and fucking *gorgeous*, and, god, Sam. He's pushing into you, real slow at first, then faster, hard but not too hard, y'know? Stings a little but doesn't really hurt."

He's moaning now, loud and unrestrained, and she's almost as close as he is. "Fuck, I'm about to come just thinking about it, picturing his cock just sliding into you, and you're begging and pushing back into it, just fucking *eager* for it. Almost makes me wish I had a dick so I could fuck you. It gets me so wet just thinking about that—bending you over the bed, fucking you until you're sobbing and begging to come. Makes me wanna buy a strap-on and turn you out."

And then he's coming loud and hard, gasping and moaning like she's never heard him before. If she didn't think that was so damned hot, she might be worried. As it is, she's just trying to remember if she saw any stores on the way to Becky's from the airport.



It takes about a month from Sam agreeing to let Jess peg him to when they actually did it. Sam's apprehensive about it, but not in the, "Oh, god, do I really want something up my ass?" way. No, Sam's good with that part of it.

But there's a difference between liking it when a guy fucks you in the ass and liking it when your girlfriend does the same thing. It's a deceptively big difference, in fact. Because getting fucked by a guy is different—when people hear a guy's gay or bi, that's just what comes to mind

anyway. If the guy's bi and has a girlfriend but still likes bottoming, the assumption is generally that he *obviously* just likes cock and is fooling himself.

And Sam's had more than enough of that stupid "if you like cock, you're gay" mentality. He already went through that crap when he started dating Jess and lost all those fake friends of his who didn't like him "playing straight."

There's also the fear that Jess will get the wrong idea and think that she's not enough for him or that he really misses cock. And it's not even about cock, not for him, it's just... about being close. As girly as it makes him, he gets off on that. It's hot knowing that there's no actual way to be closer to someone than when part of them is inside of you. He's always been a thinker about everything, for better or worse, and sex is no exception. It gets him hard to get others hard. Or wet, as the case may be.

Also, it feels really, *really* good.

Despite that, he's still twitchy. The idea makes him feel sort of exposed, like he's giving Jess access to all his dirty little secrets, and no one but Dean has ever been anywhere *near* that close to him.



When Dean is drunk and pissed off, he writes Jess letters telling her *just* what Sam likes in bed—how he likes to get fucked, just the way to swirl her tongue when she goes down on him, et cetera, et cetera.

He crumples them up and shoves them under his seat afterwards. Never sends them, no matter how badly he's wanted to sometimes.

And, man, does he *really* want to sometimes just out of spite. He loves Sam more than anything, and he likes Jess, but he just gets so *angry*—wants to sign one of those letters with his real name, send it off, and hurt Sam just as bad as he hurts.



They decide to move in on a Thursday. If they wait until Friday, they'll go the whole weekend waiting for the power to get turned on, and they—though Sam's pretty sure it's mostly him—are too impatient to wait until Monday.

When Jess pulls up in Zach's car, which he let her borrow for the night to set up house, Sam's got his duffle and messenger bag slung over his shoulder and a couple of pillows clutched in his hands, underwear, socks, and books shoved into the pillowcases because that's a habit he'll never be able to kick. He still ends up smashed into the front seat with all his stuff on his lap because Jess has jammed the rest of the car to its limit.

It's a short ride, and Sam doesn't feel at all bad about escaping from the car and running up the stairs into his and Jess's brand new apartment. Sam shoves his clothes into a drawer, tosses the mostly empty messenger bag and his books on the makeshift bed of thick blankets and an even thicker air mattress, plus one of those things that look like egg cartons and could probably handle having a huge knife shoved into them, and goes to help Jess bring in her stuff.

There's even more than what's in the car, so they work out a plan. Sam will unload everything and take it in because he's faster, and she won't make him come back to the townhouse and help her fit the rest of her stuff in the car. It takes three trips in total, but Zach comes with her on the last one, so between the three of them, they manage to get everything off the street and upstairs before dinner.

A few hours later, they've got most of the stuff unpacked, and Sam is helping Jess put her things away and tack up posters. It's nice. It's the first place he can remember that has his real, honest to god last name associated with it.

It's nice and normal, and Sam's enjoying the safe domesticity in *his* apartment that he shares with *his* girlfriend who he loves. Jess is multitasking, telling him where to tack up the posters—"A little to the left, no, the other left, my left"—in between planning out their day tomorrow. "It's not like you can't afford to miss a class," she points out. "And the sooner we get it done, the more time we'll have to relax. Pretend that didn't rhyme."

He hasn't been able to stop smiling since Zach took off. Jess is standing there, talking about how they need to go buy a bed and a couch, a couple of tables, a few chairs, and, god, *groceries*. He knows how ridiculous it is, but he's never had this before, nothing even close, and he's just so happy. If it wasn't for the knife in her hands and her sloppy reflexes, Sam doesn't think he'd be

able to stop himself from walking over to Jess and hugging her.

She catches him staring and glances around self-consciously, like she's trying to figure out why she's suddenly the focus of his attention. "Oh! Sam! Oh, I'm sorry, I got all involved in trying to figure out what's in these boxes and where to put everything! Oh, god, we can go get the rest of your stuff now, I didn't mean to just make you sit here and wait on me!"

Sam looks up from Jess's books, which he hasn't been alphabetizing because that's the kind of anal-retentive way of thinking that he left behind with his nervous tics and stress ulcers. "No, don't worry about it. This is my stuff, we're done." When he looks up, Jess is just *standing* there, staring at him.

He doesn't have a lot of stuff. He knows this. But he has a lot more than when he came to Stanford: a laptop that he saved up for and upgraded every year because he can, the iPod that she got him for his birthday before they were even dating, a couple of drawers worth of clothing, and about a dozen books, only four or five of which are for his classes this quarter.

"What? You're the weird one. I don't think I've ever met anyone who owned as much stuff as you." Okay, so maybe he's a little defensive. Embarrassed, really, but that's it. He's *never* had a lot of stuff, so it's not like he misses it. He doesn't miss having posters on the wall because the closest he ever got were the pictures he would tape to the back of the front seat.

Jess scoffs and blows it off with a smile. "Minimalist freak." She makes her way towards him and wraps her arms around his neck, pulling him into a kiss. "If you skip class tomorrow, I'll fuck you on our brand new bed before you go to work."

And, really, what can he say to that.



Their first month or two of living together kind of *sucks*. A lot.

And it's all because Sam had this fucking brilliant idea of not relying on Jess's parents and their money to survive, possibly because of all those times when he was little that he had to pretend he was some random old lady's grandson. And, okay, a bigger part of it probably has to do with all those boyfriends he used to have who he didn't really like, but who had a bed and shower over breaks when the dorms were closed.

It was a good idea in theory. Sam kept his jobs, and Jess got one—waitressing, because she's got that smile that can get her insane tips—and none of the money from Jess's parents would go towards their bills or anything that was needed for the apartment.

Except that between the extra shifts Sam takes at the bar and the club to help pull in bill money and his full time job at the restaurant, plus Jess's job and their classes, they barely see each other at all anymore.

Sam has a plan, though. He'll work double and triple shifts at his jobs for time and a half and extra tips, and then maybe in a few months, they might be able to afford to have free time again.

Until that happens, they make do with what they can.

Sam always wakes Jess up when he goes running. It's four in the morning, and she doesn't stay awake for long, but it's long enough to kiss good morning and be the kind of sappy neither of them want to admit to around their friends, involving lots of cuddling and nuzzling and sleepy kisses.

Sam always brings her back coffee and a piece of coffee cake from down the street because she hates muffins. He always makes sure she finishes them before she leaves for class because otherwise she ends up dropping everything on her way and almost scalding herself with hot coffee. Jess isn't the most coordinated person when she's still half asleep and in a hurry.

They try to keep their weekends open, too, at least during the days. That's their time, when Sam goes running, then comes back and meets Jess in the shower before they crawl onto the couch and lounge around, watching whatever's on Sci-Fi or TNT. Sometimes, Jess makes Sam brush her hair and braid it for her. The peace usually lasts until around lunchtime, when Zach or Becky or Kaitlin wake up and decide they need to start calling.



She goes to pick Sam up from work when she can. They still don't have a lot of time together, even after moving in, so they cling to what little they have. Sam will come with and sit with her while she gets her nails or hair done, and Jess will meet him between classes—little things like that.

It's close to eleven right now. Jess is sitting on the sidewalk outside of the club, waiting for Sam's shift to end so they can go home, maybe stop by McDonald's on the way and grab some burgers

or something.

It's cold out tonight, and she's bundled up in Sam's things: a pair of his pajama pants that he never wears unless he's already passed out and she's dressing him, one of his hoodies, and a shirt of his underneath that. She's got her pink beanie on her head, the one that Sam thinks is so cute with the floppy bunny ears.

She wants a cigarette, which she blames on Zach. She doesn't even smoke; it just feels like that kind of atmosphere. If this were a movie, her character would be lighting up right now. Of course, she would probably also be wearing something a little more attractive than baggy, baby duck print pajama pants and a sweatshirt that's about nineteen sizes too big for her.

Stupid Zach, what kind of person goes pre-med and then studies film too? What kind of a combination is that? At least Sam's makes sense; psychology and sociology go hand in hand. And yeah, Jess might be a little bit of an armchair shrink right now, but it's better than sitting on a cold sidewalk with a frozen ass thinking about how the camera angle would be if you weren't real.

God, fuck the burgers. Jess clearly needs coffee.

Her phone rings, and it takes a moment for her to fumble it out. She can hear it, but it's not in her pocket, and she didn't toss it in her bag. She fishes it out of the pocket of the hoodie and answers it before pulling back to check the caller ID. It reads *Unavailable* instead of a number, and she thinks that it's probably some really mixed up telemarketer.

There's silence on the other end for a few seconds before she repeats herself. "Hello?" *Hello?*"

She's about to hang up and write it off as a drunken misdial or a lame prank when the caller, a man, finally speaks.

"What did he tell you about his brother?"

She doesn't recognize the voice and almost hangs up again. It's not gravelly enough for Zach and the wrong accent for Evan or either of the Chrises, and she doesn't know any other guys who would call her this late.

And then it clicks. It's *him*. The mystery guy on the other end of the letter and postcards, the ones with P.O. boxes for return addresses when he puts them on at all—the one who never signs his name.

"What did Sammy tell you about his brother?" he repeats, and Jess shakes herself out of her haze. Her first thought, still a little numb with shock, is how cute the name "Sammy" is.

"Not a lot," Jess admits. She clears her throat and looks back at the club, nervous that Sam might come out. "He always...." She struggles, trying to figure out how to describe that look Sam gets when he talks about Dean. "He always looks so fucking *sad*."

The laugh she gets is not the response she was expecting; it's unsteady and breathy, tinged with hysteria. His voice is thready this time, and it breaks a little as he pushes the words out. "You cussed."

Jess isn't entirely sure, but she thinks he might be listening to a nervous breakdown over the phone. The movie she's in just went from art house indie to black comedy. If whoever this guy is starts shouting about his dead gay son, she's going to hang up and scream, then wake up from her dream.

Fuck, she needs coffee. Possibly a thick slice of reality to go with it.

"Yes, I cursed. I do it a lot. I could probably speak an entire, coherent sentence using nothing but curse words if I tried hard enough. Or if it's the middle of the night, and Sam's just stabbed me in the back of the knee with one of his sharp-ass toenails."

"You don't look like someone who cusses. It's all the pink you wear, makes you look girly."

"You've been watching me?" A cold shivers rolls over her, and she resists the urge to look around. That's just *way* too stalker-like for her tastes. God, why the fuck isn't Sam out yet?

"Only because you're around him so much. I had to make sure he was safe, you know. Had to see it with my own two eyes."

"Safe from me?" There's this hurt feeling in the pit of her stomach that takes her by surprise. She's not sure why—well, no, that's not true. She had thought that this guy trusted her a little. There's a kind of implied confidence in those letters—postcards, whatever—an unwritten, "I know you'll do this for me," at the beginning and end of every one. Maybe she was wrong. If Sam's taught her anything, it's that reading people is a lot harder than it looks.

"Safe from everyone." It's so poetic and utterly surreal that Jess only barely holds back her own laughter, a small huff of it escaping in a cloud of warm breath. Maybe it's not Zach's fault that she's thinking in lighting and camera angles. Things like this don't actually happen in real life.

She takes in a deep breath, cool air stinging her lungs, and tries to figure out what to do next. The silence isn't awkward, but it sure as hell isn't comfortable. Jess doesn't know how to respond to that, doesn't think there *is* a response.

"His name's Dean." That's the first thought that comes to her mind, so she goes with it and just hope she doesn't say something stupid. "He spoiled Sam *so* fucking rotten, it's just... I thought." She giggles, remembering how he was way back when she first met him—this nerdy, hunched over boy smiling down at his notes on the other side of the table.

"I thought he was just the biggest mama's boy in the whole fucking world. He couldn't cook for himself, couldn't clean, could barely do laundry, and if you made yourself a sandwich 'cause you were hungry, he would just get this, this *confused* look on his face like he couldn't understand

why he didn't have any food."

There's a pause, and Jess waits. For what, she's not really sure, maybe for her train of thought to pick up again. Maybe she's waiting for her mystery caller to acknowledge that he's still there and paying attention.

"He told you his brother did all that?" The way he says it isn't hesitant, but it's slow—cautious, like he's picking his words. Jess feels a little more at ease knowing that she's not the only one in this conversation who's practically twitching.

"Well, I mean, you know Sam—at least, I think you do. Pretty much everything you said has been right so far, so either you know him, or you're psychic and—uh, yeah, anyway. He never really *tells* you anything outright; it's just these little things that slip through sometimes. Like how when you ask him if he's hungry, he says no, but if you just put food in front of him, he'll eat it. Well, now that he eats in front of me."

There's a moment of silence as Jess takes a moment to process what she just said. "That doesn't make sense, does it?"

The laugh is healthier this time, less psychotic sounding. "No, not really."

"Yeah, well, shut up, it's late."

"It isn't even ten."

"It's past eleven."

"No, it's not. It's nine fifty-two."

"I'm looking at my watch right now, and it says it's eleven ten."

"Buy a new watch, then. The clock on the corner of the TV says it's eleven fifty-three here, which means it's nine fifty-three there. If it were past eleven, Sam would be off work or would at least have called you to say he was gonna be late."

"*Fuck*. I could be sleeping right now. Or cleaning or something. I can't believe I just wasted fifteen dollars on a cab to come sit here in the cold for an hour."

"Fifteen bucks? That means you're, what? Two miles away?"

"Yeah, something like that, we're real close by. But Sam doesn't like me out alone so late, so I take a cab to pick him up before we walk home together—not that I'm some weak little girl who does whatever her big, strapping man tells her to. It's just that there've been attacks lately, and I'm smart enough to know that I'm no match for someone who can put one of our star linebackers in the hospital."

"You're nervous, aren't you?"

She laughs, this stark, brittle sound, and she thinks that if she tilts her head the right way, she just might be able to see her sanity fleeing. "What's there to be nervous about? I'm only sitting in front of a club in PJs talking on the phone to somebody I don't know who won't even give me his name and knows more about my boyfriend than I do. Who also knows how much pink I wear, what time Sam gets off work, and not only my address but my *phone number*, even though I haven't told him anything."

"Don't take it so personal. It's my job to find things like that out. And for your information, finding out someone's address or where they work isn't the same as knowing their social security number or what color panties they wear to bed. I'm sending postcards, not nailing puppies to your door."

Jess has clearly spent too much time around Chris and Zach's other degenerate friends because her brain bypasses possible identity theft and a peeping tom stalker and latches straight onto the last sentence. "Was that a *Buffy* reference you just made?"

"No!"

"It was! Oh, my god. I.." This isn't fair. This guy was supposed to help her figure out Sam, not give her yet *another* person to obsess over trying to figure out. "What do you do?"

"What?"

"What do you do? You said this is your job. What are you?" She knows better than to suggest things. Her daddy taught her well—let them tell the truth or watch them try to think of something plausible that fast.

"I can't tell you."

"No, I get enough of that from Sam. You're not fucking me, so I don't have to put up with it from you. And don't you dare insult me by trying to pass yourself off as a fed or a spy or something. My dad's an FBI agent, and there's no way in *hell* you're one."

"Think of my job as Fight Club. First rule of Fight Club is—hang on." There's a scratching sound followed by silence, and Jess figures she's just been set down or covered.

There's a muffled sort of sound, and if she covers her other ear and presses the phone close against her head, she can make out a few words like, "Only wanted two," and something about a dog and water.

He picks up the phone again and greets her with, "Hey, Bobby." It doesn't take a genius to figure out he's not supposed to be talking to her. "We're headed out in a minute, so I have to call you later about that, okay?"

"Wait!" she calls out, trying to catch him before he hangs up. "Are you really going to call back, or is that just for whoever's benefit?"

He scoffs, letting out this cocky-sounding laugh that grates on her eardrums. "Luck's got nothing to do with it; this is pure skill. Bye."

Jess barely restrains the urge to throw her phone into the street. That was so far beyond a non-answer that she may as well have asked—"Fuck!" She didn't even think about asking his name.

The clock on her phone says she's still got another half hour until Sam's shift ends. Sitting outside by herself doesn't really sound like an appealing idea, and it would be time for them to go anyway by the time her cab home would arrive, so she gives a wave to Jeph, the bouncer, who lets her in to go wait at the bar for Sam.



It only takes a week for Dean to call her back. He's getting better, although the fact that he waits until he's sure she can't answer the phone kind of negates any points he gets for his quick turnaround.

