

The Writing On The Wall

By Scribblesinink

Bobby's eyes stung with unshed tears. Seemed like the only part of him that wasn't numbed. The rest of him felt as dulled and dead as his useless legs.

Stone-faced, he stared into the fire, where the flames licked eagerly at the photograph. When he'd insisted on taking it, he'd known it was possible—even likely—that not everyone would make it back. It was why he'd wanted the damn picture in the first place. But knowing what might be and seeing it turn into reality were two different things. Turned out, deep down, he'd never *really* believed any of their small band of warriors would die.

The paper blackened and curled as the fire caught and consumed the photo slowly: their forlorn attempt at a farewell ceremony when no remains were left to salt and burn, and send off properly. Yesterday, they'd all smiled for the camera; today, two of them were nothing more than another pair of hunters on the mental tally against Lucifer, two more names to add to an already far too long list of casualties. And for what? Bobby scrubbed an arm over his eyes angrily. Ellen and Jo were gone, while the Devil still walked the Earth, and Death itself had been awoken....

Their sacrifice had gained them nothing!

Next to Bobby, Sam shifted a little, drawing Bobby's attention briefly away from the hearth. Dean also hovered beside his chair: both of them tall, silent shadows whose presence was a comfort and a burden.

No, not *nothing*, Bobby decided, turning back to the fire. Jo and Ellen had died, but the Winchesters still stood to fight another day. They might have started the Apocalypse, but Bobby suspected they might also be the only ones who could stop it, even if the hope of them doing so grew dimmer with every passing day and every new death to be mourned.

At last, the photo was gone, the last of its ashes swirling up into the chimney and out into the dark night. Bobby wheeled away from the fireplace, pushing his chair with heavy hands.

"Dean?" When the elder Winchester gave him a questioning look, Bobby jerked his head to indicate he should follow. With a last look at Sam—who was still staring into the flames with dry eyes and his mouth set in a thin line of determination—Dean obeyed.

"Something I need you to do." Bobby gave Dean the hammer and chisel, and a rough pencil-sketch map showing him where to go. Dean glanced down at the tools in his hand and quirked an eyebrow. "You'll know." It was all Bobby could manage, his voice catching in his throat.

Too many people had died over the last year for Bobby to keep up with his memorial wall in the woods, even before his legs gave out and he'd no longer been able to make it out there at all, even when he'd had the time. In the end, with deep regret, he'd told himself to quit worrying about it. The living needed him more than the dead. But this was different. Jo and Ellen had been family, and they deserved more than a burned photograph and a handful of tears.

Dean caught Bobby's eye for a moment, before he nodded quietly and turned away. A minute later, Bobby heard the Impala roar to life in the yard and rumble off. Once he found himself alone in his kitchen, he finally allowed the tears to fall, a bit surprised he had any left to shed.

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