

There's A Girl In Texas

By AmandaK

The sudden quiet startled Dean awake. "We there yet?" he mumbled, yawning and trying to stretch out in the passenger seat.

"Nope." Sam sounded just like Dad used to when they were kids.

"Want me to drive?" Dean opened his eyes and blinked at his brother. Sam looked a little cranky—then again, he always did—but otherwise still fresh and awake.

Sam shook his head. "I'm good."

"Then why stop? We could make Arizona by midnight."

"Because it's way past lunch time." Sam's reply was curt. "And because I'm stiff, and sick and tired of this damned car. We've been driving three days straight, Dean."

Oh yeah, definitely cranky. Dean shot his brother a mock glare and patted the dash board. "Never mind him, baby. Sammy's such a sourpuss." He sat up straighter and looked around. "Where are we?"

Some crappy town in the middle of nowhere, by the looks of it. A wide, mostly empty street stretched away from the Impala in both directions. Nearby shop fronts sported canvas awnings and small signboards with faded letters: a bar, a beauty parlor, drugstore, a five-and-dime... Nothing he hadn't seen a thousand times before in a thousand other no-name towns.

A tired old truck that had once been green rested with one wheel on the sidewalk in front of the hardware store half a block down from where Sam had parked in front of a garage. Bright blue letters painted on a white board proclaimed it Big Bob's Auto Shop. A dozen cars and trucks surrounded it: some gleaming with newness, others showing dented fenders and rust spots. The workshop itself was a gaping maw filled with shadows. Inside, someone was reaching into the engine of what looked like an Oldsmobile.

"West of Wichita Falls." Sam's tone suggested he'd decided to ignore Dean's jab. "And for the record: we don't even know there's really a job in Arizona."

"We also don't know that there's not," Dean shot back. "And Sam? I thought you said you were

hungry. But this is a garage. So unless you've developed a taste for motor oil, I say again: why did we stop?"

Sam puckered his lips. "Busted tail light, remember? We gotta get that fixed before dark; we don't want highway patrol pulling us over."

Dean glowered at Big Bob's shop. "I don't need some hick mechanic for a friggin' tail light." He'd be damned if he let someone else work on his girl. "I'll do it myself."

"With what, Dean?" Sam sighed. "A magic spell? We used the spare light a month ago, after we fucked up with those vampires in Illinois."

Right.... Damned vamps'd known they were coming. Dean's instincts had warned him about the trap at the very last second, and he'd stomped on the gas. Had to squish a bunch of the bloodsuckers beneath the wheels to get them out alive, and they'd been very lucky to suffer nothing worse than a shattered tail light and some scratches to the Impala's paint. Though that had hurt plenty when he'd discovered the damage. He'd patched up the car best he could while they were hiding out in a barn that stank of manure. He'd forgotten all about it.

Dean conceded Sam had a point: he could perfectly well replace a busted light, but he couldn't conjure a fresh bulb out of thin air.

"All right, we'll get Bob here to sell us a replacement." Dean shoved open the door and climbed out. There was a diner across the street that looked like it might serve half-way decent cheeseburgers. His stomach growled. It couldn't hurt to give the place a try; they weren't in *that* much of a rush to get to Arizona. "And we'll eat. Then we hit the road again. That make you happy?"

Instead of replying, Sam looked over Dean's shoulder. Dean turned on his heel.

"Car trouble?"

The mechanic was strolling down from the workshop. Dean's eyebrows shot up to meet his hairline: the mechanic was... a girl. And the stained baggy coveralls with rolled-up sleeves didn't hide the fact that she was, well, *hot*. Dean looked her up and down, not bothering trying to hide his surprise, or his admiration. She put up with his scrutiny without blinking.

"Yeah," he drawled. "Girl's developed a rattle I can't seem to put my finger on." He sensed more than saw Sam roll his eyes.

"Well, drive her on in," the girl said. "Let's have a look."

She pivoted on the toes of her sneakers and disappeared into the shadowy interior of the workshop. Her hair, tied back in a ponytail, danced with every step. "You got the keys," Dean threw over his shoulder at Sam as he trotted to catch up with her. He knew that would earn him another eye roll and probably the Glare of Doom but, like before, he didn't care.