He's hopping around in the handicapped stall at a Wal-Mart in Georgia when he calls her. It might be completely chicken-shit of him to wait until he knows she can't answer the phone, but at least he's calling her back like he said he would.

His pants are pooled on the floor and his old jockeys are halfway down his ass and off when he hears Jess answer her phone with a cheery, "Hello?"

He falters for a moment, unsure whether he should pull the old underwear back up or finish pulling on the new ones. His brain stalls like a car in a flooded underpass, and when he finally gets it going again, the first thing that pops out of his mouth is, "You're supposed to be working right now."

He sneers at himself in disgust, and the only reason he doesn't plant his head against the stall door is that he's pretty sure she'd be able to hear the echo. Yeah, because he didn't sound enough like a stalker the last time he called her.

"I switched with someone else who needed the hours more than I did." She sounds weary, and he can picture her looking around trying to spot him. Dean knows he should probably reassure her that he doesn't hide in her bushes with a pair of binoculars or anything like that. It's too close to

an apology for his tastes, though, and he's sure as fuck not going to apologize for keeping an eye on Sam.

"Hang on," he tells her as he sets the phone on the toilet paper dispenser. He might not be Miss Manners or anything, but even he knows there's something not cool about talking to a girl you aren't fucking while you've got your dick hanging out. He's used to quick changes, at least, and his new jockeys, new socks, same pants, and his boots are all on, laced, zipped, and buttoned within a minute.

He's doing up his belt and stuffing the other two pairs of underwear into the inside pocket of his jacket as he grabs the phone back up. She's singing something to herself, some shitty bubblegum song he recognizes from those big chain grocery stores. Dean valiantly resists the urge to gag as he makes his way out of the bathroom. "Figures that Sam'd pick someone with the same shit taste in music as him."

She makes this sound that's half scoff and half pornstastic whine, and Dean has to remind himself that she's Sam's girl. "There's no such thing as bad taste in music."

"Yes, there is. Sam has it, and so do you, apparently."

"I have eclectic taste. Just because I like things you don't like doesn't mean that what I like is bad."

Oh, for the love of fuck. "Does Sam realize he's dating himself? With better equipment?"

"Well, that shows how much you know; nobody has better equipment than Sam."

Dean's almost inclined to agree—his is better, though Sammy comes in a close second—but he's smart enough to know that telling her that might not be the best idea. He clears his throat twice and tries to think of a completely different topic. Awkward doesn't begin to cover it. "So being a waitress probably sucks, huh? Having to put up with bitching, hungry people every day—bet you think about taking a torch to the place sometimes, don't you?"

"Wow, that was smooth as silk." She laughs at him. "It didn't scream, 'Oh god, change the subject, change it now,' at *all*."

"Yeah, well, what can I say; talking about—" Dean stops himself short at the last second before he can add "Sam's dick" to the sentence. He's in the parking lot now, so it's not like he has to worry about being thrown out, but there are tons of kids and mean, grandmother-looking ladies milling about. Censoring yourself is just common sense when you're surrounded by kids who repeat things at top volume and people carrying heavy purses to whack you in the head with. "Talking about *that* isn't my favorite topic."

"Want a new one?" Oh, this can't be good.

"Sure, my pick." Damn, stupid, fucking Wal-Marts; fucking parking lots are too damn big. He's

itching for his girl, and she's still rows over and back.

"Nice try, but I don't think so."

"I can hang up."

"You won't, though. Because if you do, then I won't tell you anything about him, and there's only so much you can learn from your creep-o stalking."

Dean would praise her on her brilliant deductive skills, but something tells him now's not the time for sarcasm. Fuck, he's just censoring himself left, right, and center today. The next thing he knows, he's gonna be saying shit like "golly" and "gosh darn it."

"Let's go old school," Jess starts. "Tit for tat; I ask you something, you ask me something, I ask you something, so on and so on."

"Let's go old school?"

"Don't make fun of me, or I'll count that as your question."

"I wasn't making fun of you," he lies. "Who goes first?"

"You do, but you're being a smart-ass so *that* counts as your question. What's your name?"

Holy shit, he walked right into that one with a map and a flashlight. "You're the baby of your family, aren't you?"

"Not your turn. Gimme a name."

"A name? How about Lemmy?"

"Your name isn't Lemmy."

"You don't know that."

"You didn't even put a return address on anything until the letter, and you're still blocking your number, so obviously, you aren't gonna tell me your name right away."

He doesn't hold back the smile that nearly breaks his face when his baby finally comes into his line of sight. He's only been gone about an hour, but it feels like a hell of a lot longer than that. "Why do you need my name, anyway? And don't try to pull that 'it's not your turn' shit on me."

"Have you ever talked to someone with no name? No, because people have names for a reason. Without names, we're all just running around yelling, 'Hey, you,' and turning in circles constantly."

Dean drags a hand over his girl as he makes his way to the driver's side, just a light caress. The tension slides off him once he's behind the wheel, and he instantly feels more relaxed, like after a massage or good food or really *amazing* sex. He turns the volume down on the radio before he even puts his keys in, rubbing the dash a little in appreciation. Dean doesn't care what Sam ever said, he knows his girl, and she likes it when he pets her. "Your logic is pretty damn astounding. But seeing as how we're never going to meet, it's also useless."

"You wanna know about Sam, don't you? I'm just asking for a name, something to call you."

"Call me Ishmael." He can't help it; it's like poking a scrape or rubbing at new stitches. It's like rubbernecking a crash on the side of the road, it's that damned ingrained in his skin to piss people off. And, really, since... since he and Sam started their unspoken agreement of mutual avoidance, he hasn't had much opportunity to *really* get someone mad.

"No!" She's yelling into the phone, and, fuck, Dean should feel bad for it, but all he feels is this overwhelming sense of giddy satisfaction. "Quit *dicking* me around, or, swear to God, I'm gonna hang up on you right now and show Sam all those postcards."

Okay, that was kind of hot. And maybe a little creepy—the finding it hot part, at least. She's got a good rumble to her voice when she gets loud, like Bonnie Tyler after a cough drop or two. "You go right ahead and do that. I can honestly say that I don't think Sam will care that you didn't tell him about them. And, you know what? Sam's got good grades, he's got a roof over his head, and he's happy. What else do I need to know?"

There's no answer on the other end of the line, and it's silent enough that he pulls the phone away to see if she really did hang up on him. The time's still ticking away on the phone, though, which means she's just trying to out-stubborn him. Shows how much she knows. Dean got his thick skull from the best; even Sam doesn't have shit on him.

Dean starts to get a little antsy after about a minute, but he's nowhere near giving in. He starts his car, then fishes around his box for something appropriate—because mix tapes really *are* a way of life—and pops it in the tape deck. His finger is on the play button, just about to push it, when she breaks.

"Fine, then, don't give me your name. *Be* a baby. Are you gonna hang up if I ask you about Sam's brother again?" Oh, low blow. She's sneaky. If he hangs up now, not only is he proving her right, but he's almost guaranteeing that if he calls again, she won't answer. On the other hand, the list of things he'd like to talk about less than himself is short and includes things like "Mom," "Globe, Arizona," and that time he watched Sam fall fifteen feet onto his stupid fucking head.

That wasn't what he meant when he told Sam to get the fucking hell off that damn ledge right now, by the way. Dean sighs and makes faces at the rearview mirror. She had better have some *damn* good dirt on Sam for this. "What do you want to know about him?"

"Really?" Her voice climbs an octave or three and squeaks enough that Dean has to laugh. "Okay, hang on, gimme a minute. I wasn't expecting you to actually agree. Or even say anything

to that, really."

"You've got thirty seconds," Dean tells her. And if his voice got gruffer or deeper just then, it was purely an accident, probably caused by hearing it from his dad so much. It definitely wasn't on purpose.

"Tell me... just tell me what he was like. Or is like. God, I don't even—" She stops suddenly, and it doesn't take a pussy psych major to figure out what she was going to say. "I just, I want to know something about him. Hell, I'd settle for what kind of cereal he ate in the morning at this point."

"Cereal is overrated. Oatmeal with tons of cinnamon and sugar and bananas, that's the way to go."

"Don't try to distract me. Sam always does that, and I can't stand it. I just want *one* fucking straight answer. It's not that much to ask, is it?"

Dean takes a deep breath while he tries to figure out what to say. A honk distracts him, and he waves off some rabid soccer mom who is apparently desperate for his parking space. "He was kind of a fuck up. He tried real hard, though, just... couldn't tell his asshole from his elbow sometimes. But, hell, Sam turned out to be a pretty good guy so he had to have done *something* right."

Ugh. Dean feels slimy and in desperate need for a shower, preferably with boiling water. Anything to get rid of this feeling.

"So he was good to Sam, right?" She sounds almost hopeful.

"What the fuck kind of question is that?"

"It's a valid one! I've seen—Sam has—" Jess's voice cracks, and oh, *god*, he hopes she's not crying. He didn't mean to make her cry. But how the hell could she think he would—Sam. Holy shit. "He's got scars all over him, and he, he—I've taken the classes, and I know he never accidentally cut his arm open on a knife while washing dishes, dammit."

Fuck the slimy feeling, Dean just wants to throw up now. Maybe crawl into a corner and bang his head against the wall until he knocks this whole conversation out of his memory. "And he told you that his brother—you think he did that to Sam." It's a statement, not a question, and Dean wishes he had never sent out that damned postcard.

"No! No, he didn't say that," she protests. Dean doesn't even want to think about how bad he must sound for her to get like that. Talk about a sucker punch, though, man. "I know all the odds and statistics. I know it was probably his dad, but I had to ask. I didn't *really* think it was him because Sam gets that good kind of sad when he talks about Dean. You know what I mean? That 'those were the days' look to his face. Nostalgic. But I know how people who get abused will make excuses sometimes and do that eternal forgiveness thing, and I just had to ask someone

else."

Dean wants... fuck, he wants to say so much. He wants to tell her that he feels sick that she thinks he could ever do that to Sammy. That Dad has only ever hit him three times: when Sam was four and ran in front of a car; when Sam was twelve and decided to run away for three and a half days; and once when he beat the shit out of both of them after they went and decided they were going to be bait for what they thought was some kid-killing monster, which turned out to actually be just a violent pedophile who, thankfully, preferred his victims pre-pubescent. Dean was never happier for Sam's cracking voice and Big Bird limbs. That was definitely one of the top five worst attempts at a hunt that he's ever been on.

He wants to tell her that most of Sam's scars aren't serious—kid's always scarred easy, ever since he was a baby and teething on his own hands—and that he and Dad have ones a lot worse from saving the punk's whiny little ass. There's a list in his head of things he wants to say right now, so of course, when he opens his mouth, what comes out is, "Do you really think Sam's brother could've done that to him? And don't pussyfoot around; be honest."

"I honestly don't," she tells him. And it's the way she says it, quick but not rushed, that makes Dean believe her. "But it's not like you ever get a full story with Sam. I mean, for all I know that cute story about Dean teaching him how to dunk cookies in a bowl of milk is because the day before, Sam spilled a glass of it, and Dean beat him unconscious!"

"Don't you think you're overreacting *just* a little bit?"

"My mom used to work for CPS; you have no idea what kind of scary shit is out there."

CPS can't do anything to them anymore, hasn't been able to in a while, but a cold shiver still rolls over him, a bone-deep fear of the acronym that he'll probably never outgrow.

"CPS as in Child Protective Services?" He deserves an Academy fucking Award for the completely fake, curious, *interested* tone of voice he just pulled out of his ass right there.

"Yeah, she went there after she quit the FBI."

What the hell, Sam? Where did you find this chick? "She was in the FBI, too?"

"Yes! She's so amazing, and she's pretty much the embodiment of everything that terrifies Sam. She's one big red nose and a bottle of seltzer away from making him piss his pants every time he sees her."

"Is that so?"

Her voice is so bouncy and full of energy all of a sudden, and Dean almost feels like he can see her, nodding her head and smiling big and wide. "First off, my mom's side of the family comes from money, from, like, way back. My great-grandpa sold real estate after World War II, and then grandpa had IBM stock and all that good stuff. Second, she was a shrink until she got tired of

treating bored soccer moms. Then she was an FBI agent until she got bored with that. Next was CPS, and now she teaches some classes at UC Davis and buys stuff."

"Wow. She sounds... exactly like Sam's worst nightmare. Is she a short redhead with bad hand-eye coordination?"

"What?"

"Nothing, it's a, it's a thing."

"Okay?"

"So, your mom's a shrink, huh? She and Sammy-boy must have a *ton* to talk about over the dinner table."

"Oh, he hates coming home with me. He's only done it twice, and both times he looked so uncomfortable the whole time. He's downright miserable there, no matter how many times I tell him they like him. Mom tortures him, too. She keeps telling him that she's thinking about trying to get hired on to Stanford so that she can request to be his therapist. I think she might just be trying to see if she can make him actually get up and leave the room."

"Wait, wait. Sam's seeing a shrink?"

She starts laughing. Cackling, even. "Yeah, his advisor makes him."

"They can do that?"

"When you—yeah, they totally can. See, Sam's got this professor who hates his guts and everything holding them in. And the two of them had this battle going on for pretty much the whole quarter that came to a head on Sam's mid-term paper. Sam kept turning it in over and over and over, and every time he did, the guy would find another reason not to accept it. So Sam's in his meeting with his advisor, and he's venting and yelling, and he makes some vague, sarcastic remark about killing himself or something, which immediately buys him five sessions a week with a therapist and fucks up his work schedule like you wouldn't believe. But he's down to three a week now!"

"Did that actually happen?"

"How could I possibly make up something that stupid and ridiculous? And on the spur of the moment like that, too."

"Hey, for all I know you're one of those acting majors who's really good at improv."

"I find it hard to believe that you know my shifts at work but don't know what my major is."

"I only know important things. Where and when you work is important. The kind of people you

hang out with is important. What your major is isn't important."

"Spoken like someone who never had to change their major three dozen times."

That raises Dean's hackles. He's pretty sure that wasn't any kind of insult directed at him—it's not like she knows he didn't go to college—but it still puts him on edge. He blames Sam for that; he still doesn't have any idea how someone who got looked down on so much growing up could turn out to be such a huge fucking snob. "College isn't for everyone."

"Tell that to my mother. We fought for *months* about me going to college. I mean, yeah, I like it now, but I really, really, hated it for most of my first quarter here. And I changed majors once a week just to piss her off. That was actually kinda fun."

"It really doesn't bother you that you're dating yourself?"

"I don't know why you keep saying that. Sam and I aren't that alike. And he's, like, the most passive person in the world. When we met, I practically had to sew a backbone into him just to keep him walking upright."

And that just boggles Dean's mind. Try as he might, he just can't comprehend that. Sam has always had a backbone at least twice the size of his oversized, orangutan body. He never yelled at Dad—he's not an idiot—but for as long as Dean can remember, Sam's always had balls the size of watermelons, never *quite* crossing that line Dad set up for them but constantly walking right on it. To hear him described as spineless just hurts in the pit of Dean's stomach. "Sam Winchester, right? Twelve feet tall, feet like boats, bears a strong resemblance to Paul Bunyan? Maybe wearing a little more flannel?"

"Yes, Sam Winchester. I'm telling you, I've never even heard him raise his voice. That's why the whole 'I'm gonna bleed my wrists in front of the teacher and write my paper in blood' thing is so damned funny, because Sam doesn't get angry. Or whatever the hell that was."

"I'm pretty sure that's not actually Sam you have there. He's a Stepford."

"Nope, I've seen him get cut; no wires or any sparking parts. And he is way, way too interested in his own smells to be a robot. Plus, he has some really questionable hygiene."

"Yeah, Sam's never been a real big shower guy. He gets distracted a lot, runs himself ragged, and just crashes where he lands—doesn't even take his clothes off, usually."

"So that's not a new thing?"

"Nah, he's been doing that since he was little. He's great at dressing himself, but undressing himself is a whole different story altogether."

"I've noticed. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night, and Sam's just lying there asleep in bed, boots and jeans and shirts still on. Sometimes a hoodie, too. Once I woke up, and not only

was he still fully clothed, but he was under two blankets, too."

"I told you, the kid's an ice-pop. He's never warm. It could be a hundred and fifteen outside, and this dumb shit will still be running around with three shirts on and a thick jacket over them like he's some teenager trying to hide a pregnancy from her parents."

"Well, that's a colorful way of putting it."

"If the baggy maternity bra fits, he should wear it."

"That's an image I could've done without. The maternity part, that is. Sam in just a normal bra is kinda hot."

Dean's not sure how to respond to that—whether to leap on the obvious and call her a kinky bitch, ask if Sam's ever actually worn a bra (the wording in that was a little hard to figure out), or risk looking like some prudish little pussy and change the subject.

And then the sirens flip on, and Dean's rearview mirror is blinding him with flashing red and blue lights. "Shit. You don't happen to know what Georgia's laws about talking on a cell phone while driving are, do you?"

"Uh, no? I assume they don't like it, though."

"I gotta go," Dean tells her as he pulls onto the shoulder. A quick check of the car shows nothing outright illegal in plain sight, so all he has to do now is hope the cop isn't a tight-ass for speeding or having a bad day. If this guy asks to search his car, Dean's only real option is to knock his ass out and run like hell, and he needs a high-speed chase right now like he needs a hole in his head.

"Wait, what? No!"

"I'm either about to get a huge ticket or arrested. As soon as this donut muncher's done checking my plates, he's coming over here."

"For talking on the phone?"

"For doing 125 in a 55."

"Wow. You went to the same driver's ed class Sam did, didn't you?"

"He's opening his door. I have to go." *Damn.* Definitely not a guy, with a set of headlights like that. Dean always *did* love a chick in a uniform.

