

Unsung Heroes By Scribblesinink

By the time Bobby was finishing the last leg on the R, the sun had risen high enough that daylight filtered through the heavy canopy of fresh spring growth. Bobby switched off the lantern; he no longer needed its light to see by. He'd worked through most of the night by the lamp's dim glow, chiseling letter after letter carefully into the smooth rock surface, adding a name like he had so many times before. Far too often these past months, truth be told. Most people might not know there was a war going on, but Bobby's memorial wall told a different story.

Carefully he placed the head of the chisel, tapped the hammer gently against its butt until the final chip fell away. He put down his tools and reached to trace the outline of the letters with his fingers. Newly cut, their edges were sharp, as sharp as the pain still so fresh in his heart.

The wall blurred in his vision, and Bobby realized his eyes were swimming with tears. Again. He didn't care; there was nobody around to keep a brave face for. He loved those boys like the sons he never had, and within the space of a year, he'd lost them both. If that wasn't reason enough for a man to cry without shame, he didn't know what was.

Sam had come back before Bobby had had the chance to mark his passing on the wall, Dean's demon deal bringing him back to life within days after his death. There wouldn't be such a last-minute miracle this time, Bobby knew. Dean was gone for good.

He leaned back on his haunches and cocked his head up to survey the rock wall before him. His joints creaked, and every bone in his body hurt; he wasn't getting any younger. Perhaps it was time to pass on this self-imposed duty to someone else.

For a time, he'd thought that the Winchester boys would be the logical heirs to this particular legacy. However, Dean was dead, and Bobby feared that Sam's name would be next for him to cut into the hard rock surface. After they'd buried Dean, Sam had taken off, a wild look in his eyes. He refused to answer the phone whenever Bobby called, unwilling to listen to caution, hell-bent as he was on locating Lilith and avenging his brother—this Sam reminded Bobby starkly of John Winchester at his worst.

John was up here too, several names above that of his oldest son.

They all were, the hunters that had passed over the decades. Or at least the ones Bobby knew about: Caleb; Pastor Jim Murphy; Steve Wandell; Bill Harvelle; Ash, along with a few more hunters he'd been able to confirm had died when The Roadhouse went up in

flames. And others, dead a longer time, their names a little more weathered, the etchings smoothed by the elements. Some he'd known well and grieved for while others were no more than people he'd heard whispers about on the hunters' grapevine. Yet to Bobby's mind, they all deserved a spot on the wall, those unsung heroes who answered the call to duty and fought in the shadows, never decorated or acknowledged. They waged their unknown war in quiet graveyards and abandoned houses; in thick forests, or big cities on the night of the full moon. Their battles went unnamed, while the American people slept the sleep of innocents, never aware that some stranger had given their life so they might not lose theirs.

Bobby had started the wall by accident. After he'd killed his wife—and instead of dying, she'd laughed at him before vomiting up a cloud of billowing black smoke, her body bloody but no longer bleeding despite the knife wounds he'd inflicted—he'd stumbled out of the house and fled into the dark night. He'd ran and ran, never paying attention to where he was going. If he tripped and fell, he'd pick himself back up and keep going, never looking back for fear of seeing her come after him, a nightmare come true. He'd kept running until he ran out of adrenaline and found he could go no further. He'd crumpled, gasping and drained, at the foot of a smooth rock cliff, half-hidden behind a thicket of young hawthorn several miles from the house.

Half-crazed with grief and fear, not really knowing what he was doing, he'd started scratching at the surface of the rock with the knife that somehow was still in his hand. He never fully realized what he was writing until he woke the following morning from a comatose sleep he didn't remember falling into, stiff and half-frozen, and saw her name etched into the rock. It had been barely legible, white chicken scratches against the darker stone. He'd returned after he'd buried her, and cut her name into the rock properly, a silent memorial to his love and to what he'd done to her.

Bobby had thought that'd be the last he'd ever see of the rock. But then he learned about the supernatural. About demons and ghouls; about werewolves and vampires. About the hunters that tried to keep those dark forces back. And he understood, at last. Soon he found himself at the cliff again, chiseling another name into it, that of a fallen hunter. And then another, and another.

He'd kept the ritual up for over thirty years. In a good year he didn't have to come here more often than once or twice. But lately... Yes, there was a war happening right now, even if it never made the papers. And like in any war, people died. Their names would never be known to the general public, yet he could at least make sure that once they were gone, they would not be forgotten.

Awkwardly, Bobby climbed back to his feet, wincing as stiff muscles stretched. He collected his tools and snatched up the bottle of Johnny Walker Blue, one of the finest

whiskeys he knew. He unscrewed it, then hesitated. Normally, this was the part where he'd drink to those no longer around, and wish them well in the afterlife. But what did you tell a soul that you knew for a fact had ended up in hell?

In the end, he settled for a simple, "Goodbye, Dean." He didn't think he could've said more, even if he'd know the words; fresh tears clogged up his throat, making it hard to breathe. He screwed the cap back on the bottle and stashed it into his jacket pocket before turning away and beginning the long walk through the woods back to the house.

Dean might be gone, but the war was far from over. There was work to do.

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