A few minutes later, the Impala stood in the middle of the workshop with her hood up while the girl—Dean couldn't quite bring himself to think of her as a mechanic—dug around in the engine compartment. Sam had found himself a pile of tires near the door and was enjoying the meager sunshine filtering through the clouds.

"I take it you're not Big Bob?" Dean sidled up to join her under the hood.

She laughed—*nice laugh*, he thought—and shook her head, glancing over at him. "No. That's my dad." She stretched to reach the valve cover.

Feigning interest, Dean slanted forward as well. But he had far better things to look at than the Impala's engine—more so since he knew damn well there was nothing wrong with it. He squinted from the corner of his eye at the shadowy dip of the open V in her coveralls, enjoying the round swell of breasts visible there. What he could see of her skin was smooth and tanned, and he wondered if she sunbathed topless.

The thought made his mouth go dry.

"Your fa—*ungh!*" The question died on his lips and his breath caught in his throat. The girl had reached back and placed one hand over his crotch. Her fingers tightened, not enough to really hurt him, but with a firm enough grip on his delicate parts that he thought it best to stay very, *very* still. He turned his head to stare up at her face, but she wasn't even looking at him, still checking over various lines and cables with her other hand.

"There is no rattle, is there?" she asked softly, squeezing a little harder.

"No," he gasped. Thank God Sam was out of earshot, or he'd never hear the last of it. He hardly dared breathe.

She let out a sigh. "Figures."

She gripped him for another second or two, just to make her point, then let go of him and straightened up. She moved away from the car, wiping her fingers on a greasy cloth, while Dean tried to get his breathing under control. He was left with a slimy feeling in his stomach and the sense he'd failed, somehow.

It took him a minute to pull himself back together, during which he furtively adjusted himself in his jeans. Once he thought he had himself fully in hand again, he slammed down the hood, walked around the car and switched on the ignition. The engine turned over without a hitch, and the satisfying rumble of the Impala's V8 resounded through the workshop, bouncing off the walls.

"Listen to her purr! Ain't that the most beautiful sound?" A man as tall as Sam but at least a hundred pounds heavier walked up the side of the Impala, grinning. "My girl's the best damn mechanic in the county, aint she? In the entire state, even."

His... girl? Dean's gaze traveled from the man's ham-sized fists over bulging biceps straining a grease-stained T-shirt all the way up to a square jaw, towering far above him. This had to be Big Bob. He stole a quick glance at the daughter, half-expecting her to bitch about him and have her dad chuck him out on his ass. He didn't think he'd stand much chance stopping the guy if he chose to drag Dean out from behind the wheel. He tensed, ready to hit the gas and make a quick getaway.

But instead she poked her father lightly in the chest. "Come on, Dad. Don't be such a blowhard." She winked at Dean.

Dean stared at her, surprised. But she pretended not to notice, though he thought he saw her lips twitch. She sashayed away—and was it his imagination, or did she put a little extra swing in her hips? He frowned. *What the hell kinda game is she playing...?*

It was Sam who remembered to get them a new tail light, and Big Bob waved them away when he asked how much they owed for the 'repairs'. "I ain't gonna charge you for that." He shook his head. "Girl was under the hood all of five minutes. And it's a pleasure to see one of the old American classics in such great shape."

It did nothing for Dean's conscience. The weak grin of thanks he managed in response drew a suspicious look from Sam. Dean shrugged. "Let's get the hell out of here," he murmured.

oOo

The diner across the street turned out to be true to its promise: the burgers were hot and sizzling, the bun toasted just right, and the fries golden and crispy. But Dean hardly noticed, munching on the food without really tasting it. His thoughts kept drifting back to the girl across the street. It wasn't the first time he'd been turned down by a hot chick, nor would it be the last. Usually, he could tell when no meant no, or when it meant something else entirely. But with this girl... She'd been very, well, *firm*—he wriggled uncomfortably on the fake leather seat at the memory—in putting him in his place, yet hadn't seemed mad at all. If he hadn't misread the signs, she'd even

flirted a little, afterward. And yet he still he felt like he'd done something wrong.

He stabbed at his fries with his fork. He'd only been looking, damn it. Could't blame a man for taking in the view, could you?