Before he can hang up he hears her scream into the phone, "Wait! You have to at least give me your name or something!"

So Dean says the first name he can think of—"Nathan Jessup"—and shuts his phone as the cop

knocks on his window. Ooh, a brunette, his favorite. "Well, howdy there, officer, was I speeding?"



"If you didn't want to help, all you had to do was say so."

"I *do* wanna help, Jess! I'm telling you, I didn't know what it was."

"Stop lying. Dammit, Sam, I don't need the perfect fucking boyfriend. If you don't want to help make dinner, just tell me. Don't act like you want to and then make some stupid excuse."

"But Jess—"

"No. I don't even want you in the kitchen right now, okay? Just—" She sighs, pushing the stray strands of hair off her face. "Just go play with Zach or something, okay? Take your phone, and I'll call you when the food's done."

"Jess, please, listen to me, okay?"

"No, *you* listen to me. If you aren't out of this kitchen in one minute, I'm going to brain you with this meat tenderizer. Got it?"

There's really no way that Sam can answer that without possibly risking himself a serious head injury, so he grabs his bike and heads out, aiming for Zach and Becky's place, even though he doesn't particularly feel like being there now. If he had it his way, he'd still be making dinner with his girlfriend in their apartment.

The next time Jess asks him to help with something, he's just going to tell her no flat-out. He really *did* want to help her, though. Dean used to let him help make dinner sometimes, and, okay, there's a difference between a bowl of ramen and a whole meal with meatloaf and green beans and all kinds of other things that didn't come frozen in a tray, but still. He likes helping.

Zach stares at him for a moment when he opens the door, squinting and making faces at him. Okay, so maybe it's been a little while since he's had some free time.

"Becky," he screams into the apartment. "There's some weird dude at the door! I think he might be a missionary; bring the sacrificial goats!"

"They use cows more than goats, actually, due to the sacredness of them in a lot of cultures," Sam tells him. "Cats, too, if you're doing necromantic work."

"Nasty."

"Necromantic as in 'relating to necromancy,' not as in 'relating to necrophilia.'"

"You're a sick dude, man. And you played way too much D&D in high school."

"D&D isn't that far off. Move, let me in."

"Oh, I'm sorry, did you want to come in? I'm afraid I don't let strangers into my house, Mr. Creepy. Bye bye now."

Sam's hand shoots out to catch the door before Zach can slam it. He knows Zach isn't really gonna lock him out for long, but the last time he did it, Sam had to fake an orgasm—twice, because he wasn't realistic enough the first time—before Zach would let him in.

"Mr. Creepy? That was the best you could come up with?"

"Oh, I'm sorry I don't have enough free time to think up creative insults."

"Or to look up 'subtle' in the dictionary, obviously." Becky shoves Zach out of the way and pulls the door open. "You guys are just in time. We're trying to decide between Chinese and pizza."

"It's just me. Jess kicked me out."

"What? What happened?"

"He doesn't mean *forever*, retard. You're Jess's best friend. Do you really think he'd come over here if she just dumped him?"

"Hey, boys are stupid. Who knows what you guys would do without us?"

"Drive around with a trunk full of guns and kill stuff," Sam deadpans.

As expected, Becky pauses at that and makes a face before staring at him for a long moment.

"You're kind of scary sometimes. You know that, right?"

"Your brother just talked about sacrificing goats, and I'm the scary one?"

"You live with Jess," Zach states, like that explains everything.

Becky makes a protesting noise. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"I think," Sam starts, "that it means that your brother is scared by women who try to convince him that he's secretly gay or bi and should fuck a lot of guys."

"And also that she's scary, and Sam has balls the size of planets to live with someone who can kill you with her *pinky*."

"No, she can't. No one can, actually. That's a myth."

"Her dad works for the *government*."

"My dad is a Marine with anger management issues. If you could kill someone with just your pinky, half this country would've been dead *years* ago." The silence that descends on the room is anything but comfortable. Becky can't seem to stand still, hands flexing and fluttering in front of her, eyes darting around the room as she waits for someone to speak.

Zach keeps staring at Sam, not moving at all to show just how unfazed he is. "So, pizza and Grand Theft Auto?"

Sam deserves a fucking award for the straight face he keeps. It's so damned hard not to laugh because, for once, he wasn't actually trying to imply that John used to beat him, and it's kind of fun being the only person in the room who isn't uncomfortable. "No food. Jess is still making dinner. She said she'd call when it was done."

"And then she kicked you out."

"She kicked me out first."

"Bacon, sausage, and anchovies, right?" Becky asks, already on the phone.

"The food was already in the oven when I left."

"Jess will eat that entire meal just to spite you."

"She will. It's true."

Becky orders the three of them a large pizza each and some hot wings before bringing her laptop out into the living room and settling down on the couch. He and Zach are on the floor in front of it with their drinks and a large punch bowl full of jelly beans set on the coffee table next to them.

Sam's not a big fan of video games. They're kind of boring to play, and they're extra boring when he's sitting waiting for his turn. He doesn't understand the appeal of driving around in a fake car and stealing things while beating hookers up with baseball bats, but at least it's better than the sports games, which just make no sense to Sam. Isn't the whole point of sports to do physical things like tackle people and run a lot?

Also, trying to play something with a two-handed controller while one of your hands is trapped

in a cast is hard. Sam doesn't have enough experience with video games to ignore the cast with them like he does when writing, bathing, shooting, or fighting.

He figures the games are probably more fun if you haven't actually done the stuff in them in your real life. Not that he's ever beaten a hooker to death with a baseball bat, although he *did* hit one in the face with a tire iron once. She was possessed and choking him at the time, though, so that totally doesn't count, especially since all it did was piss her off more.

"Video games are really boring."

"You know, if you keep—*motherfucker*—keep talking like that, they're gonna take your dick away."

"You keep saying that, but I still have my dick."

"Only because they're scared of Jess."

"Because she can kill them with her pinky."

"Because she bleeds for seven days and still lives—ow! What the fuck? Why'd you hit me?"

"My hand slipped."

"See, Sam, this is why you should be glad you don't have a little sister."

That's another reason Sam doesn't come over much. He likes Zach, and he likes Becky, but he hates being around them when they're together because Zach is Becky's big brother. When they're in the same room, Zach reminds Sam so much of Dean that it makes him ache.

"They *are* boring. I don't get the point of sitting there for three hours making a little guy on the TV screen run around and do things because you're too lazy to do it on your own."

"Whatever, you study for fun."

"I read, I don't study. And reading is fun. I like learning things." Sam ignores the churning of his stomach and tries to pretend he hasn't had some variation of this argument fifteen million times before.

"You can learn things from video games. See, I just learned that if I drag a hooker down the street by her hair, she'll give me money."

"Remind me to never go near Castro with you," Sam tells him.

"If I ever went anywhere near Castro without being coerced, Jess would... I don't even know what she would do."

"Probably videotape you and then try and get Sam to get you drunk."

"If this conversation goes any further, at least two of us are going to end up traumatized."

"And, no matter what, one of the ones traumatized is going to be me because your girlfriend hates me," Zach states.

"I'm pretty sure your problem is that she doesn't hate you."

"No, she loves me. That's why she spends all of her free time trying to figure out how to get me to fuck you."

"Basically."

A short grunt is all the response Sam gets as Zach goes back to stealing cop cars and tanks to run people down with. They pass the controller back and forth every time someone dies or gets arrested, which is more often than Sam would have thought, considering how much Zach plays the game. Sam's pretty sure Zach keeps getting arrested on purpose so Sam can play, which is nice in theory but not as much in execution because, as Sam previously stated, he's not a big fan of the game.

"D'you guys know what a potato masher is?"

"What?" Zach asks, stealing a police cruiser.

"A potato masher."

"Like as in that metal thing that you mash potatoes with?" Becky asks.

"Never mind."

On a golf course now, Zach ditches the police cruiser and proceeds to run people down in his new golf cart. "Why?"

"No reason. It was just a question."

"Oh my God! Tell me that Jess didn't know? Is that what the fight was about?" Before Sam can even fully turn around, Becky smacks him. *Smacks* him right across the back of the head like she thinks she's Dean or something.

"What the hell?"

"You made fun of her, didn't you, you asshole?" She starts smacking him again, and he only avoids getting a fingernail shoved in his eyeball because he manages to get his arms up over his head before Becky starts beating on him.

Zach's cracking up, laughing his ass off like the good friend he is. Becky's ignoring his noises of protest and yelling about how only she can make fun of Jess. "What the fuck, *stop hitting me*, you psycho!"

"You aren't allowed to call her spoiled!"

"I didn't! You're a fucking nut job; I didn't call her anything. That's not even what the fight was about!" Sam finally jumps up, backing away and pointing a finger at Becky, as if that has some power to keep her from going after him again. "If you hit me one more time, I swear, I'm *gonna* hit you back. I didn't call her any names, I didn't yell at her, *nothing*, okay? So just leave me alone and go get a tampon or something."

The look on Becky's face is reminiscent enough of John Winchester at his deadliest that Sam actually takes a step back before he gets his bearings.

"Hey, Beck, why don't you go call Jess and commiserate over what a douchebag Sam is and how right she was to dump him, huh? That sounds like a much better idea than ruining the security deposit with his brain matter, right? Doesn't it?"

Sam has no idea if Becky glares at him or flips him off because his eyes are glued to a blank spot of wall a good three inches above Becky's head. He only knows that she's left the room when Zach shoves him.

"I'm not apologizing," Sam tells him. "Your sister has lost her mind."

"That douchebag she was dating dumped her today. Said he didn't wanna deal with such a spoiled, ungrateful brat."

"You didn't kill him, did you?"

"Nah, I was at work when she called me. You're coming with me tomorrow, though, right?"

"You gonna end up in jail if I don't?"

"Probably."

"Guess I have to, then. You're the one with all the bail money."

"You liar," Becky yells from the kitchen. "Jess does *too* know what a potato masher is!"

"I didn't say she didn't know," Sam yells back, pinching the bridge of his nose. There's virtually no way staying in this apartment much longer is going to be good for him. Either Becky will come and try to rip his head from his shoulders for being a great big liar—which is ironic because he's hardly lied at all today—or she and Jess are gonna keep talking, and then all three of them will realize that Sam doesn't even know what basic kitchen utensils are, which will just *suck* for him.

Sam waves behind him in the vague vicinity of his bike and tells Zach he's gotta go. "The library or something, man. If I stay here any longer, I'm pretty sure I'm either gonna die or get dumped."

"Or both."

"Yeah, thanks for that very encouraging support, man."

"It's what I'm here for."



Jess is a complete idiot. Huge. Gigantic. Bigger than the whole fucking universe and Sam's shoes. But, in her defense, who the hell hasn't heard of a potato masher? Or, really, more to the point, what kind of guy *actually* wants to help make dinner?

Well, except for her dad, but he's from Kentucky, and he can only stand them having a cook as it is because he's seen her mom try to cook before. It's not a pretty sight and is pretty nasty to try to eat.

But that's beside the point. The point is that Jessica is a horrible person who yelled at her boyfriend and called him a liar when all he was trying to do was be nice and helpful. She is pond scum. She is the scuzz underneath the pond scum underneath the rock that someone scraped dog shit on.

It's a really fucking good thing that Becky called because she was about fifteen minutes away from the food being done and her eating everything just because she could. But now, instead of a stomach full of meatloaf and mashed potatoes and green bean casserole, she's got this knot of worry right in the pit of it. All she can do is hope that Sam forgives her and that the table full of food isn't ice cold by the time they get home.

She knows where he is now; he's predictable enough that she doesn't even have to think twice when she leaves and just heads straight to the library. It's his own personal tree house, chock full of big books, computers, and a fucking maze of shelves that let him hide from anyone he wants to.

Jess has no idea exactly what she's going to say to him. She doesn't really have a plan aside from groveling and hoping that it will work.

She's halfway through calling him before she remembers his phone is currently MIA somewhere around campus. "Fucking fucker, dammit, stupid damn phone." Sam keeps saying he's going to get a new one, and it's only been about a week since he lost or broke this last one, but it's fucking annoying when she's actually trying to get ahold of him.

The library looks much bigger now than it did this afternoon when she was studying in it. Sam's got these four or five spots that he has a thing for, although he's not averse to burrowing into the stacks at random.

If he's hiding from Zach—even though she's told him time and time again that he doesn't need to do that because Zach will fuck off if you just tell him you want to be alone—he stays on the first floor, far back corner with the big windows. When he just wants to read, it's either by the newspapers behind the information desk or sitting down somewhere at random near wherever he's pulled out his book.

She takes a chance and heads to the second floor of the Bing Wing, takes a left at the stairs, and hopes he's in the Lane room. He doesn't like it—too much open space, nowhere to hide, whatever—but that's where she likes to study, and he's gotta know she'll try to find him.

He's there. He's got one of the big leather chairs commandeered in the corner, one leg thrown up over the arm and the other kicked out flat on the floor. There's a book in his lap and another few on the table behind his head, the top one teetering on the pile, ready to tumble onto him or his backpack. She doesn't really have a plan beyond "apologize and possibly have make up sex," so she decides to just go with her gut and wing it.

Straddling someone in an armchair is hard. When that someone in question is fifteen feet tall, nine feet wide, and spread out on the chair sideways with a book in his lap that's bigger than her father's car, it takes a little more finesse and grace than she's used to using while still clothed.

She manages it, though, with the added—and unneeded—help of Sam's hand sliding along her hip when she leans too far to the right. He looks so cute with his face all red and embarrassed, and she contemplates leaning down to kiss him, but her left leg is currently shoved between Sam's cast and the back of the chair, making it awkward. That's okay, though; Jess is in a skirt, so she's pretty sure she flashed him a good shot of her panties while she was trying to settle into place, which *totally* makes up for skipping the kiss.

"I'm sorry that I yelled at you."

"And called me a liar."

"And called you a liar."

"And kicked me out."

"And kicked you out and was just this huge bitch to you when all you were trying to do was be

nice."

"Yeah. You kinda suck."

"Shut up. Guys don't cook, okay?"

"Wolfgang Puck."

Jess can't help but stare at him for a moment, dumbfounded. "You don't know what a whisk is, but you know Wolfgang Puck?"

"If we were somewhere that got The Food Network, Dean made sure it was on whenever the TV was. I think it might've been even better than porn to him."

Jess files this away with the other incidental information Sam has given her about his family and smiles down at him. "Clearly, your brother has his priorities all mixed up," she tells him, scooting back off his stomach and letting him pull himself up further onto the chair. "What do you say we go home and make some porn of our own? I think I know where I left the camera."

Sam makes a face, mouth twisted to the side in an exaggerated grimace, and makes this squeaky little noise in the back of his throat. "I don't know—I mean, I *am* kinda hungry. Didn't really get to eat today, you know."

She smacks him, lightly and climbs off, ignoring the stares of more than a few people, probably frosh. "Sex first. Then if you're really nice, I might let you have some dinner."

He hooks his messenger bag over his shoulder, pulls Jess close, and kisses her. He pulls away before it gets *really* good, nuzzling her neck as his fingers dance along the sliver of skin at her waist. "Well," he says with a sigh, "I guess if I *have* to..."

"Oh, yeah, I'm sure it's such a hardship."



Dean sends her stuff sometimes. They're not, like, presents because that's kind of girly. He just sees stuff sometimes that he thinks would be funny. It's like what he does with Sam, but more creepy and less spiteful—and never let it be said that Dean never taught Sam anything.

The things he sends Sam don't have any notes attached or anything. No letters or return addresses, because if he left one, and Sam didn't write back... well, Dean's not that much of a sadist. They're still not talking, but he can't *not* send Sam a shot glass for his birthday or a flea collar for a random Tuesday .

The stuff he sends Jess is more personal, in a way. Fuzzy pink dice from Vegas, a bowling ball with a skull in it from Amarillo, a kung-fu hamster from the Walgreens in Decatur, things like that. Stuff that reminds him of her or conversations they've had.

Sam gets the impersonal gifts now. Dean only sends them because he has to, because no matter what Sam wishes, he'll still always be Dean's baby brother. And by that right, Dean has to send him presents. Birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries of times Dean whooped his ass so bad that they need to be commemorated.

He sends her a mix tape once. It's stupid and childish, and it probably sends the wrong message because he's not actually hitting on her that much. She doesn't even have a tape player to play it on, so he's not sure what compels him to do it.

Jess calls him up after she gets it. A friend of her friend's friend has some friend who has a fifteenth-hand car, so she borrowed the damn thing to try and play it, but the stupid fucking car ate the tape—that's what you get with a fucking Ford, man.

He sends her a big care package for Christmas, even though it might tip Sam off. It's a tradition, though. You get presents on Christmas, and Dean's been in charge of making sure Sam got at least one thing ever since back in second grade when Sam came home and asked why all the kids in class were talking about getting things over break. And Jess is practically family, which means it's his responsibility as an almost-kind-of-brother-in-law to make sure Jess gets a big box of useless crap, too.

Given, he doesn't have much of an idea what she likes, so he makes a wild guess or nine after asking more store clerks than he wants to admit.

"Are you looking for something for your girlfriend?" asks the scary looking Amazon in J.C. Penny's.

"No," Dean answers as he pokes through lacy pink dresses and fuzzy-looking shirts. "My brother's."

"Do you know what she likes?"

"My brother, I assume. What do you get a lesbian for Christmas? A softball?"

He leaves with the Amazon's number, a hideous looking purse, and a softball.

The purse gets packed with the softball, rock candy, cactus jelly, a rubber duck, a bear fucking a turkey, eight dollars and seventy-five cents worth of Christmas candy, and an inflatable sheep.



Sam's not entirely sure what's going on.

Well, that's not actually true. There's a broad chest against his back and a hard cock riding the ass of his jeans; that's pretty easy to decipher. There's a mouth on his and a tongue that's doing hot, wicked, *amazing* things to him. His head is tilted back for the kiss, and that combined with the floaty numbness in the rest of his body makes him wonder whether he's standing or sitting.

Sam knows the how. What he's confused about is how he managed to get here, locked in what looks like the rec room of the Alpha Delta Omicron frat house with three of Stanford's best football players hungrily groping at him.

There's that shrill, high-pitched noise again, the one that jolted him out of his haze. It stops and starts again, then one more time before Sam realizes it's his phone and goes reaching for his pockets, and, whoa—what happened to his shirts?

He manages to get his phone out of his jeans pocket, no easy feat with a hard on and extra hands sliding around down there, and answers it right before it goes to voicemail. Coherent thought is still hard at this point, though, and all he can do is pant hard into the phone and try to make sense of the noises on the other end of the line.

It takes what feels like hours for his brain to recognize that what he's hearing are words. Sam barely manages to get out a thick, slurred, "Zach?" before his phone is pulled out of his hands and thrown into the wall, shattering into a dozen broken pieces.

The slow, drugged foggy lifts, cut clean through by a sharp spike of pain as teeth sink into the soft flesh of his bottom lip, filling Sam's mouth with the coppery taste of blood.

"Fuck." He can feel his heart pounding in the gash and welcomes it, pain cutting through his brain and waking him up more and more with each passing second.

He starts with the small things first. He knows he's in the ADO frat house—or at least someone who loves them so damn much they had to go and plaster their Greek letters all over everything they own—and probably in the rec room if the dart board and pool table are anything to go by.

Or the game room. He's not actually sure what the difference is between the two. He should ask Jess; she knows all that kind of stuff.

Oh, *shit*. *Jess*.

Sam makes a mad scramble away from the tangle of limbs. How the hell could he forget about Jess? He almost—there has to be something going on here, some kind of "bad juju" as Dean would say.

Sam's backed up into the pool table as he's advanced upon by—wow. Michael Hertzberg, Brett Hovey, and Paul Clayton. Not just any football players, then—Stanford's star quarterback, star halfback and... well, Sam's not exactly sure what position Clayton would play if he was ever allowed off the bench, but that's not the point.

The fact that they all still have their pants on is all that separates this from ninety percent of Jess's porn collection. He doesn't think he moved, but when his vision swims back into focus—and why was it out of focus anyway?—the first thing he sees is the fan mounted on the ceiling.

The fan is soon blocked by Hovey leaning over—when did Sam's arms get pinned over his head? This missing things shit really isn't funny anymore—and starts biting at his jaw. Sam groans and drops his head back, offering up his throat. The groan turns into a pained gasp as the movement starts a chain reaction as it pulls the muscles in his right shoulder, already resting at an awkward angle because of the cast on his arm.

Another small glimmer of clarity comes with the pain, and Sam realizes he has no idea how he got here. When he bites at his lip, it's only partially because Hertzberg has just settled himself, heavy and obviously hard in his basketball shorts, right over Sam's cock. Sam's tongue worries at the cut on his lip that he knows is gonna end up needing at least one stitch by the time he gets out of here. The constant swings between lust and pain are dizzying, making it even harder to try and actually hold onto those precious moments of clear thinking and force himself into remembering anything outside of this room.

Hertzberg isn't straddling him anymore. This would be a good thing for the coherent part of Sam's brain, except that Hertzberg isn't straddling him anymore because he's moving to kiss his way down Sam's chest and stomach. Sam's almost got this figured out, he thinks. Something's fucking with the reception in his brain, hitting and firing the wrong parts of it, like a hit of X—at least, he thinks it's like X. He only has secondhand knowledge of it, so there's only so much he can trust.

Pain seems to derail whatever it is, but biting his lip, no matter how much blood he tastes, just isn't doing enough. He feels like Charlie in *Flowers for Algernon*; he knows he's missing something, but he just can't put his finger on exactly what it is. Something to do with X? Ecstasy? Drugs? Whatever it is, it's just beyond his reach, taunting him.

Sam's fighting it hard, pushing against the overwhelming feeling of *want* and trying to make himself care that his jeans are almost undone, and... and that's bad for some reason. He's not really sure why because from here, a blowjob from a really hot football player doesn't have a downside, but Sam's still aware enough to know to trust his gut.

He's not exactly in a good position to fight back, stretched out and exposed with little control over his extremities, but he tries his damndest, wriggling and bucking until the pull in his joints is too much to fight against. By sheer dumb luck, he manages to get a leg out from under Hertzberg and knee him hard, right in the soft spot of flesh over his left kidney.

It was both a perfect move and a *phenomenally* bad idea. Hertzberg drops off the pool table like a Slinky kicked down stairs, and Hovey slams Sam's wrists against the lip of the table. He says something, but Sam's too blinded by pain to know what as he feels some part of his arm crack along with his cast.

Sam knows pain, and having John Winchester as a father and Dean Winchester as an older brother means he's no stranger to fighting through it—literally—or to trying to beat the ever-loving snot out of someone with a chunk of plaster on some vital part of his body.

Sam's arms are still being held captive, so he makes do, swinging his legs up and hoping. A sharp pain shoots through his shin as it connects with Hovey's head, and Sam realizes he didn't think that through too well. His hands are free now, though, and he's got a clear line to the door that he takes, snatching up his missing clothes along the way and trying to ignore the throbbing pain in his arm.

He's almost to the door when he gets clotheslined and knocked flat on his ass. He has just enough time to realize he probably should've paid more attention to where Clayton was before everything goes black.

When he comes to, he's in a bedroom. No pool table or football players in sight, still only as half-clothed as he was when he lost consciousness, and arm still throbbing in pain with his head joining in on the chorus. He's on his back on a bed that's *way* too big and soft to be native to the frat, and is that a fucking *canopy*? Before that line of thought can get any further, Sam's brain comes to a screeching halt as *Dean* comes towards the bed. Same stubble; same dirty, over-gelled brown hair; same scars—everything.

It's not Dean, though. The eyes are all wrong; they're the perfect shade of greenish grey, with the perfect smattering of freckles and the overly long, girlish eyelashes that helped get him into so many fights in high school, but they're... off. Not dead, just the opposite. Too alive, too bright, too open. Too much everything.

The thing, whatever it is that stole Dean's body—it's too obvious for possession, and the movements aren't anything close to Dean, so it's not a shapeshifter. Maybe a doppelganger or some stupid witch with a fucking spell—

"Oh, Jesus Christ." It hits him with the force of a bus. It's an *incubus*. The mindless sex drive, the body, the football players—and that's gonna be one hell of a mess when this is all over with—and the weird-ass ballerina movements in what looks like Dean's body.

Hell, it explains Dean's body, and Sam's a little disturbed in the back of his head that it doesn't

look like Jess. Then again, ideal or not, he's not sure if incubi can cast female shadows.

Sam's still sluggish, probably from a concussion, and that's the only reason he doesn't jump off the bed. "Well, you're just a frisky little fella, aren't you?" the thing asks, running its fingers through Sam's hair. Its voice grates on his nerves, rhythm and pitch all right but inflection and tone all wrong.

It's a concussion, definitely. That's why Sam lets it kiss him, not because it looks like Dean or because it's been more than three years since he's seen his big brother. The kiss is off, of course, because perfect isn't right. Its teeth are straight where Dean's aren't, it's missing that slight overlap in Dean's front teeth, and there's no weird ridge of scar tissue on Dean's tongue from when he almost got it cut out of his mouth.

It smells soapy, freshly washed, and *clean* in a way Dean hasn't been since long before Sam can remember, and that's the final straw. That's what he clings to when he shoves the thing off of him and swings at Dean's face, planting it with a solid left cross. It drops like a sack of potatoes, and Sam's thrown for a moment. He knows that incubi are supposed to be physically weak, but even chupacabras put up a harder fight than that.

The incubus is still breathing but out cold, so Sam takes the chance to rummage through the dressers and see if there's a shirt or twelve he can steal, since none of his are anywhere in sight. He grabs the first two things that look like they have a small chance of fitting him, then lands a hard kick in the thing's ribs. "That was my good hoodie, you asshole. Do you have any idea how hard it is to find things that fit me?"

He kicks it one more time for good measure, and, okay, maybe he's channeling Dean a little too much, but Sam's pretty sure he's got a right to. Not only did he just almost get... whatevered by three guys, but he got the crap beat out of him and assaulted by something wearing his brother's face, and now he's going to lose clothes he can't afford to replace because he has to light this place on fire before it wakes up.

Sam says a silent "fuck you" to his father as he tries to find his way out to the back door. Of course his dad couldn't take the time to see if there was any other way to kill them besides fire, *no*. Why bother with subtlety?

His bike isn't out back, and he doesn't have time to see if it's anywhere else nearby because the flames are spreading faster than he expected. Of *course* he would torch the only forty-year-old house in SoCal that isn't chock full of asbestos. And exactly how much alcohol did they have in the damn place, anyway?

His bike's aluminum, so if it *is* there, it's probably half-melted by now. If it isn't, well, it's not like he's losing anything by getting the fuck out of there before people start to notice the smoke.

It takes what feels like an hour to get back to his and Jess's apartment, taking the long way and walking slowly so as not to either jostle his arm or draw any attention to himself. He's not sure exactly what he did to his arms this time, but both of them throb and ache, and that would just

make his whole day if he managed to break both of his arms at once. Because figuring out how to piss with a cast on each hand wasn't fun enough the first time.

The two flights of stairs are borderline agony. Sam's never realized how often he goes to reach for the railing while climbing up, but he sure as hell knows now.

The TV is still on from this morning, channel 37 now blaring that show Jess hates about those witches instead of the one about the vampires that she loves to watch in the mornings. Sam thinks neither one of them bear even a passing resemblance to anything real, but the point is that it's on, and he can't hear cursing, so Jess isn't home yet. Score one for Winchester; he just might be able to avoid her from now until tonight so that he can blame his arm on work.

Again.

The light on the answering machine is blinking, but he doesn't care. His arm hurts, and he has blood soaking through his borrowed sweatshirt, so the first order of business is to figure out just how badly his cast is cracked, then wash the blood off. Maybe even wash first; it's not a lot of blood, but most of it isn't his, so he wants it gone as soon as possible.

Four washcloths and a towel later, Sam's clean again and has the sweatshirt soaking in Dad's water, bleach, and dish soap solution in the tub. There's a large crack in the plaster of his cast along the back of his hand, which explains some of the pain. His left hand, the one without the cast, is swollen near the wrist, red and puffy and probably sprained. He doesn't think it's broken; maybe a hairline fracture at the most.

Sam grumbles to himself, muttering things about incubi and how hard hunting shouldn't be. "Stupid Dean. 'No, let's baby Sammy and not let him do anything on his own so he's completely dependent on us forever!'" He knows he's being petty, but he can't bring himself to care right now.

It's not until after a failed struggle trying to get the borrowed shirts off without fucking up his wrists even more that Sam remembers something about Zach calling him earlier.

There's no hello when he calls, just a pissed off, "What the fuck did you do to your phone, Winchester?"

"Did you know frat row is on fire?"

"What?"

"Yeah. Big flames, lots of smoke. Probably some kinky sex thing, I saw a couple of guys run out of ADO half naked."

"What were you doing there?"

You remember that article your sister did about the new date-rape drug that leaves no trace?

And the other article about the how the Alpha Delta Omicron guys get rape charge after rape charge dropped because they all play sports? Wrong. It was totally an incubus mind-fucking them and making them rape pretty much everyone they came in contact with using drugged sweat that's like Viagra shoved in oysters.

Yeah, because there's no way that would end up with Sam in a straightjacket.

"Running."

"You just randomly decided to go running and turn off your phone in the middle of the day?"

"I didn't turn it off. I dropped it. Phones are fragile; they break."

"Yeah, and speaking of breaks? Get to the hospital. Jess started a riot and broke her arm."

"What? What happened? What do you mean she started a riot? Where is it broken, how bad?" He's already halfway down the stairs by the time the phone starts beeping at him, reminding him that it's a cordless landline and now out of range. When he makes it back up the stairs, he realizes that in his hurry, he didn't even close the door all the way. "Shut up," he tells Zach when he calls him back. "I forgot I was on the cordless; what happened?"

"Someone threw yogurt at her or something, I don't know. Becky was screeching at her like a howler monkey, and Jess wasn't saying much, so this is all secondhand."

"Yogurt?"

"I told you this was secondhand. You need me to pick you up?"

"Yeah, call me when you're here."

"Be ready," Zach warns him. "We're going on California time here, not Winchester time." He hangs up before Sam can give his token protest about his time-telling abilities.

At least he has a few minutes to make himself look presentable. Though, shit, Zach's gonna be fun to deal with for a while after seeing him like this.



Jess loves Sam more than puppies and crayons and playing in puddles in the rain all put together because he shows up as the doctor is about to set her arm, just in time for her to have someone to hold on to. Zach is a complete pussy who wouldn't even let Jess hold his hand while she's in pain, the rat bastard.

At least, she thinks it's Sam. She's not entirely sure; all she sees is a dirty blue cast waving eleven feet in the air. Then the doctor touches her arm, ready to set it, and everything goes hazy and painful. Very, very painful. Someone, hopefully Sam, is by her side, and her nails are digging into flesh, jaw clenching as she tries to prevent herself from screaming. Her eyes are squeezed shut, like not looking will possibly make it hurt less, and there are tears rolling down her face.

Sam—it's definitely Sam now, she'd recognize that nuzzle anywhere—has his face pressed against the side of her neck. He's wrapped around her from behind, pulling her close against his chest with his arms loose across her waist. Her nails are digging into Sam's thigh hard enough that her fingers ache, and she focuses on that pain and hopes the doctor is done soon.

"Stop being such a baby," Sam murmurs to her. "He isn't even touching your arm yet."

She opens her eyes, hesitant because she has a brother, and she wouldn't put it past Sam to say that just to get her to watch the doctor bend her arm sideways or whatever it is he's doing.

"Oh, god," she moans, dropping her head back onto Sam's shoulder. She almost wishes he had been lying. "It hurts, okay? I thought he was setting it." The doctor isn't anywhere *near* her arm, and Jess laughs a little. She's woman enough to admit when she's being ridiculous.

"He wasn't. He's going to now, though—deep breath."

She doesn't have time to react before there's this sharp, *deep* pain that seems to sweep over her whole body. Jess is squeaking and has just enough time to be mortified by her mouse-like sound before she hears a snap and passes out. Not for long, because the doctor's still there holding her arm when she comes to, but long enough for it to be over.

At least, she hopes it is. If they stopped setting it because they wanted her to be conscious, she... well, she's probably just going to sit there and take it again, but she sure as hell won't be coming back to this ER any time soon.

She's lying on the bed now. Sam's still sitting where he was, more or less, with her legs pulled up into his lap. He looks horrible. She didn't notice it before—her back was to him, and she was busy trying not to wet herself—but he looks like death warmed over. His right eye is puffy, reddish purple, and starting to swell, and he's got cuts on his lip and nose, with this trail of half-dried blood leaking from the one on his nose.

He's also wearing some ridiculous light pink polo shirt—with an alligator on it, even—and a black tee-shirt underneath it, peaking out at the sleeves and the collar. They aren't his. They in no way approach his style, not even if he's trying to impress someone, and they just barely fit him. The polo hugs his shoulders much tighter than can possibly be comfortable for him.

"What happened?"

Sam shakes his head. "Nothing, I'm fine," he insists, even though she can tell he's not. It's not just his face because, honestly, he's a bouncer. She's used to him coming home with his face cut and bruised from random fists and bottles thrown at him, and she knows he can handle them. But he's got his right hand just sitting there on her leg while his left rubs awkwardly along her shin. The day Sam got his cast on, he wrote two and a half pages of a paper in longhand, so the fact that he either can't or is unwilling to move scares her.

"Sam—"

"I'm okay, Jess. I promise. I've had much worse; this is just annoying, that's it. I'm worried about *you*. Zach said someone threw yogurt at you, and you started a riot?"

"Some stupid girl picked a fight and won—don't change the subject. I have a hairline fracture; you look like somebody just tried to *kill you*, Sam." He's shaking his head and saying something, but she's ignoring him, too busy trying to crawl closer without moving her right hand too much. The splint or brace or whatever it is on her wrist might be helping it stay steady, but she's pretty sure that putting weight on it still isn't a good idea right now. There's also that small matter where it still throbs and hurts enough that she feels nauseous just breathing too deeply. "Please," she begs him, snuggling up close and snaking her good arm around his lower back. "Just tell me. You know you can trust me. Please?"

He huffs and she feels him knock her head lightly with his own. "Later, okay? I'll tell you; I just don't feel like talking about it right now. What we *should* be talking about right now is what color cast you're gonna get."

It's better than nothing. "Fine. And I already know what I'm getting; it's pink and green with sparkles."

There's another huff, but it's laughter this time. It's a subtle difference, but it's one she can tell, which makes her proud in some part of her stomach. "Pink and green?"

"Light green. Like a kiwi." She pulls her arm back from his waist, wiggles it in between them, and dances her fingers across the rough surface of his cast. "I think yours should be red this time."

"What?"

"I'm not an idiot. I know you did something to your cast; you've barely moved that arm, and you were scratching at me with your left hand."

"That's some good deductive reasoning right there."

"Mmhm," she agrees. "Also, you had it laying flat earlier, and I could drive a truck through that

huge crack in it."