Tackling the cheesebuger, he tried to shrug off his hangdog mood. She was just another girl in just another nowhere town. Even if she'd literally had him by the balls. Well, no harm, no foul, right? In a few minutes, they'd be on their way to Arizona, and he'd leave her and this shitty place both in his rear view mirror.

He finished the last bite of cheeseburger and washed it down with a final gulp of coffee. The waitress, a middle-aged woman with a friendly smile, appeared beside their table before he'd even set the cup down. "Can I get you boys anything else? Dessert, maybe? The cherry pie's delicious, if I say so myself. Homemade, too."

Sam opened his mouth to tell her no, please bring the check, but Dean was faster. "Sounds great. I'll have some." No way he was gonna pass on a slice of homemade cherry pie. He offered her his most charming smile, and grinned inwardly with satisfaction at the way her eyes widened a little.

She nodded. "Comin' right up, hon."

Sam looked at him, brows slightly raised in question. "Thought you were in a hurry to get to Arizona?"

Dean glanced out of the window to where Big Bob was puttering around outside the garage, talking to a bald-headed customer in a rusty old pickup. The girl was nowhere to be seen. "Not any more." The words took him by surprise, but as soon as he said them, they felt right. "There's a place a half a mile down the road," he pointed out. "Let's stick around for a couple of days. See what's what."

"See what's...?" Sam followed Dean's gaze and groaned. "Dean, I swear, if this is about you gettin' laid...."

"It's not," Dean snapped.

Or maybe it was. There was something about this particular girl.... "Anyway, you said so yourself: could be there's no job in Arizona."

Sam blew out a breath, and stared at Dean for a long minute. But he wisely didn't say anything, just waited for Dean to finish his pie—which was every bit as delicious as the waitress'd promised—before he followed him back to the car and headed for the passenger seat. Dean smirked and got behind the wheel.

When Sam had found a way to break the crossroads deal and gave Dean back his life, he'd also given him time. Lots and lots of time. Dean no longer had to frantically try to cram a lifetime of living and hunting into a single year. He *had* a lifetime, now. And he was determined to live it to the full.

Arizona could wait.

oOo

Dean had figured finding her again would be a piece of cake. The northern Texas town was small enough that it had only a handful of saloons. It'd be simply a matter of checking them all out.

Sam wasn't so sure. "You don't even know this chick," he complained as Dean turned into the parking lot of the fourth and final bar of the town. "For all you know, she married the high school quarterback and is putting her kids to bed, while you're chasing after her all over the place."

Dean gave Sam a look that clearly said he thought his brother was an idiot. "It's Friday night," he said. "And she's not married." At least, he didn't think she was. She hadn't been wearing a ring, although that didn't necessarily mean a damn thing with a job like hers. But he kept his doubts to himself. Instead, all he said was, "You don't have to tag along, Grumpy. I'm a big boy."

"What? Go back to the motel and watch reruns of *I Love Lucy* by myself?" Sam sighed and dragged himself from the car slowly. "No thanks."

"Suit yourself." Dean shrugged and slammed the door of the Impala behind him. Pointing at the bar, where a neon sign flickered with the words 'pool' and 'darts', he slapped his brother on the back. "Lighten up, Sammy. Fourth time lucky, you know."

"Third, Dean," Sam muttered, following him through the door. "It's third time lucky."

Dean shot him a dirty look over his shoulder. "Whatever you say, dude." Seemed like nothing could get a smile out of Sam today.

He saw her as soon as his eyes grew used to the dim light of the bar. Sitting at a corner table with a couple of girlfriends, she was the prettiest of the three by a country mile. She wore a red tank top with spaghetti straps, and a pair of jeans so tight Dean wondered how she'd managed to wriggle into them. Even through the smoky gloom, he could tell his first impression had been right: she had a damned fine body. Nice rack, too. But he already knew that.

She was laughing about something one of her friends had said and he didn't think she'd seen them come in. Dean quickly directed Sam to an empty table on the far side from where he could keep an eye on the entire room, and waited until she sauntered over to the bar to get a fresh pitcher of beer. As he pushed to his feet, Sam glanced up from the newspaper clippings he was studying but didn't comment. At least he'd stopped griping.

Dean slunk up to the bar next to her, for a moment admiring how her hair caressed the smooth slope of her shoulders. "Hey," he said, by way of greeting. She glanced sideways. He caught a whiff of herbal shampoo and soap.