"Jess—"

"I'll wait for you to tell me what happened, but I'm not letting them put my cast on until you agree to let the doctor fix you or x-ray you or do whatever it is he needs to do."

"We could be here all night long. We don't have the time."

"We are *not*. And even if we are, you cover enough people's shifts that you should be able to find at least one person to go in for you if you need it."

"Fine, fine. You don't have to stay, though. I'll be good, and I promise I won't run away when you leave."

"You're so stupid." Jess laughs at him, but it's not an amused laugh. She wants to find his family, his old friends, anyone who knew him before her, and ask them what the hell they did to him—*how* they could possibly do whatever it is they did. "I'm not gonna leave you here by yourself. I'm gonna sit right here and stay with you even if it takes a week, and I'm going to do it for the exact same reason you came running down here for me—because I love you, and that means that you're worth more to me than a few hours of TV time."

"You only say that because your drugs are starting to kick in. You love everyone now," he teases her.

They sit there for another few minutes, Jess half-dozing against Sam and enjoying the fuzzy, numb feeling replacing the pain in her hand. The doctor comes in again, apologizes for the wait, and lets them know it'll be a little longer, then rushes off to get paperwork for Sam to fill out for his arm.

"Dean hates hospitals."

It takes a second for that to process, for Jess to remember who Dean is and why Sam's whispering. She feels like she should say something, but she doesn't want to risk breaking the spell and knocking Sam over to a different topic.

"He was fine when he was in them himself—well, not fine, they annoyed him, he didn't like being taken care of—but whenever me or dad landed in one, he freaked out. Once, when I was fifteen, dad punctured a lung. He hit some black ice in his truck, spun out, hit a tree, and pushed a rib through it. Almost hit his heart. He was in ICU for about a month. Dean was... a mess." Sam stops, abrupt like the green light in his brain just turned red. "Bobby, Pastor Jim, Caleb, Joshua—everyone said Dean was like that every time I spent the night there."

Jess stays silent. Not because she wants to, but because she can't begin to think of what she could possibly say right now. She tilts her head and risks a glance at Sam; he's got his head bowed and this bashful little smile on his lips. "Whenever—" He pauses and laughs, chewing on his bottom

lip before he starts again, whispering like he doesn't want to be overheard. "Whenever I'm in here, I keep expecting him to come bursting in, pissed and worried with security chasing after him. I know it's stupid because it's not—I keep thinking it's gonna happen this time."

Jess lays her head on his shoulder. She says nothing and thinks this might be the longest she's gone without talking since they've met—because there's nothing she *can* say to make it better.



He gets into the habit of sending her something every time he stops. If it's just to get gas, it's usually a postcard, maybe a candy bar or light-up necklace or something else small like that. If he actually stays the night somewhere, it's bigger, usually something from wherever he is.

He mails a cooler full of foil-wrapped snowballs from Toronto—"Canadian snowball. *More polite.*"

He grabs a box full of volcanic rock from Mt. St. Helens when he swings through Washington, but he doesn't remember to mail it until he gets to Maine. He almost doesn't even send them because there's something about them that creeps him out. He washes them in holy water, salts them, and even lights them on fire just to be extra safe before he mails them out. It's probably just the whole "this killed people and no one could stop it" thing, but better safe than dead.

The next time he and Dad roll through Blue Earth, they're only there a week, as opposed to the months they used to spend there whenever one of them got hurt bad enough to need to rest up. Pastor Jim hugs him extra tight when they leave and packs Dean's entire backseat with real, honest, homemade food. He sends Jess some of everything, baked macaroni and cheese, lutefisk, and about a dozen hotdishes—spam, tater tot, tuna, beef, all the good ones.

She calls him when they arrive fifty bucks and two days later, laughing her ass off. "Did you rob a restaurant?"

In Florida, he sends her a thing of pink dental floss. *Look*, the package says, *a bikini!*

He breaks his tailbone on a hunt in Oregon, and the result of that is a big pickle jar full of some protective stuff Dean decided it was better not to ask about. "Just keep it by the door, okay? I promise it's not a jar of puke." At least, he's pretty sure it isn't. Like, ninety, ninety-five percent.

Oklahoma is still just as boring as it was the last time he was there, so he decides to make his

own fun this time. Few things are more fun than sitting in the middle of a library and getting a phone call from an irate chick screaming bloody murder because you sent a Strip-O-Gram to her while she was in class.

He seriously didn't think she'd get in trouble for that, though. It's not like she would order herself a stripper to class.

He's pretty sure he crosses the line with the lizard, but fuck, man. She sounded so fucking *depressed* when he told her Sam was allergic to puppies—dogs. It's not like it was that hard, though. All he had to do was call up a pet store near them and find one that delivered. The hardest part was trying to figure out how to spend a hundred and fifty dollars on shit for a fucking lizard, but it was either that or mail Godzilla—he didn't even have to tell her to name it that—and hope it didn't die before it got there.

Then their birthday rolls around. He doesn't know how he's managed to get this far gone in a month, but holy shit, she's just so much like Sam, and she actually *talks* to him. It's not his fault. He can't be blamed for it—it's just that he misses Sam, and she's the next best thing to him.

He feels guilty, even though he knows he shouldn't. It's not like he sent her panties or porn or anything like that. That almost makes it worse, though, and he's gotta do something to make it up to them, even if Jess doesn't understand that yet.

A gift card to a steakhouse might not seem very personal or caring, but Sammy always *loved* when Dad took them out to eat at the fancy places with cloth napkins and no tuna melts. And Jess just likes spending time with Sam, which he knows she doesn't get to do much anymore now that they're paying for a place by themselves.

Maybe that was where he started losing it.



"What do you look like?"

He doesn't answer at first, and she thinks she's scared him off, but then she hears this wet, squishing sound that she hopes is him chewing food. "Why, Jess, I'm shocked. *Shocked*, I tell you. I know I've got the kind of voice that haunts your dreams, but phone sex while you're dating Sam?"

"Nate—"

"Okay, okay, just stop begging. You're embarrassing yourself. But just the once, then it can never happen again."

"You aren't nearly as funny as you think you are."

"I know. I'm even funnier."

"Whatever, you aren't gonna distract me. I can't stop picturing Jack Nicholson when I'm talking to you. It's kind of creepy."

"So you caught that, huh?"

"I go to *Stanford*. They don't let you in just because you're pretty."

"Well, what can I say about myself? I'm six-two with the face of an angel and the body of a Greek *god*."

"So what you're saying is that you're about five-six, maybe five-seven, with a boxer's nose, a hockey player's teeth, and a bowler's body."

"Hey, now, I was being serious. There's no need to be mean."

"Oh, oh, I'm sorry," she says, sarcasm dripping from her voice. "Did I hurt your feelings?"

"I don't know if I can ever forgive you."

"As long as you're hating on me, you should tell me what you really look like."

"I already told you; I'm a fucking hotass. I can't walk down the street without people falling all over themselves just for the chance to get in my eye line."

"You're so modest."

"Humble, too." He pauses, and now she *knows* he's eating because she can hear some kind of rustle followed by a slurping sound that's probably him draining his drink. "Why don't you tell me what you want me to say, seeing as how your puny mortal mind can't comprehend my massive awesomeness."

"I'll settle for something small. Like if you have any piercings or tattoos. Any scars? Things like that."

"I've got a couple of scars; it comes with the job. No piercings. A couple of tattoos, though, nothing big."

"Really?" Jess perks up. "How many? What are they of?"

"Someone's got an ink kink, huh?"

"I do not! I have tattoos of my own. I'm just interested in what kind of tattoos people have; you can tell a lot about someone by their tattoo choice."

"Yeah, if they've got some Chinese shit on their arm, they're dumb and trusting."

"And if they've got tribal, they were sheep in the nineties."

"Sheep?"

"Trendy, trying to fit in, a clone."

"Like a lemming."

"Yeah."

"Sorry to burst your kinky little bubble there, but all I've got is a Maltese cross on one foot and a Seal of Solomon on the other. No sleeves or huge back pieces or anything."

"The feet? You totally cried like a little girl, didn't you?"

He scoffs, and she can practically see him puffing his chest out. "It's a couple of tiny needle pricks. Those don't hurt."

"That's complete bullshit. My first tattoo was on my ankle, and since it was just skin over bone, it hurt so bad I had to make them stop after the first little heart. So instead of this cool vine-y heart thing I wanted, it's just a random heart."

"You have a tattoo?"

"Three! And not a single butterfly or tramp stamp anywhere."

"You don't look like the kind of chick—girl—who would have tattoos."

"For future reference, if you could try not to remind me that you've been watching me and Sam from the bushes for who knows how long, that would just be really super."

"Got it. But before I start, I think I should tell you that I like that one pink shirt better than the one you have on now. This one makes you look too scrawny."

Jess whirls around, and her eyes go straight to the windows, trying to spot the camera or him lurking outside her window. And then the bastard starts laughing, cackling like some psychotic evil overlord. "You're an ass."

"See? I told you I'm funny."

"No, you're not funny, you're an ass. That was *not* cool."

"Sure it was. Watching you fall for the same thing over and over is something that doesn't get old."

"Fuck you. And technically, you're just listening."

"Yeah, okay, Sammy. Why don't you go do your homework and put your girlfriend back on the phone?"

"It's natural to pick up speech patterns of people you spend a lot of time with."

"You know what's not natural?"

"I am *not* like Sam, oh my God. You have the lamest running jokes in the history of the world."

"I don't know. I think calling that crap you listen to 'music' is a pretty lame running joke."

"You weren't even trying that time."

"It's late; I'm too tired to insult you good."

"Or speak proper English."

He grunts, this caveman-like sound, and she has a mental flash to the scowl and gorilla noises Sam makes every time someone mentions any kind of frat, even in passing. She pulls a pebble off the *brother* side of the scale in her head and tosses it onto the *ex-boyfriend* side. "English am be stupid."

"That noise you just heard was every English major you've ever even walked past screaming in pain."

"They deserve to be screaming in pain if they majored in English. Who pays a hundred thousand dollars to learn something they already speak?"

They way he says it, so normal and flat, stops her in her tracks. She wants to say that it's a joke—because otherwise, she may very well start crying—but she's just not sure. Sam says things like that, though. Voice deadpan and normal, face completely open as he spouts off random facts about exactly how many square pounds of pressure it takes to decapitate someone.

Sam has a very special sense of humor.



She's given him a tattoo kink.

Not a huge one; it's not like he sits in class and daydreams about sucking on the brightly sleeved arms of the skater in front of him or anything.

Well, not usually.

He's fascinated with her tattoos, though. Not exactly obsessed, but he's pretty close to it. It's the way they contrast with each other, showing how Jess is everything people think she should be—rich, intelligent, gorgeous, completely and utterly used to getting her way—and all this stuff that would never cross anyone's mind—sarcastic, insane, random, fearless, and disgustingly perky at times.

The back of her neck, right below her hairline, is littered with thin and thick-lined stars that vary in size with no particular pattern to them. They rainbow from right to left, starting with a bright, fire engine red and shifting to a deep violet at the far right. He loves kissing them when he's behind her, dragging his teeth right below the ink and biting at the far ends.

Her other one, because Sam doesn't count that little blob of ink on her ankle, is nothing like the stars. The stars are dainty and classy, and they look delicate and nearly fitting when she has her hair up and a nice dress on.

The other one is this big, blue-frosted cupcake with multicolored sprinkles and a burst of green stars behind it. It's not as completely random as it sounds; when they went into the tattoo place, Jess only had a vague idea what she wanted for herself, although of course she knew exactly what she wanted for Sam, right down to where she wanted it.

She took it as a sign when she saw the cupcake right there in the front of the book. "My dad *still* calls me 'Cupcake.' Don't you see? I'm supposed to get this tattoo. Why else would I have opened this book first?"

He stares at that one constantly. It's perched high on her right shoulder blade, just inside of where her bra strap lays. Sam never loves the California heat more than he does when Jess breaks out her tank tops.



The Feeldoe is the first one they get. It's all fun and good for about two minutes, and then it slips out and decides it just doesn't want to stay in Jess for very long.

They keep it, though. Because Jess loves the way it feels and Sam looks when he deep throats it.

Sam's on his knees in front of her, one hand on her hip and the other holding it in her, making sure it doesn't decide to slide out. Jess has one of her hands on his head, and she's pushing him, urging it deeper down his throat. He's just *taking* it, so hard and eager for it. It's hitting her just right, and before she knows it, she's coming, toes curling and whole body tingling.

But Sam doesn't stop. Never just satisfied with one, he keeps going until she comes two more times, until she's panting and whimpering, before he slides it out of her.

He's still not done, though, because Jess has the very best boyfriend in the world. She's still pretty sure he actually did porn at some point because nothing else makes sense. He lets her slide down the wall, then carries her to the bed and spreads her out, where he holds her legs down and opens her with his fingers, licking in and around until she can't speak, can't moan, can barely even move.

Sam's very thorough.



Clubs—the kind idiots go in to dance—are, in Dean's opinion, one of the worst ideas ever and probably demonic in origin.

The only reason he's in one right now is because it's a hell of a lot easier to pick up a guy in a gay club than it is at the bars he prefers, and there's much better variety here, too. Besides, it's not

like he's looking for someone to have a conversation with.

The whole damned place is giving him a headache already—loud techno "music" thudding out from the walls, bright multicolored lights swirling around and reflecting off of sweat, water, and glitter-covered bodies. Something this horrible could not have been created on Earth.

He tries to keep his annoyance off his face. Guys don't usually want to leave with other guys they think are going to try and bash them out in the parking lot. Dean ignores three invites to dance; dancing is one of those things he only does under threat of immediate death, and even then it's iffy.

Dean knows exactly what he's looking for—a tall, white kid with dark hair in that doofy mushroom cut all the nerds love. Yes, he is aware of exactly how fucking pathetic he is. It's dumb and cliché and probably makes him the star of some *really* fucked up chick movie, but he doesn't even fucking care.

So he has a type, so what? It's cliché, but it's not a bad cliché if he acknowledges it.

Just as Dean's about to give up and go find a really dykey chick, he spots his target. Even from halfway across the room, he's head and shoulders above everyone else with dark hair just brushing the tops of his ears. Probably a college kid who plays some kind of sport if the muscles and nervous way he keeps looking around are anything to go by.

There's not much talking, just enough to get the point across and get him in the car. It's probably the older brother in him worming its way to the front, but he has this split second where he wants to tell the kid that he *really* shouldn't get in cars with strangers. For all this kid knows, he could be getting into a car with a serial killer or something.

He doesn't, though, because he would actually like to get laid tonight.

They end up back at Jay's place—Jake? Jace? That's gotta be about a thousand more cliché points right there. It's this small little studio with a bed, a desk, and a basketball sitting right in the middle of this fake Ikea couch halfway into what must be the kitchen.

He's not a great fuck. He talks too much and keeps trying to bite—a big no-no even aside from werewolves and AIDS—but he's better than jerking off alone to fuzzy soft-core back at the motel.

That buildup of idle energy is gone afterwards, and Dean feels better. Well, until his phone rings and Jess's ringer belts out across the room. He really regrets letting her have the number sometimes.

It rings a few more times and almost goes to voicemail before Dean realizes that it's three in the morning for him, which means it's midnight or one for her, long past when she usually calls.

He drops his pants, still mostly inside out, and lunges for his jacket, barking out a sharp, "What's

wrong?" into it before it's even open all the way.

"Nothing. Your phone can get pictures, right?"

"What?"

"Does your phone receive pictures," she says, words drawn and stressed like she's talking to a very small, slow child.

"It's three in the fucking morning, and you're calling me to ask about my fucking phone?"

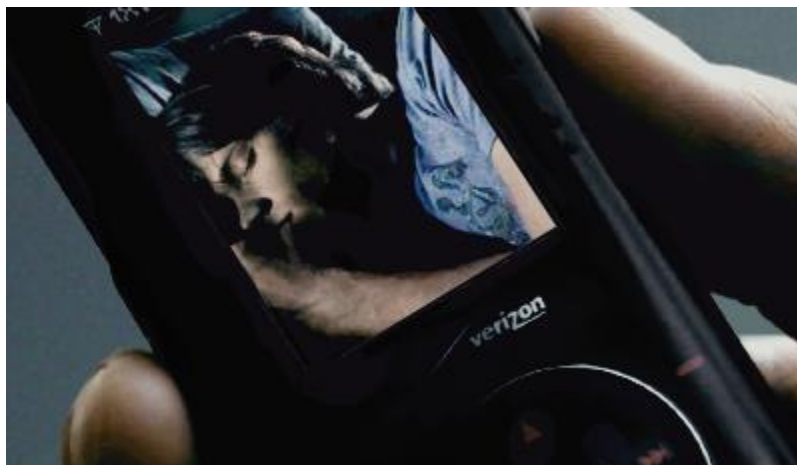
"Oh, please, you've woke me up plenty of times in the middle of the night for completely random reasons. Phone? Pictures?"

"Yeah, it does."

"Good. I'll call you right back."

"Wait—" But before he can get any further, she hangs up.

The picture arrives a few minutes later. Sam's passed out on his stomach, face slack and smashed sideways into a pillow, hood of his sweatshirt halfway on his head, and thumb planted firmly in his mouth. His fingers are lax, pointer finger caught on the bridge of his nose, curling and obscuring part of his eye.



It's both pathetic and adorable. Pathetic because Sam only sucks his thumb when he's exhausted beyond movement, and adorable because he looks about five years old—which is also pathetic in its own way.

Dean's stomach churns a little, and he chooses not to think about the kid who isn't Sam—guy, the *guy*—in the bed three feet away from him. He pulls on his pants and shirts, grabs his jacket, and sneaks out as quietly as he can, trying not to wake Jason—Jayden? Jacob?—up as he closes the

door.

When he gets to the car, Dean swaps out his black coat for his leather before climbing in, even though it's kind of warm out. He's tired and was planning on pulling over at a truck stop till morning or grabbing a room, but that twitchy feeling is back under his skin again, and his stomach feels like it's trying to eat itself.

Dean puts in Zeppelin and cranks it up, blasts the A/C, and drives in no particular direction, relying on his girl and her familiar rumble all around him to calm him down again.



"Yeah?"

Jess doesn't bother with a hello; they're past pretending these are any kind of normal conversations. "I'm waiting for Sam to get done with work, and I'm tired and cold and hungry, so I'm making him take me out to eat because I don't wanna cook, and the only thing he can make is grilled cheese."

On the other end of the phone line, Nate responds with, "Cut up like butterflies, right?"

She smiles, and her cheeks hurt, too wide a smile after spending all day scowling outside in the cold. She fucking hates being a waitress. One day, she's going to listen to Sam and get a new job. "Yeah, it's adorable. And really sad, too."

"He still burn 'em?"

"The smoke detector went off four times in our first week at the apartment. I've banned him from cooking, but it doesn't stop him. I swear, he's like a giant three-year-old. Just can't wait an hour for me to get home and make something, *no*, he has to be a big boy and make it all by himself. Just *once*, I want him to go to McDonald's or order a pizza."

"Yeah, that sounds like Sasquatch. Be glad he's sticking to the grilled cheese; the last time he tried to make spaghetti, he managed to start a grease fire."

"Making spaghetti? How the hell do you do that?"

"He knocked something on the counter over, and it spilled all over the stove. And then the dumb shit decides to throw water on it. I—" He stops, then starts again. "He knew better than that, but

he panicked. He got in a *shit load* of trouble for that. Not to mention that he took out half the kitchen."

Jess tries hard not to think of the scars littering Sam's back or the way he talks himself out of any conversation involving his life before Stanford. And Nathan is... twitching? Fidgeting? Covering his mouth and laughing hysterically? More and more, Jess wishes for a video phone. Or maybe a webcam, but only a one-way one.

"You should make him something before you go to work. It'll keep him from burning your place down while you're gone. Not like a steak or anything, a salad or some shit like that."

"I don't know how big Sam was the last time you saw him, but trust me, Sam is not a salad guy." She hears a snicker that may or may not include the words "tossing the salad," and the "brother" half of the scale in her mind gets another pebble thrown on it.

His snickers die off, but the humor is still heavy in his voice when he starts again, "You anorexic chicks have it all fucked up. Salads are what you eat while you wait for your food to arrive, not in *place* of the food."

"I'm not anorexic."

"I meant the royal 'you.'"

"Is there a royal 'you'?"

"Sure."



The first time Jess pegs Sam is less than good. There's lots of pain—Sam will prep himself next time or rip her damn fingernails right off before she goes anywhere near his ass again—and Jess manages to somehow throw her back out. No matter what she says, it wasn't Sam's fault; how was he supposed to know it was different with a chick? Anal sex is anal sex. Acquiring the right strap-on was supposed to be the hard part.

Jess's doctor gives her some low-grade pain pills and tells her to lie on a heating pad for a few days. He also tells her that she should try stretching more before she tries such "potentially strenuous activities" again, and Sam is so busy boggling over the fact that she actually told him

the truth that he barely remembers to be mortified.

Thanks to the doctor's note, Jess gets a solid week off of classes and work, and Sam spends most of that week waiting on her hand and foot and collecting all her homework for her. She plays the pity card well, almost as good as Dean used to with his stupid damn ability to make himself cry on cue.

Sam has no fucking idea why he was surprised that she wanted to try it again. Well, he wasn't surprised that she wanted to try it again; he was surprised that she wanted to try it again so soon. As in, the day she was allowed to be up and moving again.

"You just got an entire week's vacation. Do you really need another one right now?"

"No, I know what to do now! I've been reading and chatting, and I totally know how I messed up my back. We just have to do it differently."

He can't think of a safe way to respond to that. If he tells her the truth—that it didn't feel good at *all* and hurt a lot, and he doesn't want to try it again with her for a very long time—then it's going to hurt her feelings. If he lies—well. If he lies, his ass will probably be the bad kind of sore for a while.

Lying has done good for him so far, so Sam figures there's no reason he should give it up now.

He's stalling, relaxing back against the headboard fully dressed while he watches Jess do a rushed, half-assed striptease out of her clothes. She's usually smoother and more outright playful, but he can tell she doesn't have the patience for it now, whether because her back really *does* hurt or because she's just that damn horny.

She's rummaging through the top drawer now, shaking her ass from side to side as she mumbles to herself. Then it's the drawer below that and grumbling. The curses start flying at the drawer after that, and Sam decides to help her out.

"Nightstand."

"What? No, it's not."

Sam leans over to his nightstand, where he tossed the vinyl harness after their last mangled attempt at this, and picks it up, twirling it on his finger like an obscene hula hoop. He can feel himself wagging his eyebrows like some fucking idiot, but it's too late to stop, no matter how badly he doesn't want to channel Dean right now.

Jess claps her hands together—awkward with the dildo still clenched in her right hand—and gestures to him to toss the harness to her. He waves her over instead, beckoning her close so that he can help her put it on. It takes some work, trying to maneuver around each other, but eventually they manage to get the silicone cock in the strap-on and up where it belongs.

Sam fastens the right strap, making sure it's not so tight that it digs into her hip, and places a kiss there. Jess's hand caresses his face, brushing his bangs off his forehead. She looks so hot like that, smiling and confident, naked except for the glittering pink and white harness and the lavender cock jutting from it. It's so undeniably *Jess*, and it should be ridiculous, but it's nowhere near it.

He tries to fight it, but the image in front of him has him so hard that he can't find the willpower to stop himself. Sam slides his other hand along Jess's left hip and pulls her closer to the bed so that he doesn't have to lean forward much at all to swallow her cock. Jess whimpers and tangles her fingers in his hair, which he takes as a sign that she likes it. He dips his head to angle around the curve, and Jess pushes in hard, choking him for a second.

He pulls off with a gag, coughing hard enough to make his eyes water.

"Oh my god, I'm so sorry, was that too fast?"

Sam resists the urge to rub at his neck—that thing's sitting so it's curved upward right now, and his throat curves in the exact opposite direction, not a good combination—and waves her off. "It's fine." Sam stops and clears his throat before starting again. "I should've held tighter. I didn't think girls would thrust like that, too. Guess that flare on the base is pretty nice, huh?"

Jess scoffs and runs her fingers through his hair again. "This is *so* much hotter than watching you suck some random guy off."

Sam feels his face heat up, though he's not sure whether it's from embarrassment or arousal. He grips the base of the dildo and twists it around until it curves down, then deep throats it as far as he can with that huge bend jabbing him in his soft palate every time he pushes down. Even with the rubbery, condom-like non-taste to it, Sam's still aching in his jeans, moaning around the silicone and enjoying the tight pull of Jess's fingers in his hair.

Sam's close and getting closer with every minute. No matter how much he wants to, he doesn't reach down to touch himself because he wants to wait. He likes that extra overwhelming rush he gets when he comes while being fucked. He must be letting it show, though, because the next thing he knows, Jess is pushing him back and telling him to strip.

"It's not fair that I'm the only cold one here."

The shirts come off, tangling on Sam's wrists and getting caught under his chin until Jess helps, giggling at him and saying something he's glad not to be able to make out. The pants come next—slower than the shirts because zippers aren't something to mess around with—and his briefs after that. Jess crawls over him, kissing her way up his chest and ending with a small kiss to the corner of his mouth.

"Where's the lube?" Jess whispers. Sam stills instead of showing her. He learned from last time.

"No, I'll do it."

Jess sits back on Sam's thighs and pouts at him. "You don't like it when I do it?"

"It's not that," he tells her. "You just, you have long nails, and it really hurts to get scratched in there." Sam arches back to reach over to the nightstand again, too impatient to wait for this talk to be over.

Jess's fingers drift between his legs, brushing against him, and even that's enough to make him clench in response. "Why didn't you say anything? I would've stopped."

"It was almost over with anyway. I have a high tolerance for pain." Sam curses himself as soon as he says that because the look on Jess's face is horrified, and Christ, he didn't mean it like that. One day, he's going to be able to talk without shoving his feet in his mouth.

Jess leans forward again, lays herself down over Sam, and takes his face in her hands. "You have to tell me things like this, Sam. Okay? It's never going to get better if you don't let me know it's bad, and fucking you will be so much more fun if you actually like it. Promise you'll tell me?"

Sam grunts and nods, failing to hide just how uncomfortable this conversation is making him. "Can I get the condom and lube now? Or do you want to talk about your feelings more instead of fucking me?"

"Wait, why a condom?"

His arm is still stretched over his head, straining towards the nightstand and trying to fumble without looking so he doesn't have to turn away from Jess. "Because when you broke yourself last time, I had to get up and clean that thing—"

"Call him by his name."

"No. I had to get up and clean that *thing* instead of sleeping. So you're gonna put the condom on while I get ready, and that way after we're done, I don't have to go bleach anything in a sink for an hour."

"I promise I'll pull out."

Despite himself, Sam laughs. "Fuck you."

"Been there, done that, your turn now. Come on, Cowboy, give me the condom and spread 'em."

Sam tosses her the box of condoms and finally breaks eye contact to look back and find the lube, which was in the complete opposite direction from his hand. "It's such a good thing you're not a guy. You'd never get laid with a line like that." Jess rolls her eyes at him and bites the corner of the condom wrapper to open it, demonstrating exactly why Sam never lets her open it. "You're gonna bite a hole in that."

"Whatever," she dismisses, rolling the condom over her cock. "It's not like you're going to catch anything from the plastic."

Sam squeezes some of the lube into his hand and coats the strap-on with it in slow strokes. "Silicone."

"And that difference means it'll give you herpes?"

"Can we stop talking about STDs now, please?"

"Oh, fine, you big baby. Like oozing, pussy warts are such a huge turnoff."

"I'm about to shove fingers up my ass. Please don't gross me out any more."

She scoffs at him. "Don't even act like you don't love getting fingered. You forget that I've seen you have sex."

Sam ignores her and squeezes more lube onto his fingers. He doesn't spend much time prepping himself—no teasing or drawing it out, doesn't try to make it look good for her or anything. He just wants to get this over and done with because he's still not sure this isn't going to be just as bad as last time, if not worse.

"Hey, are you okay with this?" Jess asks him, hand resting on the inside of his spread thigh. "We can stop, you know."

Sam nods again. "I'm good, don't worry," he tells her, rolling onto his stomach. "Let's go."

"Wow, Sam. That was so romantic. Sometimes I just don't know how I manage to keep my clothes on around you."

"You know, just because I can't see you doesn't mean I don't know you're rolling your eyes at me."

"They're rolling because you make them so hot."

"I make your eyes hot?"

"Just shut up and get on your knees."

"Now who's romantic?" Sam teases as he climbs up on all fours. He ducks his head and takes a deep breath, forcing himself to relax when he feels Jess settle behind him. He's done this a lot before, so there's really no reason to be freaking out. Even as bad as it was last time, it was still nowhere near as bad as the first time he had sex. There's a reason Dean always told him virgins shouldn't fuck virgins.

Jess rubs his back low by his hip and eases in. It hurts, that slow burn of muscle, and he takes a

deep breath and holds it. The pain doesn't lessen, but Sam's body gets used to it, so he nods at Jess and tells her she can move. She pulls out, and Sam can feel it, inch by inch, stretching him wide. He bites his lip and counts to ten.

By the time he hits a hundred and fifty-eight, he's already decided that he doesn't even care if he hurts Jess's feelings—this is just not going to work. "Stop," he croaks out.

She does, freezing mid-push and gripping his hip. "Are you okay? What's wrong? Did I hurt you?"

Sam doesn't say anything, just slides a hand back between their hips and pushes her back, pulling his own hips forward and letting the dildo slip out. Sam flops down and rolls himself onto his back. "Baby, you know I love you," he starts.

"I did it wrong again, didn't I?" she asks, sitting back on her crossed ankles.

Sam's eyes zero in on the cock between her legs, sticking out and— "Why did you turn it?"

"What?"

He laughs, a breathy, wheezing kind of chuckle. "That's not supposed to be turned like that."

"What? Yes, it is. That's what it looks like on the site."

Sam's smiling now, big and unrestrained. He's holding her by the hips, trying to get her to scoot closer to him instead of sitting way down by his knees. "All our good stuff is up front. That's why your toy—"

"I don't see why you can't use his name. It's a perfectly good name."

"That's why your *toy* curves up—because when you're face-to-face, that's where it needs to curve. But when we're like that, you have to rotate it so it curves down. Otherwise, it feels really not good."

Jess leans down until her forehead is pressed against his ribcage. "I'm sorry I'm an idiot," she mumbles.

"You're not an idiot," Sam tells her, still laughing. He brushes her hair back so he can almost see her. "Come on, this is good news. Now we know that it isn't us."

"No, just me."

"You turned a fake dick the wrong way because you didn't know any better. It's not like you held me down and took me dry." Sam winces when Jess pinches the flesh on his abdomen. "Hey!"

"That's not funny."

"No, you know what's not funny? We just figured out why the sex wasn't working, and instead of fucking me, you're pouting." A beat. "I'm supposed to be the one pouting while you tell me to fuck you."

Jess says nothing, just shifts.

"Come on, Jess. I'm going to lose my nerve here soon, and then I'm not going to want to do this anymore. Please?"

Jess uses the bed to push herself up, flipping her hair back off her face and revealing a wide, bright smile. "Okay!"

"You bitch. You played me!"

She pats his cheek, half-condescending. "Oh, you're just so cute when you beg, baby, I couldn't pass up the chance. Come on now, knees up. Before you lose your nerve."



Part of Dean is psyched to go on hunts alone. He's twenty-six now, so it's about time. The other part of him knows what this means. It starts with being given a salt and burn two towns over, then it'll be a chupacabra in the next state, and the next thing Dean knows, he'll be alone in Boston trying to find a kelpie, and he'll realize he hasn't seen his dad or talked to another person in months.

Not that Dean's worried or anything, he just doesn't like the idea of Dad out there alone. It's different than those one and two week trips he used to make when Dean was little and had to stay home or in the car to keep an eye on Sammy.

Back then Dean wouldn't've been able to help much anyway, and besides, he had *the* most important job back then. He was like the Secret Service but better because they only had to protect some figurehead who everyone knows doesn't have any kind of real power. Dean had to protect Sammy.

But Sammy's not around anymore—Dean didn't know he was supposed to protect him from guidance counselors and college recruiters—and Dean can do more than just point and shoot now. But he knows better than to say any of that out loud; he doesn't want dad to think he's afraid

or anything.

So he says his, "Yessir," climbs into his car and cranks *Here I Go Again* as loud as he can without blowing his girl's speakers. The salt and burn *is* ridiculously easy. The legwork's already done on it, so Dean gets this feeling in the pit of his stomach that he's just been given busy work to get him out of his dad's hair.

So maybe he's been a little more... *antsy* than usual. Dad could've just *told* him to go find a bar for the weekend and let off some steam. Though, okay, that might toe the line on that whole unspoken agreement they have to never, ever, *ever* acknowledge that either of them might have sex—there are some things no parent or child wants to think too hard about.

The grave is only an hour away, but it takes most of the night to dig it up alone, so the sun is on its way up by the time he makes it back to the motel. He tries to tell himself that Dad's truck not being in the parking lot doesn't actually mean anything.

The note from Dad in the empty room, though, probably means something.

Jim called. Stay put. Back soon.

Sometimes Dean really wishes he had a decoder ring or something. "Stay put" as in, "I'll be back before tomorrow; don't leave the room," or "stay put" as in "I'll be back by the new moon; don't leave the state"? And it's not like calling him would do any good. His dad could be standing in front of you looking at his phone and *still* not notice it ringing.

Dean decides to err on the side of caution and camp out in the room for a few days to see if he comes back.

It only takes Dean two days to become monumentally bored. He's never been one for sitting around, and he's never really liked TV, either. Movies are different; they're self-contained and quick. They don't require devoting a chunk of time every week to them just to get one to make sense like with TV.

He tried to watch this one show once—there was nothing else on, so it's not like he had heard about it and was waiting or anything. It wasn't that bad, though; two hot chicks being bitchy to each other is always a win in his book. But then the next time he saw it, they were best friends and lovey-dovey in the non-fun, non-lesbian way. Total suckfest, not to mention seriously confusing.

And, of course, only three in every billion motels actually get The Food Network or Animal Planet. Those are the good channels—always something on, and if you only watch once a year, mayo is still nasty and elephants still stampede all over people.

Unfortunately, the Sunset Inn happens to be one of those *extra* special motels that gets nineteen channels of static and one Spanish station that plays nothing but shitty soaps and Japanese cartoons.

He only calls her as a last resort. He's run out of anything to keep him busy, and he's too wired to sleep, so he needs to talk to someone, and phone sex operators are just really not all they're cracked up to be.

She picks up on the third ring. "Why is Sam so stupid? Did it take a lot of practice? Because I can't imagine that he could've been born this dumb and then still continued to breathe."

"What did he do this time?"

"He blew up the fucking microwave."

Dean cackles because there's no other reaction to that than to laugh like a maniac. "Metal bowl? Spoon in his oatmeal?"

"Nuking a bagel."

"What?"

"Yeah, that's right. A bagel. He put it in the microwave—because he broke the toaster last week—and hit zero too many times or something. It *burst* into flames."