"Hey, yourself."

Well, that wasn't a bad start. "Mind if I buy you a drink?" he asked, gesturing for the bartender. "To make up for, ya know, earlier?"

She arched an eyebrow.

"I was rude," he admitted. "Sorry."

"No problem. I get that all the time." Her lips curled up at the corners in a wry smile. "Female mechanic in Texas? I'm sorta used to 'rude'," she wiggled her fingers to make air quotes, "looks. Or worse."

"Bastards," he mumbled, finding the thought strangely offensive. Her grin widened and amusement sparked in her eyes.

"Though they're not all as cute as you," she added, twisting further around to face him. "Or as repentant." She caught a passing waitress by the arm and handed off the pitcher of beer the bartender had pushed across the bar. "Take this over for me, would you, hon?" She looked back at Dean. "And I'll have a beer, please."

He ordered two bottles and pulled himself up on the stool beside her. "Dean."

"Stacy." She cast a glance across his shoulder at the table where Sam sat scowling over the clippings spread out before him. "Your boyfriend doesn't look very happy."

"My b—what?" Dean inhaled half his beer. Tears sprang to his eyes and he choked and coughed. "Oh no," he wheezed once he found his voice again. "We're not.... I'm not.... Sam's my *brother*."

It was only then he saw the twinkle in her eyes. "But you knew that, right?"

She laughed, and he instantly forgave her. "Not that he was your brother," she said. "But yeah. There's no way I could mistake you for gay, not after the way you checked me out this afternoon. I was just yanking your chain a little."

"Huh." Dean decided he really liked this girl. "I guess I deserved that."

oOo

At Stacy's invitation, he and Sam joined her and her friends at their table, and the girls proved good company. As the evening progressed, even Sam perked up a little, especially after they'd divided a third pitcher of beer between them and a lithe, pretty brunette latched on to his arm.

At one point, Stacy tried to get Dean to dance to some CCR from the jukebox. The girls ribbed him good-naturedly when he refused, but he was determined not to make an even bigger fool of himself than he had already. And though he appeared to've been forgiven, he was careful not to let his eyes wander too obviously. He desperately wanted to stay in Stacy's good graces.

He certainly didn't want to end up like the salesman from Dallas, who'd thought Stacy should service more than his car. "Remember John Bobbitt?" the brunette had mouthed at him with a sly grin as Stacy told them the story. Dean had nodded, shuddering with a pang of sympathy while forcing himself not to let his hand drift protectively down to his lap.

Stacy had caught the expression on his face anyway and patted his thigh, making him jump. "Don't worry, Dean. I wouldn't do that to you."

Dean thought he was quite lucky she seemed to have taken a liking to him.

They stayed until closing-time and the bartender shooed them out with a glower and a rude gesture. The third girl, Leeann, headed for her car, while Sam had his arm wrapped around the brunette, whose name was Polly. Stacy was snuggled up against Dean. She felt good in his arms, warm and supple, and seemed to fit right in the crook of his shoulder. He breathed in deeply and thought he could still detect a hint of shampoo in her hair.

"Maybe we should...?" he began. She tilted her head back until she could meet his gaze.

"Should what, Dean?" He felt as if she could read every depraved thought he'd ever had. *No*, he decided. She deserved better than the standard Dean Winchester One Night Stand treatment.

"Nothing," he muttered. He searched around for Sam, and saw his brother making his way to the Impala. Alone. *Friggin' monk*. "Sam? Wait up a sec." Sam turned, and the look on his face betrayed his shock.

Dean walked Stacy over to her car, a mean-looking, dark-colored T-bird. He whistled through his teeth, and she grinned. "Perks of the job."

He leaned down and held the door open for her. As she climbed in, she turned to face him. "Thank you."

Dean lifted an eyebrow in surprise. But before he could ask what for, she reached up, snaked an arm around his neck and planted a quick kiss on his lips. It was brief, light, and gone before he fully realized it.

"Um... yeah...."

She started the engine and slammed the door. "See you around, Dean."

He licked his lips as he watched her drive off.

oOo

Sam and he spent the next few days investigating every reputedly haunted house in the county. They checked out abandoned barns, followed up on local legends, and scoured the library's archives for suspicious obituaries. They found nothing. Zip. Nada. The town was as devoid of supernatural creatures as the hallowed ground of an ancient graveyard.