"Wow, I think that might be even worse than the spaghetti."

"The spaghetti had grease near it. He managed to light the microwave on fire with *bread*."

"Yeah, well." Dean leans back on the bed, making himself comfortable. "Sam ever tell you about the time his dad tried to fix a toaster?"



Sam can come just from getting fucked. Jess thinks that is, hands down and no contest, the hottest thing she's ever seen in her life; she's hardly ever even seen it in porn, and she's seen a *lot* of porn.

It's even hotter than watching Sam jerk off, hotter by miles and miles.

Sam eating her out is hotter, maybe, but she's too out of her mind when he does it for her to be

able to judge the level of hotness. Taping it doesn't work because Sam's got this thing where they can't watch their homemade stuff without having sex. It's not like a rule; it's just that Sam can't keep his hands to himself when they do. Well, sometimes he can, but that just leads to sex anyway.

For the record, that time Sam decided to spread her wide on the couch and eat her out was even hotter with video of her fucking him with the big strap-on playing on the TV in surround sound.



Sometimes when Dean's alone and has listened to his tapes so many times in a row that they're actually starting to annoy him, he gets to thinking.

Dean doesn't like being alone with his thoughts at *all*.

He's a protector; his entire existence is about keeping Sam and Dad safe, so he's always had to think about the worst possible outcome for any given situation. It's especially annoying when he's driving, picturing himself missing a turn and rolling his girl six times or hitting a patch of black ice and fishtailing into a Honda.

Or *really* bad things like trying to figure out which makes him worse—purposefully fucking guys who remind him of the little brother he used to fuck, or having weird, only sometimes sexual, thoughts about said brother's girlfriend. It breaks him a little inside to think that there are some things worse than sleeping with your brother and that he's managed to do two of them.

Wanting to fuck Jess is one thing; that's okay because it's just sex. It's that other shit, wanting to kiss her sometimes and do stupid things like watch B movies with her. That's the stuff that's just unacceptable. It's his fault, he knows. Couldn't just leave well enough alone, no, had to go and fucking send her mail.

Then, as if that wasn't bad enough, he has to give her a fucking address and open the lines of communication or some other Dr. Phil shit. But he couldn't even stop with that; he had to go and give her a *phone number*. He was hit with the stupid stick, he's fucking sure of it, because there's just no way in hell that someone can be born that dumb.

Every fucking time he thinks he's hit rock bottom, he manages to dig down through that and outdo himself with a brand new level of low. They talk for absolutely no reason now. At least it started with something innocent; telling her stuff about Sam that he knows Sam would never say.

But now he calls her for absolutely no fucking reason—because there's nothing on TV, because he's too tired to try and fiddle with the shower to get some kind of decent water pressure, because it's Tuesday, because last night he got stitches put in the inside of his cheek and couldn't talk after something tried to *stab him in the face*.

Actually, fuck that. It's all Sam's fault. If that asshole hadn't decided to up and ignore Dean... two years ago? Fuck, two years ago. Anyway, if he hadn't decided to cut Dean out of his life for abso-fucking-lutely no reason at all, then Dean would be calling him and would be able to think about watching *Lobster Men From Mars* with Sam without having to talk himself out of putting his fist through a wall.

He's tried to call Sam, too, because he's really that pathetic. He hasn't managed to go through with it, though. Can't make himself hit call and listen to it ring through to voicemail again.

On second thought, he's not just pathetic; he's creepy, too. Can't let Sam go, won't accept that Sam will never even speak to him again as long as one of them lives if he has his way. Nope, Dean's gotta go and write his fucking girlfriend in some retarded... thing. Dahmer wishes he were half as creepy as Dean is.



"There are *too* such things as emergency trips to the porn store!"

"No, there really aren't. Not with the internet and overnight shipping."

"I don't want to wait until tomorrow; I want to fuck my boyfriend tonight!"

"You're going to break the earpiece on my phone. Stop yelling."

Jess sighs and rubs the back of her neck. She knows she's being bitchy, but she's horny, and she hasn't been able to fuck Sam in a week. The internet is failing her because pictures and spec listings mean nothing at all when the way you pick your stuff out is by what fits in your boyfriend's hand best.

Also, the last time she got a sex toy off the 'net, it had all these glowing reviews from customers but was apparently not meant for people their size or strength or *something* because it was useless.

Well, not completely useless; it's great for blowjobs, but it's useless for fucking. Damn thing kept sliding out, and not in the good way things are supposed to slide when sex is involved. Well, at least not sex when the girl is doing the fucking.

"You're supposed to be helping me here, not making fun of me." There's no answer. "Kaitlin? Kaitlin? Are you there? Fuck." They weren't disconnected, but Jess isn't patient enough right now to wait for her to come back, so she just hangs up.

She calls Sam next, knowing that he's in class with Bershmier and she's only going to get his voicemail. "Oh my *god*, Sam, you're never allowed to do anything alone again *ever*. Ugh. I'm still at the store—alone, of course, like usual—and I can't find one like ours. Our old one. The one you *shredded* because you're a big freak who can't even work the dishwasher right. Call me when you get this, or I'm grabbing the biggest one I can find, and you're just gonna have to deal with it." She wouldn't actually do it, but it sounds a lot better than, "Call me, or I'm gonna sit and bitch more until Kaitlin actually comes here."

Jess didn't even *know* you could fucking *do* that. She *hates* dishwashers, holy shit.

It was after the first night they used it, too, which just fucking pisses her right the hell off. They finally found the perfect one, and it was the last one at the store. She's *horny* and *frustrated* and two minutes away from just asking the next person she sees wandering the aisles.

At this point, it's not so much that Jess is freaking out. It's more that the only dildos they have there are the crappy ones that kept slipping out, were too small, are the size of fists, or just looked plain scary. She doesn't even want to know who would want one shaped like Jesus; that's wrong even for her. She's starting to think that she's never going to get to assfuck her boyfriend again, and that's just not acceptable at all.

Okay, so maybe she's having a meltdown, but only a tiny one.

Luckily, she's been to that store enough times in the past month that the guy who works up front, who really isn't as creepy as he looks, takes little notice and doesn't make her leave after her tantrum on the phone.

Nate, though, may never recover. In her defense, she thought maybe he was Kaitlin or Jesse calling her back, and also, *holy fucking shit*, she totally didn't mean to tell him she fucks Sam with a dildo. Even she knows that might be an overshare.



Dean's not sure how or when it happened, but the phone calls change.

They go from warnings and tips—"Don't keep a lot of dairy around; he'll chug it if it's there, and then you'll both be miserable all night"—to random, mundane things. He tells her about his day. Not the "holy shit, all I want is one ghost who doesn't want to toss me into a damn wall" parts, but the other ones.

"I think my girl's angry with me. She keeps stalling out."

"Maybe it's the fan belt?"

"That's the only part of the engine you know, isn't it?"

"Pretty much, yeah. I had car accidents the first two times I took my driver's test, so my dad banned me from operating anything more complicated than a bike."

"And you still don't have a car?"

"That's part of the problem with living off your parents. If you ask for twenty thousand dollars, they're probably gonna ask what you want it for."

The thought of being able to ask anyone for twenty thousand dollars—not including a bank teller with either a gun and a note or a really nicely faked platinum card—boggles Dean's mind. He's derailed for a moment, thinking about the prospect of that.

Fan belt, right. "It's not the fan belt," he tells her. "I give her the best gas, check her oil myself every time I fill up, and, okay, yeah, she's got some miles on her. But that can't be it. I change her parts; I keep her young. I just don't know what I did to piss her off."

"You have kind of an unhealthy attachment to that car. Even for a guy."

"She's always been there for me when I needed her, never let me down."

"Maybe it's not a she."

"She's a girl. I know my damn car."

"No, hear me out. Maybe it's a he, and he keeps stalling because he doesn't like being called a girl. I know Sam stops faster than government funding whenever I imply that he's anything but a manly piece of man meat."

"Manly piece of man meat?"

"Shut up. I'm not the one whose car is having an identity crisis."

"After thirty-eight years."

"What?"

"She's a '67. That means that for thirty-eight years, she's been called a girl and never minded before now."

"How old *are* you?"

Dean laughs. He can't help it; he hasn't been asked his age since he was about twenty-two, not counting that last FBI cover or the professor one before that. "She was my dad's car and my mom's before that. It's our version of a...." He trails off, trying to think of some kind of non-cursed heirloom. "A wedding ring? What kind of stuff gets passed around like that?"

"Genetic diseases, mostly."

"Okay, sure, so it's like our version of cystic fibrosis."

"Of what?"

"It's a genetic thing. Sammy's roommate when he broke his spleen had it."

"He *broke* his spleen? How is that even possible?"

"Ruptured, if you wanna get all anal about it."

"*How?*"

"It was...." Dean pauses, trying to remember where and when it happened. It wasn't the cliff in Boston; that was when he broke his ankle the second time. It wasn't the haunted waterslide in Texas or the Dire Wolf in Blue Earth.... "Oh, right. Devil's Night in Detroit. Shit for brains couldn't wait for two minutes while I took a leak. Fuck head had to wait until my back was turned and then go and pick a fight with these three kids with hockey sticks. I'm telling you, you're dating the dumbest thing on the planet."

"Even dumber than the girls in horror movie who run upstairs?"

"By *light years*."

"Wow, that's pretty dumb."

"You have no idea. I love him, but he doesn't even fucking know what common sense is." *Oh, for the love of fuck.* Dean starts backtracking fast, trying to disclaim that last sentence. "He's like one of those pug puppies. It doesn't matter that he keeps eating his own shit and running into walls because he's got those big eyes and that goofy smile that makes you just want to pet him

and wrestle around with him."

Dean can't seem to remove his foot from his mouth. He just keeps shoving it farther and farther in, and if he doesn't do something soon, he's going to be tasting kneecaps. His only chance now is to try and change the subject and hope she either doesn't notice or doesn't comment.

"You know how I said California was the worst state? With the earthquakes—"

"And the mudslides and the forest fires and the agents, yeah."

"*Wrong*. I was so, *so* wrong. It's Missouri. Missouri is the pus-filled scab on America's ass."

"That's disgusting."

Dean ignores her and continues. "If elected president, I would flatten the whole fucking state and start over."

"Wait, I thought you were in Louisiana."

"New orders came in, and I had to hightail it up here."

"Well, what's so bad about it?"

In his head, Dean thanks her for letting him get away with that piss-poor attempt at subtlety.

"Well, for one, it's July, and there's a foot and a half of snow on the ground. Then there was the freak blizzard that came out of nowhere last night and knocked out the power, leaving me locked in a Walgreens all night with, along with a dozen other colorful characters, the only human being on the planet with a thicker skull than Sam. This chick was actually gonna call the cops if I broke the doors to get out. Though, really, I would have to say that the crowning jewel was the naked teenage girls running through the streets screaming about how they were 'Shiva, Queen of the Ice.'"

Jess laughs at that, a quick burst that sounds like a terrifying cross between a giggle and a cackle. "Like from Final Fantasy!"

"Not my fantasy, man. They're fourteen; that's just fucking sick." There's a pause again, and Dean isn't sure exactly what to make of it.

"You were raised in the same cult that Sam was, weren't you?"

"What? What the *fuck* is that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing, I've just never met a guy before Sam who didn't know Final Fantasy. It's this video game series. You run around on this quest and fight bad guys and stuff. It's different in every game, but it's the same basic idea."

"And this has what to do with little girls running around with their asses hanging out?"

"Okay, in the games, you can summon these GFs—guardians—in battle to help you, and they're all modeled after different gods. Well, okay, not all of them because I don't think a Toneberry even exists, much less is worshipped by anyone, but there's Bahamut and Quezacotl and Leviathan and Ifrit and—yeah, anyway, they've got all these gods and other figures and stuff, and one of them is Shiva, who's this Hindu... well, she's not really a god because they kinda don't have them, I think, but she's like a principal or something. Not like a school principal, but yeah. I wonder if Zach still has my FF VIII."

"Okay?"

"Sorry, anyway, Shiva—in the game—is this naked blue... female-shaped thing who encases the whole battle in ice and then breaks it or something and does a lot of damage to the enemy. If you're strong enough, that is."

It hits him, then, like a frying pan to the back of a cartoon cat's head. Freak blizzards, summoning, and stupid little kids who probably watch *The Craft* like he watched *Star Wars*.

"Has anyone ever told you that you have the brain of a really ugly girl?"

"Uh, no. Not in those words, no."

"Well, you do. I've gotta go do something real quick, but I'll call you tomorrow."

"Not tonight?"

"If all goes according to plan, I should be getting laid tonight. Not that you aren't welcome to call and listen if you want, but I figured all that screaming might be rough on your ears."

"How thoughtful of you. You've only been there a day, and according to you, it's hell on Earth. How did you manage to find someone to have sex with you there?"

"That chick from the Walgreens, Cassie."

"You're kidding, right?"

"Hey, a nice ass is a nice ass. It's not like we've gotta talk or anything, just buy her some food and take her back to her place, and I'm good."

"I'm speechless."

"Hey, it's not like she's interested in talking, either."

"I wasn't saying that she was. I was just admiring your ability not to let something like an inability to get along with someone get in the way of sex."

"I'm going to take that as a compliment and get to work."

"Okay, but you have to call me if she stands you up or calls the cops on you."



Jess likes to sit on one end of the couch and watch Sam get himself off on the other. Sure, she doesn't get to do much in the way of participation, but it's pretty much one of the best things Jess has ever seen in her life.

Ever. God, she fucking *loves* watching Sam get himself off.

She's the one who taught him how to dirty talk. She almost didn't bother because those gaspy little happy noises Sam made were *more* than enough, but Jess likes to tease. Tease Sam, tease herself, doesn't matter, as long as there's a nice, long, healthy dose of anticipation before the big payoff.

The best is when Sam's lying in bed against the headboard with her sitting at the foot. Jess really likes making him touch himself while he tells her just what he's thinking about.

It was actually a pretty slow process because Sam gets embarrassed easily. After a month of stuttering and fumbled attempts, they—Jess, mostly—decided to institute a rule where anything said during sex doesn't count. Random exclamations of love or fantasies are all forgiven, especially if a fantasy or idle thought includes someone else they actually know.

This is in part because Jess has had at least one fantasy involving Sam and nearly every guy they know. It's not her fault, really. Sam is *gorgeous* and looks even better when he's getting fucked—moaning and gasping, grabbing at the sheets and whimpering like he just can't get enough.

What Jess really wants, in an ideal world with no diseases or jealousy or delusional guys who think they're straight, is for Sam to slut it up with just about every guy they've ever met. She really, *really* does. Girls, not so much. Guys, *fuck, yes*.

Becky, who never seems to be able to remember that she isn't *actually* a psych major, says it's because Jess feels competition with other women. She has all their parts, and blah, blah, blah. With guys it's different because she can't do everything they can.

This makes no sense at all to Jess, but she remembers it because Becky ended it with, "And it's

*really*fucking hot. Really. My birthday's coming up; you should remember that that next time you have your digital camera out or something."



Dean's not stupid; he can read the signs. Dad's sending him off on more hunts on his own, finding more excuses to go see Caleb or Joshua or Pastor Jim by himself or otherwise be far, far away from Dean.

When they swing by Bobby's, and Dad picks up his truck—"Just makes sense; this way we can hit twice as many leads at once."—Dean knows they're as good as done.

Dad's had the truck since before Sam ran away like the little pussy he is, but he hasn't used it much yet. Until he decided to start splitting hunts with Dean, it mostly sat idle at Bobby's place.

They're still hunting together. but not for long. Dean can tell. He knows his dad.



Jess thinks it's tragic that there are hot boys in the world who she can't make have sex with Sam. She's said so in almost those exact words on several occasions, usually whenever she's at a bar and has had too many of those girly fruit-drinks she loves so much.

Jess has this thing where she keeps subtly bringing up the idea of Sam and Zach together. Sam tries to pretend that he isn't there next to her in the booth, and really, one day he's going to learn to stay home when he wants to instead of letting Jess drag him out.

Right now, they're in the middle of a bar, and Jess is just. Talking. Way, way, way too loudly. "He's *great* at sucking dick, really. It doesn't even have to be a real dick."

"*Oh my god,*" Sam says, letting his head bounce right off the table so hard that it shakes everyone's drinks. He knows he should probably be proud of the sex stuff, but there's something

about everyone within twenty feet of you knowing just how much you like sucking cock that's a little less than fun.

The only consolation is that he doesn't have to see the guys that Jess convinces to come home with them again—except when they accidentally pick up someone Sam never noticed in class before but suddenly can't ignore after that.

"You have *no* idea what you're missing, Zach. He's *so* good when he gets fucked, all moany and begging and loud. Makes me wish I had a real cock instead of just the strap-on. You really, *really*, need to stop pretending you like girls."

And that right there is *way* more than enough. Sam slides out of the booth, tugging Jess after him. "Okay, Jess, time to go home now."

"No, no!" She pulls away and whirls around, wobbling on her feet. "He needs to hear this!"

"No, he doesn't. Come on, *Jessica*." He stresses her name, using the full version in hopes that it might grab her attention. "Don't you wanna go home? Bed?"

"No," she whines. "It's your night off, so we're staying here and having fun, *Sam*." Jess pouts, making this adorable face and sticking her bottom lip out. "That's not fair; you don't have a long name. Ooh," she gasps with her eyes big and wide. "You're a Sammy! You're such a *cute* Sammy, Sammy."

Sam shoves back every feeling he equates with that name and forces his face as blank as he can get it. "Come on, babe, I need to get you home before you start puking." He tugs at her hand again, sliding the other one to the small of her back for more leverage. She pulls away again, intent on not leaving.