Sam started to grow restless, leaving the reports about the deaths in Arizona that had first raised their suspicion scattered about on the beds, where Dean was bound to see them.

Dean pretended he didn't notice.

At the end of each afternoon, he left his brother to do whatever it was Sam did when alone—jerk off over internet porn, probably, or write sappy poetry—and picked Stacy up from the garage. He enjoyed spending time with her, even if she did make him go see a chick flick in a theater in Wichita Falls one evening. For his part, he took her out to dinner another night, to a nice place she knew about in the next town, suffering in silence while Sam needled him over the suit and tie that usually only came out when the job demanded they pretend to be respectable.

And a couple of nights, he just hung out at her house, watching TV while discussing muscle cars with her and her dad.

Much to his own amazement, Dean never actually tried to make a real move on her. He flirted with her, sure, or paid her sly compliments, which she shrugged off with a grin and a joke. But he never took it beyond that, always refraining from taking action whenever the thought popped into his head.

He didn't understand himself at all. And it wasn't that he didn't want her....

God no, he wanted her. He wanted her so bad he thought it might drive him nuts. She was one of the sexiest girls he'd ever met, and the mere sight of her made the blood pump a little faster through his veins. He fantasized about her in the shower in the morning, and in bed late at night after he'd returned to the motel room. Seeing her come skipping down the sidewalk from the garage to where he was leaning against the Impala took his breath away every time, and made his pants tighten uncomfortably. He simply longed to run his hand through her soft hair, or reach out and cup the breasts he'd caught such a tantalizing glimpse of once. He imagined they'd fit right in his palm.

Each day, he firmly decided today was to be the day, that he'd waited long enough. And each night, at the very last moment he shied away from hitting on her. Gradually other things glossed over the prospect of sex: despite Stacy confessing a love for Bon Jovi and soft country rock, he forgave her when he saw her nodding her head to the intro of Deep Purple's *Smoke On The Water*. He discovered she really knew her cars—she could tell him things about the Impala's history that not even his dad had known. And she managed something that very few people could: she made him laugh. *Really* laugh, from his belly up.

By the following Saturday, he even let her drive his car. He hadn't wanted to, to begin with. Nobody was allowed behind the wheel, except Sam—and that only when absolutely necessary. The memory of Andy Gallagher driving his baby was still enough to wake Dean in a cold sweat.

But Stacy had pleaded, "Please, Dean. She's such a beauty. I'd love to feel how she handles....," looking at him with those big blue eyes he feared he could get lost in, and Dean's resolve had crumbled. Reluctantly, he'd given her the keys.

The first few miles had been a living hell. He'd sat stiff and tense in the shotgun seat, watching her every move eagle-eyed, ready to step in. But she never overstressed the old girl. She took it easy on the transmission, and knew how to use the clutch, and gradually he relaxed and began to enjoy the ride. Once he let go of his anxiety, he liked watching her from the corner of his eye, relishing the delighted smile on her face and the way her hair streamed back in the warm summer's wind blowing in through the open windows.

He discovered she'd lost her mother while still a toddler, and surprised himself by telling her it was something they had in common. She turned out to be a good listener, but he never dared tell her the full truth about him and Sam.

He hated lying to her, though.

oOo

One morning, Dean stepped out of the shower stall to find Sam leaning against the bathroom door, dressed in jeans and T-shirt but barefoot, arms crossed before his chest, staring at him.

Dean rubbed himself dry with a towel. "Dude. Do you mind?"

Sam ignored him. Instead, he kept staring until it made Dean snap, "What?"

"Just making sure you're really my brother."

Dean lifted his brows. "Huh?"

"Man." Sam shook his head. "I don't understand what's going on with you."

Done with the towel, Dean threw it in the sink and dragged a clean shirt over his head. "What do you mean, what's going on? I was taking a shower. And you're being a Peeping Tom."

There was a momentary downward twitch to Sam's lips, and Dean prepared himself for a full-on scowl, but Sam quickly recovered. "That's not what I'm talking about." He pushed off from the frame, grabbed the wet towel from the sink and hung it over the heater to dry. "We've been here, how long? Over a week? And we've checked out everything. There's not a supernatural creature for miles, not even a gnome in Mrs. Lewandowski's garden." Mrs. Lewandowski was the waitress at the diner.

"So?" Dean smirked at himself in the mirror as he ran a comb through his hair.

"So? You're supposed to be *itching*, Dean. Chomping at the bit. Yelling for me to pack up and get ready to leave. Instead you seem happy to spend your days reading newspapers down at the diner and—"

"I work on the car," Dean protested.

"Yeah. About that." Sam's cheeks dimpled as he smiled. "See, that worries me the most. You really lost your touch, haven't you?"

"Touch?" Dean pushed past Sam into the room, searching for his socks. "What touch?"

Sam sighed and followed. "Not with the car, Dean. With the girl. Eight days, and you haven't even gotten to first base, have you? That's *serious*, dude."

Dean raised his head from where he was sitting on the corner of his bed, trying to force his foot into a stubborn sock, and saw the amusement in Sam's eyes. "Screw you. Stacy's not like that. She's..." He glanced away.

There was a sharp intake of breath and Dean risked another look at Sam. "Oh my god," Sam murmured, his eyes wide. "You like this girl. You actually *like* her." There was wonder in his voice.

Dean hung his head. "Oh, god," he muttered below his breath. He reached for his boot, stuffed his foot in and started to lace it up. He had to get out of here. Before he killed that idiot little brother of his.

"You like her... and you're scared."

"What?" Dean got to his feet. "Shut up, Sam. You're talking out of your ass."

"No, I'm not." Sam's expression softened until it turned into the puppy-dog look usually reserved for old people and victims of demonic attack. "That's why we're not moving on. You like her, but at the same time, you're too scared to take it any further. And I understand. With what we know —"

"I said, shut the hell up!" Dean barked. He was so not in the mood for this shit.

But Sam, like the proverbial dog with a bone, wasn't about to let the matter go that easily. "Dean... You can't let fear stop you. You could... dunno... stop hunting, get a job. Have a normal life with Stacy. I'd understand. I tried with Jess; I wouldn't hold it against you if you did the same."

"Get a job? Have a normal life?" Dean made a rude noise in the back of his throat. "Yeah, right. Because your attempt at normal went so well." He felt a stab of guilt as Sam flinched.

"Azazel's dead, Dean."

"So? There's plenty of others still out there."

After that, Dean did everything he could to avoid talking to Sam. He turned on the TV in their room loud enough to make conversation impossible. He took the Impala for long 'test' drives, or spent hours alone guzzling coffee at the diner. He made sure not to return to their room until he was certain Sam would be asleep, and set his watch early so he was up and about before Sam woke.

Truth was, he was afraid Sam was right.

He could remember only one other time when he'd felt this way: with Cassie. *And look how that turned out*, he thought bitterly, staring over coffee and a donut at a magazine he'd already read twice from cover to cover. Afterwards, he'd sworn he'd never again let a girl get to him like that. And he never had.

If he'd thought about the future at all, he'd seen him and Sam keeping on hunting until some evil son of a bitch or other got the better of them. And if nothing ever did, they'd keep goin' until they grew old and gray and couldn't hunt any longer. But when he looked at Stacy, the decades of dangerous, thankless jobs that lay ahead of him didn't appeal so much anymore. In fact, he thought he was tired of hunting, of never knowing whether he'd live long enough to see another sunrise. And if that year of living under the shadow of the crossroads deal had taught him anything, it was that he didn't want to die. He—

"Hey." Stacy slipped into the seat across from him. "You were so deep in thought, you didn't even hear me calling. What were you thinking about?"

"You," he said.

She smiled. "Only good thoughts, I hope."

He grinned and wiggled a brow. "The best."

Her cheeks colored slightly... and that was new. Dean frowned a little; she usually suffered his innuendoes and double entendres in good humor, with a smile and a quick rejoinder.

"You wanna get out of here?" she asked. "I know a place...."

Something about the way she said it made his stomach clench.

He swallowed. "Sure." He dropped the magazine, gulped down the last of the nearly cold coffee, and left a couple dollar bills in payment. By the time he was finished, Stacy was by the door, looking back at him and bouncing impatiently on the balls of her feet. The jitters in his belly ratcheted up a notch.