Any other time, Sam would play along, maybe even stay despite the mortification. Right now, though, what he really wants to do is get her home, sober her up, and explain to her why he wants her to never, *ever* call him that again.

Using the hand on her back to throw off her balance is a cheap move, but Sam can't really be assed to care right now. He lets her grab his arm for support and sweeps her off her feet, an arm under her knees and the other one supporting her back. Jess whacks him in the face with her purse—possibly on purpose, possibly on accident—when she goes to grab at his neck, and he very valiantly doesn't drop her, even though that bag has corners that fucking hurt.

He smiles tightly and manages to nod goodbye to Zach and their other friends without looking at any of them before making his way outside and trying to find a cab.



Dean's pretty sure there actually aren't words yet that describe the feeling that goes through the pit of his stomach when he finally gets a call from his dad.

It's part relief—because every time he drops off the grid, that nagging voice in the back of Dean's head starts to yell—and part... fear? He's not sure exactly how to describe it. It's not the mind-numbing terror he gets when Sammy's hurt or the low, comfortable kind of fear he associates with hunts. It's that weird, unnamed feeling he gets sometimes, the one that makes him go left instead of right at the light or chase the hunt way over in Denver instead of right next door in Queens.

Then the message starts cutting in and out, and Dean hears the unmistakable sound of EVP in the breaks. Dean hangs up and then curses himself because that was fucking *amateur*, and he knows better. His voicemail could've fucking erased the message.

Fucking Katrina, *damn* it. New Orleans is the only place in the whole fucking country where he can't get fucking cell reception. It's been three weeks since anyone's heard from him, and the first fucking call he gets, he misses. Dean knows it's useless, but he tries calling him anyway.

"Fuck. Fuck, fuck, *fuck*." He kicks a hole in the cheap plaster wall of his motel room. He can do this. He just needs to breathe deep and ignore the fear and anger so he can pretend this is just some random case and figure out what he has to do next.

Except it's his *dad*.

He can't just go chasing after him alone; he doesn't even know what happened. Except that he could, Dad made sure of that—and holy *fuck*, Dad made sure he could do this alone—and he can probably guess what happened, too.

Dean knows what to do. He throws his shit in his bag, heads straight out to his girl, and beelines west towards Sammy.

It's sometime in the afternoon before he even thinks about Jess and the gigantic fucking shit bomb of a mess that could be. Even then, it's only because she fucking calls him. He's eight hours into the trip, gassing up in San Antonio, when her ringtone trills out of his phone.

He almost doesn't pick up. He's not panicking anymore, but fucking *shit*, man. In his semi-psychotic hurry this morning, he'd completely fucking forgotten about her. He opens the phone

and hopes he doesn't sound like he just pounded a Red Bull, Monster, and Mountain Dew breakfast. "Yeah?"

"Why does Sam hate Halloween so much?"

Dean rubs his forehead and breathes. He can do this. Just pretend he's driving up to Washington or something. "Mid-October to January were always bad times. Lots of anniversaries."

"What's so bad about an anniversary?"

Dean feels the laughter bubble up in him and can't quite tamp it down. It's not just borderline hysterical; it sounds one hundred percent insane, but it's not like Jess can blame him. Well, could, if she knew. Which she probably will soon because Dean's life has pulled a Twilight Zone on him and turned into a fucking soap opera when he wasn't looking.

"Nate? Nate?"

Dean can hear Jess calling him by the fake name he gave her because he was too much of a fucking idiot to just hang up and change his number when she asked him.

"Nathan, please, you're scaring me. Answer! Say something."

Dean bounces his head off the steering wheel, hard enough that he can pull himself together a little more. "I've been awake since... Sunday. Saturday? It's Wednesday, right?"

"Thursday."

"Thursday. So I've been up since Saturday, and I think all the sugar and caffeine is finally hitting me." That part isn't a lie, not completely. Adrenaline's been a big part of it, too. "I should probably get some sleep. I'll call you later." There's the lie. Not the sleep—he needs to find a truck stop or something and grab a couple of hours. He's not going to call her, though, not for a while and maybe not ever again.

"Yeah, you should definitely get some sleep. Call me when you wake up, okay?"

He doesn't want to lie to her. *Fuck*, he's so screwed. Dean makes some nonsense noise into the phone and hangs up.

Fuck.

"I am *not* fucking drunk enough for this shit," Dean mumbles. He loves his girl, but he deserves a fucking bed after this. Besides, he needs a clear head if he's gonna try and figure out how to corner Sammy without running into Jess.



"—The hell are you doing here?"

A laugh—chuckle, really. "Well, I *was* looking for a beer."

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"Okay, all right. We gotta talk."

She can't make much of anything out. It's dark, and her eyes have yet to adjust properly.

"Uh, the *phone*?"

"If I'd'a called, would you have picked up?"

She flicks on the light and sees Sam, standing there in their living room with some guy. He's smaller than Sam with a slightly thinner build, and he looks kind of like he hasn't showered in a while, with messy hair, bags under his eyes, and what looks like dirt on his face. She has no idea who he is. "Sam?"

Sam glances at her. "Jess. Hey," he says, and then his eyes are right back on the stranger. "Dean, this is my girlfriend, Jessica." She's probably imagining the emphasis on "girlfriend."

Or. Wait. "Wait, your brother, Dean?" She can't stop the smile that splits her face; he's *alive*. There's finally something concrete about Sam that she knows. So Sam probably did stress the "girlfriend" role; she remembers that Dean's not big on commitment or sleeping with people more than twice. Their dad didn't like attachments, didn't let them date—standard, stupid, idiot movie crap.

Huh. Guess he was telling the truth about that, too.

The guy—Dean, Sam's *brother*—leers at her. It's quick, but it's enough to make her remember that she's got on bootie shorts and her ancient Smurfs shirt.

"I love the Smurfs," he tells her with a sleazy grin, waving at her chest. There's something about that grin that itches at the back of her head. It's probably just because she's seen it on Sam before, only infinitely less borderline creepy. "You know, I gotta tell you, you are *completely* out of my brother's league."

Jess barely restrains herself from rolling her eyes at him. It's kind of cute how completely unsmooth he is, like a thirteen-year-old who just realized he has a dick. "Just let me put something on."

"No, no, no, I wouldn't dream of it. Seriously." He pauses, moving back towards Sam. "Anyway, I gotta borrow your boyfriend here, talk about some private family business, but, uh, nice meeting *you*." He points at her—*points*—and it's the dorkiest thing ever. It's adorable, and she wants to smile because all of Sam's random little quirks make a lot more sense now.

She doesn't, though, because she's not stupid, let alone blind or deaf. The tension in the air is *thick*, and the way Sam's staring at his brother isn't anything like she expected. She would've thought he'd be happy to see Dean.

"No," Sam cuts in. And it's like he suddenly remembered that she was in the room, because he crosses the gap between them and places himself next to her, throwing a possessive arm around her waist. She glances at him sideways and wonders what is going on in that freakish head of his. There's no way he can think she won't tear him a new one for this macho He-Man shit later. "No, whatever you want to say, you can say it in front of her."

"Okay." Dean shifts his whole body, moving so that he's full-on in front of them—of Sam. Face-to-face again, giving Sam his total, undivided attention. She may as well be a wall plant for all he notices her. "Um, Dad hasn't been home in a few days." Maybe it's not the smile because that itch in the back of her head is getting worse. She's not so sure that it's Sam, either, because that just doesn't feel right.

Sam's hand tightens on her back, his fingers digging in lightly before relaxing again. Despite this, he's flippant when he speaks. "So he's working overtime on a Miller Time shift. He'll stumble back in sooner or later."

Dean nods once, dropping his head for a moment. "Dad's on a *hunting trip*. And he hasn't been home in a few days." There's something about that that sends chills down her spine, not just what he's saying but *how*. His mouth tilts a little—not a smile, really, but something close enough to it to be creepy. And his eyes. His eyes don't leave Sam's, not for a second. They just bore right into him, anchored.

Sam freezes. She's never really understood that saying before, 'he stood frozen to his spot' or whatever, but she gets it now. Sam doesn't twitch a finger, doesn't breathe, doesn't swallow—*nothing*. She's pretty sure he hasn't even blinked. "Jess, excuse us. We have to go outside."

"Sam."

"I'm fine." He's walking away already, headed towards the bedroom. He's quick, but she still spends an awkward moment stuck with Dean, who seems to have completely dismissed her after the pass he made earlier. Sam's got a hoodie pulled on and his feet stuffed into sneakers when he comes back.

"I'll be right back."

Jess scoffs. She speaks Sam; she knows what that means. "I'm not going back to sleep."

The door is barely closed before Sam starts talking again. "I mean, come on. You can't just break in, middle of the night, and expect me to hit the road with you."

Dean's loud, but not *as* loud, and they're further down the stairs if the echo is anything to go by. "You're not hearing me, Sammy. Dad's *missing*."

"Holy *shit*," she gasps. Sammy. He called him *Sammy*. That's it, that's why—"Holy fucking shit." That's why he seemed so familiar—not because he's Sam's brother, but because she's been talking to him for the last *year*.

Jess has no fucking clue why she's so freaked out. It's not like she didn't sometimes think Nate was Dean anyway, but damn, it's different to think it in theory when you're bored in class—it's another thing to *meet* him.

At least that explains why he ignored her so completely. There's no way in hell he's stupid enough to think that she didn't recognize him, and even though she didn't put it together until he was out of the apartment, she's sure she would've figured it out. Really, she would have.

It might've taken a while, though, until she tried to call Nate, and Dean's phone rang next to her or something else horribly rom-com like that. Not that he'd be the male lead or anything, because he wouldn't. That would be Sam, of course. Nate—Dean—whoever the hell he is would be, like, the gay best friend who keeps telling you to dump the jock and go for the nerd.

Or something. Stupid Zach.

Anyway, she would've figured it out at some point, and ten minutes is totally good timing. It took Lois Lane two movies to figure out Clark Kent was Superman, and all he did was take off his glasses and comb his hair different. Nate—*Dean* only ever called her, and people sound different on the phone than they do in person.

He's nothing like she thought he would be. His words sound all wrong, and he holds himself... awkward is the only way she can think of it. It's not awkward on him—she can tell *he's* comfortable—but it's not the right stance for that voice on the phone. It's too upright, too well-postured and stiff.

And he doesn't look *anything* like she thought he would, either as Nate or as Sam's brother. With Dean, she expected darker hair, and shorter, like that buzz that Sam had when she first met him. She thought he'd be bigger, too. Not that he's short or scrawny or anything, but the way Sam talked about him, she figured he was at least a good few inches taller than Sam, maybe a little meatier, too. Sam doesn't talk about him much, but when he does, it's like he's Superman and God all rolled into one.

Dean looks like their dad, which is weird because she always thought Sam looked like his dad in the one picture he has, but Sam and his brother don't look like each other.

But when she thought he was Nate the ex-boyfriend—

Jess is really a fantastically creepy person. Even though she didn't know he was Sam's brother, that's still some pretty creepy fantasizing she's done in the last few months. Okay, eleven months. Longer, if you want to get technical and count all those times she thought about Sam and some random ex.

She's seen Sam's ex-boyfriends, though, and Sam's definitely got a type. His boyfriends have been boxers, football players, rock climbers, a cop—lots of ass-kickers, the kind of guys who tend to be real comfortable in their closets. He likes the big guys, sometimes even bigger than him. Manly, too, which usually means they're assholes. Hot and really good in bed, but assholes.

Despite all that, she didn't have a clear image in her head of Nate, except for the random occasions when she pictured him as Nathan Fillion, which was all the Sci-Fi Channel's fault. She pictured him built kind of like a football player—quarterback or linebacker like Sam's usual—but with that Captain America blond hair and blue eyes. It never felt right, though. The personality was all off, didn't fit the frat-like picture in her head.

Fuck. Sam's brother, Dean. Who *is* Nate. Was. Is?

"Fuck," she mumbles to herself. "I need a fucking drink."



Sam's proud of how he manages to keep his hands from shaking, even though he feels like his whole fucking world is about to explode around him like he's in some Michael Bay movie. Jess is wandering back and forth in front of the door to their room as he packs, probably trying to figure out how to start the interrogation without tipping her hand. They live together; Sam's seen all her secret plans.

She still seems a little drunk from tonight, which is weird because he doesn't remember her drinking that much. His only hope is that she's still buzzed enough that she doesn't notice the claw blade he sneaks into his bag when she comes back in the room again. "Wait, you're taking off? Is this about your dad? Is he all right?"

Sam bites back a grimace and tries to smile and fake like it's nothing. It's not about Dad at all, not really. Sam's not that worried about him; this is Dad's pattern, vanish in the middle of hunting something big and bad that has Joshua shaking in his paramilitary boots and then show up a couple of weeks later, bruised and stitched but not much worse for the wear.

But Dean. Dean *asked* him. Dean never asks Sam for help with anything.

"Yeah. You know; just a little family drama." Just because he turns away and remembers he should get clothes from the dresser doesn't mean he's avoiding Jess.

"Your brother said he was on some kind of hunting trip." Sam's brain is screaming at him. *It's a trap, it's a trap! Danger, Will Robinson!*

"Oh, yeah, he's just deer hunting up at the cabin." Of course, Jess has planted herself right next to Sam's bag, unwilling to be ignored. "He's probably got Jim, Jack, and José along with him. I'm just going to go bring him back."

Sam tries to make himself forget that Jess knows they don't have any fucking cabins and does everything he can to avoid any prolonged eye contact. It's bad enough that he's lying to her face—again—without any trouble. He'd like to keep some small bit of honor.

"What about the interview?"

"I'll make the interview," Sam scoffs. At least there's one truth. That counts, right? "This is only for a couple days." He tries to make his exit quick before that nauseous feeling in the pit of his stomach makes him do something stupid like stay or tell Jess the truth.

She follows him, not content to let him sneak away or take his shallow responses at face value. "Sam, I mean, please. Just stop for a second. You sure you're okay?"

Sam wants to pull her close, hug her to him, and tell her the truth. Tell her that his brother just all but begged for him to come hold his hand because he's scared. That his dad has vanished off the face of the fucking earth *again* and may have been killed by some fucking ghost, neither of which are new in any way. And that, oh, by the way, every other night, she dies a painful, vivid death in his dreams. "I'm fine."

"It's just... you won't even talk about your family." He scoffs again, rolling his eyes at her. He concludes from the lack of a smack, shove, or insult that she must be well past buzzed and into completely trashed. That, or she's actually talking from the heart, and he's being a jerk just so he can get away. And get back faster, of course. "And now you're taking off in the middle of the night to spend a weekend with them? And with Monday coming up, which is kind of a huge deal."

Fucking Dean. He really *doesn't* want to go, especially with those creepy dreams he's been having, but he hasn't seen Dean in years. Sam misses his big brother. "Hey," Sam starts out,

letting every single ounce of earnest honesty show on his face. "Everything's going to be okay. I will be back in time, I promise."

He gives her a quick peck on the cheek and makes his escape away from that concerned, patient stare.

"At least tell me where you're going," Jess shouts after him. He's not sure if it was a request or an order. It doesn't matter either way; it's not like he even knows where they're going aside from the name of the town.

Sam's almost to the door when he catches a flash of white out of the corner of his eye and stops short. His heart practically cracks his ribs with how hard it's beating, and he doesn't want to turn and see that damn nightgown, but he has to see it.

It's not even white. It's the dress Jess was wearing today in Bruckner's class because he promised extra homework to anyone who showed up in costume—light pink top with baby blue and gold beaded flowers and a wrinkly, gauzy bottom to it, flowing out from below the chest and bleeding from the top's light pink to a darker pink towards the middle.

It's not that stupid fucking nightgown from his nightmares, but Sam can't seem to calm his heart back down.



This is how Dean knows his girl loves him—he grabbed his Foreigner tape out of the glove box, and instead of Hot Blooded belting out of his speakers, All Right Now came on instead. Because she knows him, and she can pick his soundtrack better than him.

So now he's rocking out in the car because he can, and it feels fucking *good*. He's got Sam back—for a weekend, at least—Jess didn't say anything about the letters or anything and might not have even realized, and he and Sam are gonna find Dad. Things're going good.

Dean's drumming out the guitar part on the steering wheel and only restraining himself from turning it up to eleven because it would suck major ass to get the cops called on him for this. He can just see it now, sitting in the jail cell, the other guys asking him what he did to get in there. "*I blasted my music on a public street!*"

Eh, it's fucking *Stanford*. He'd probably be the most badass one in there anyway, surrounded by a

bunch of kids trashed on a beer and the head of some counterfeit pocket protector ring or something.

He's singing along with the song, completely out of tune and not giving half a damn. "Now don't you wait or hesitate, let's move before they raise the parking rate!" Dean's just about to break into the chorus, which he might just *have* to turn it up for, when the back passenger door swings open, and two oversized purse-looking things are thrown in the back seat, followed by a huge, fuzzy, purple *thing*.

"What the hell is that?"

"It's my body pillow," says a voice that definitely doesn't belong to Sam.

"What the fuck are you doing here?"

"She's coming with. Let's go."

"Are you out of your fucking mind? Hell, no, this is *family* business."

"She *is* my family, Dean. She comes with, or I get out with her; your choice."

Christ on a motherfucking pogo stick.

Dean says nothing. Neither does Sam, up front with his legs jammed half on the seat, or Jess, already half asleep in the back and curled around her fucking body pillow.

Dean jabs the tape off—*motherfucker*—and puts his car into drive, flipping a bitch and trying to remember which one-way street around here is gonna lead him to the interstate.

This is going to suck *out loud*.