Stacy drove them to the top of a low hill where she parked under a stand of trees. Far off, lights were blinking on in the darkening landscape at the few farms and towns. The sky overhead glittered with stars. It was the most terribly clichéd place Dean had ever seen, and any doubt about her intentions fled as soon as he saw it. What was left was fluttery anticipation.

He'd never been this nervous before.

She killed the engine, and was quiet for a few seconds. "Dean?"

"Hm?" He didn't quite trust his voice to say more.

"When we first met, and I.... Did I scare you?"

Dean frowned, unsure where she was going. He tried to read her expression, but it was already too dark in the car to make out more than her silhouette. "Um... no.... Well, maybe a little..." He inhaled, recognizing the soap she used to wash away the sweat and grease from a day of digging through car innards. It smelled clean, with a hint of flowers. He wished—

"I thought you liked me...?" she said, her voice going up in tone to turn the statement into a question.

"Wha...?" It took several seconds for the words to sink in. "Yes. No.... I mean...." The scent of freshly washed girl pervading the air made it difficult to think about what he was saying.

"You haven't even tried to kiss me," she complained. "I know I was a bit harsh on you, and that Polly was ragging on you with that Bobbitt thing but—."

Oh shit. "No. That's not.... I wanted to.... I didn't think...." *Dammit, Dean.* He was never this tongue-tied around a girl, no matter how much he wanted her.

He took a deep breath and tried again. "Stace, I think you're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen. And I do want to kiss you, more than anything." He cringed. That hadn't sounded quite so lame in his head.

She uttered something halfway between a wry laugh and a sob. "I bet you tell that to all the girls."

"No!" he protested, then amended, "Okay, maybe I have, once or twice. But this time, I really mean it. And that's what...." He paused.

She reached over and took his hand between hers, stroking his palm softly with her thumb. It sent shivers coursing through his entire body. "Yes?" she nudged gently.

"It scares me," he finally admitted. Sam had been right; with their family history and the things they knew that lurked in the dark, it was terrifying to get attached to someone. Someone innocent and ignorant... someone defenseless.

She let go of his hand, and the sense of loss made him ache. But that didn't last long. Stacy twisted around in the driver's seat until she was on her knees. She reached out and wrapped a hand around his neck, drawing his head closer until his lips met hers. "I guess," she murmured against his mouth, "it's up to me to make the first move then."

Dean sat frozen for a moment, while her tongue hesitantly slid across his lips. What the hell was wrong with him? He wasn't a shy sixteen year old virgin—hell, he'd never *been* a sixteen year old virgin! And invitations didn't come any clearer than this. He shook himself into action, opening his mouth and twining his tongue around hers, one hand wrapping itself in her hair, the other curling around her waist to pull her closer. She sighed into his mouth. "Dean..."

He slipped a hand under her shirt, fingers trailing over warm, smooth skin, tracing a path up along her side, over her ribs until he found the swell of her breast covered with lace. He cradled it, not in the least surprised to find it fit his hand perfectly. His thumb rubbed across her nipple and it quickly hardened beneath his touch. She squirmed into his lap and he hissed at the sudden tightness of his jeans.

She let go of his mouth and started kissing a path along his jaw, lips and teeth nipping gently at his skin. He let go of her hair and moved his hand to join the first underneath her shirt, brushing over her belly. He pushed her bra up out of the way, gently rolling her nipples between thumbs and fingers. She moaned softly, a sound that only served to embolden him. He tilted her back until she leaned back against the dashboard. He was distantly grateful she'd been driving so he was in the passenger seat, where there was more room. Angling forward, he pushed her shirt up until he could latch his mouth around one of her nipples. She whimpered again, her fingers tugging painfully at his hair.

A shrill sound suddenly echoed through the car, making them both jerk. He bit down on his tongue. "Shit." He tasted blood.

It was his goddamn phone. If this was Sam's idea of a joke....

"What?" he barked into the mouthpiece.

"Dean?" Sam asked, as if he didn't recognize Dean's voice.

"Yeah. What?" Dean repeated, vowing to kill Sam as soon he laid eyes on him again.

"Bobby called. It's Jo. Ellen says she's missed her weekly postcard. Twice in a row."

Dean closed his eyes. *Perhaps she forgot*, he wanted to say. *Maybe she's been busy. Or it got lost in the mail.* But he said none of those things. Ellen wasn't the sort of woman to panic. If she'd called Bobby over a couple of postcards, something was wrong. Jo was in trouble. *Fuck.*

"I'm on my way." He turned off the phone and looked back at Stacy. "I... have to go. That was Sam. There's been an emergency."

oOo

She drove them down from the hills and back to town.

When they reached the diner, he turned to her and said, "I'm sorry."

She misunderstood. That's all right," she said, leaning across so she could graze his lips for another kiss. "Maybe next time."

"Yeah. Maybe." He couldn't look at her; there wasn't gonna be a next time. He knew that if he left, he wouldn't return. And he couldn't *not* leave. Bobby, Jo and Ellen... next to Sam they were the only family he had.

He should've known better, he told himself as he navigated the quiet, dark streets back to the motel. He'd learned the truth in the djinn's fantasy world: there was no normal life for Dean Winchester. Not unless it came at a very high price that others'd have to pay. And that wasn't the kind of life he wanted.

A few minutes later he arrived at the motel. Sam had already finished packing up his own things and had started collecting Dean's. "Where we going?" Dean asked. "Duluth?"

Sam shook his head. "No. Ellen says Jo left Duluth a couple months back. Last she heard, she was in Louisville."

Dean nodded, grabbing a pile of folded shirts and stuffing them in his bag. He did some quick calculations in his head. "We can be there by morning."

There was a knock at the door. Dean exchanged a glance with Sam, who shrugged and waited for Dean to reach for his gun before he opened the door an inch and peered out. He visibly relaxed and opened the door wider. "Hey, Stacy. Come on in."

Dean quickly stashed the gun at the bottom of his duffel, hiding it under a pair of black boxers.

"You're really leaving," she said, looking at the mess of half-packed clothes and maps and toiletries. It was a statement, not a question.

"Yeah," Dean said. He scuffed at the carpet with his toe. "I have to."

She nodded, chewing her lower lip. "I thought you might. Something about the way you said goodbye...." She glanced over at Sam. He gave a start.

"I...um... I'm gonna go... uh... put this stuff in the car." He slung his laptop bag over his shoulder, lifted his duffel and hurried out the door. Dean shut it behind him and turned back to Stacy.

"I'm sorry. I wish...."

She reached out and rested a hand upon his chest. "Salright," she muttered. "I never thought you were the staying type." She backed him up against the door. "I just... couldn't let you go without a proper goodbye." She rose up on her toes and her mouth found his.

Her hands were tugging at his shirt, and Dean knew he should push her away. They didn't have time for this. But then her nimble fingers popped open the buttons on his jeans and slipped inside his boxers. And for a short while, Dean forgot all about Sam waiting for him outside in the dark, and about Ellen and Jo and missing postcards.

oOo

They'd left Texas hours ago, and the sky to the east was growing pale with the first light of the new day. Dean hadn't said a word since he'd put the car into gear and tore out of the parking lot. Sam had glanced in the rear view mirror to see Stacy watching them from the motel room. He'd waved a goodbye at her. Dean had refused to look back.

They'd been driving steadily ever since, Dean pushing the car along a little over the speed limit.

The interior was filled with heavy quiet, the radio off for once. Sam risked another glance sideways, trying not to be obvious about it. Dean's jaw was clenched so tight Sam thought it must hurt. His shoulders were tense and hunched, but he kept his hands lightly on the wheel and his eyes were glued to the road.

"Dean...?" Sam ventured, startling himself with the sound of his voice after the long silence.

A muscle in Dean's cheek twitched, but he didn't look at Sam. "Don't," he said. "Just... don't."

Sam sighed, nestling a little deeper into the leather seat. Days like this, he hated hunting with a vengeance. Hated Azazel for forcing them into it. Hated Dad for teaching them. Hated the victims for needing them.

Days like this, Sam thought, life truly sucked.

Disclaimer: This story is based on the Warner Bros. Television/Wonderland Sound and Vision/Eric Kripke/Robert Singer series *Supernatural*. It was written for entertainment only; the author does not profit from it nor was any infringement of copyright intended. Please do not redistribute elsewhere without the author's consent.