

**Contains ADULT material not suitable for younger readers!**

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## **Until It Sleeps** **by AmandaK**

He strode onto the wet parking lot of the roadside diner, stony dirt crunching beneath his boots. One mud-spattered pickup stood parked at an angle near the door of the diner on the otherwise empty lot. Water-filled tracks showed where other cars had accelerated, digging at the gravel. The sky still leaked droplets, but on the western horizon the murk was lifting and the cloud cover breaking up. *About bloody time.* The drizzle had left him cold, miserable and thoroughly pissed off at the world.

He brushed strands of rain-slicked hair that had escaped an untidy ponytail from his eyes before he pulled open the diner's door. The dining room was as deserted as the parking lot, although the greasy dishes and empty glasses from the late lunch crowd still needed to be cleared off of several tables. The stink of roasted beef steak and grilled onions assaulted him, strong and heady. He inhaled deeply, ignoring the stench of hot fat, and smirked. *Yes.* There it was, hiding beneath the smell of old coffee, the wench's scent. He hadn't lost her trail. He sniffed again. He was in luck; her scent was perhaps two hours old, already fading beneath the heavy aromas that hung in the room. In another couple of hours, he would have been unable to detect it at all.

"What can I get ya?"

The sudden voice broke his concentration and he scowled at the waitress, a pretty blond with a bored expression. He looked her up and down, expertly taking in her curves. *How about your ass, bitch,* he thought but didn't say. *While it's still young and comely?* In a decade or so she'd have gained another thirty or forty pounds and wouldn't be so attractive any longer. She flinched from his glare and he forced himself to suppress his ire at the interruption. He offered her the open smile he'd cultivated to reassure and hide his true motives. "You startled me."

She relaxed visibly and shrugged an apology. "The meatloaf is good," she suggested.

He shook his head. "I already ate. Coffee would be appreciated, though."

He could spare a moment to dry out before he continued to chase his quarry. He was certain he'd catch up with her soon, in time to finish what he had started long ago—he'd invested too much effort to fail at the last moment. There wasn't a glimmer of doubt in his mind: he'd find her, perhaps even tonight, and he'd complete the ritual. Then, a few days from now, on the eve of the new moon, she'd awake at last, make her first kill, and join him. His daughter; his mate. No amount of running on the girl's part would keep her from her fate. He knew he'd spooked her, that he'd come on too eagerly, but his patience had been wearing thin. Seventeen years was a long wait, even for one who had centuries for a lifetime.

He slipped onto a stool at the counter, shrugging out of his damp cotton jacket. The waitress placed a cup of steaming coffee before him. Sweet, meaningless words formed on his lips as he beamed at her innocently. "I'm Steve, by the way."

The waitress smiled back. "Nice to meet ya, Steve."

"Did anyone ever tell you you have beautiful eyes?"

Color rose to her cheeks and he grinned to himself. Things were going well; he could indulge in a bit of sport. And she *was* young and pretty, just as he liked 'em.

## Like The Stray

"Now, don't ya go anywhere, sweetie pie." The words carried the stench of a smoker's foul breath into her face. Lori nodded in response, not trusting her voice to speak. "It'll only take a minute to fill up this here baby, and then we can go somewhere to 'ave some fun, you an' me. Alright?" A thick, calloused thumb with a dirty fingernail brushed her cheek. It was all she could do not to shudder. With a last pat on her upper thigh—and thank the Lord for what scant protection her fishnet stockings offered—the heavy-set man clambered from the cab of his truck and ambled over to instruct the gas station attendant.

Lori waited until his back was turned before she opened the door on her side quietly and let herself slip from the seat. She snatched her pack as she did, and tiptoed around the semi, careful to keep its large bulk between her and the driver.

She breathed a sigh of relief. Hitchhiking had seemed such a perfect way to get to Arizona. Bus tickets were expensive, and what little money she'd managed to pilfer from Steve's wallet was running out quickly. The trucker, Tom he said his name was, had been nice at first, even going so far as to buy her a burger with fries at the diner where he picked her up. But catching a ride with him hadn't turned out to be such a good plan after all. Shortly after they left the restaurant, his hand abandoned the wheel and found her knee. No matter how often Lori pushed him away, or how far she shrank back against the door of the cab, he always found a way to get close and run his fingers up her legs or down her arm and, once, even into the collar of her shirt before she could stop him. Yet someone somewhere must be looking out for her because just as Lori was beginning to fear she'd have to throw herself out of the vehicle to escape his clutching paws, a dashboard light blinked on announcing the semi was low on gas.

And so she found herself at the intersection of Highway 36 and a smaller country road. The gas station consisted of two red pumps and a small convenience store with a graveled patch of bare earth in front of it. A few cars had been parked haphazardly among the puddles the earlier rainstorms had left: a battered pickup truck, a rusty station wagon that had once been green, and a classic black Chevrolet. An apple-red Volkswagen Beetle rounded the pumps' island and peeled into the parking lot while Lori was pondering her next move. It stopped beside the Chevy in a spray of dirty water; three teenage girls in jeans and brightly colored blouses tumbled out. Giggling, their heads close together, they disappeared into the store where they joined the other customers that milled among the isles. Lori watched them with longing and a touch of envy. She'd been like those girls once, happy and carefree. Until that fateful day. It seemed like an eon ago, but less than two months had passed since...

Her eyes stung and she brushed at them, chagrined to see black smudges on her palm. Great. Now she looked like a freak. She rubbed her cheeks with her fingers, hoping to

straighten out her smeared make-up.

The sound of heavy footfalls on the other side of the truck halted her efforts to restore her appearance. *Oh God*, she thought. Tom was done with filling up the gas tank and once he climbed back into his cab, he'd notice she was gone.

She dashed to the parked cars and crouched between them, catching a glimpse of Tom's scuffed brown boots approaching the front of the truck. They stopped beside the cabin and disappeared as he climbed in, the semi bouncing briefly on its suspension. Lori held her breath. A moment later, his boots clumped back onto the gravel and the door slammed shut.

"Hey! Where'd ya go?" Tom sounded surprised.

Lori hunkered down further, pressing up against the station wagon. If he saw her...

"You owe me, little girl." Anger replaced the surprise. "Better come back *right now*. Or there'll be hell to pay."

He approached the parked cars, and judging by his threats, he wasn't about to simply give up and drive away. Close to panicking, she looked around. What was she going to do? She could run into the store, ask for help—but the clerk might call the police and the last thing she wanted was to explain why she was in Missouri, instead of back home in Chicago where Steve was battling Child Services for her care.

Desperate, Lori tugged at the station wagon's doors. They were locked. She turned, reached up for the back door handle of the Chevy—and gasped when it opened. Tom was still calling her name, adding epithets that wouldn't win him the affection of any woman. She pulled on the handle, widening the gap. The hinges squeaked and she hoped the noise was too faint for the overweight truck driver to pick up over the sound of his own voice. She shoved her backpack into the car, brushing aside crumpled sheets of notebook paper and gum wrappers and crawled in after it. Huddling over her bag, she made herself as small as she could between the front and back seats. She inched the door shut behind her. Tom's voice dimmed and she remained motionless, not daring to raise her head until she heard the truck's engine turn over.

She waited until it had driven off before she reached behind her, fumbling for the handle to open the door.

"Turkey on whole wheat, Sammy?" A deep voice, right next to the car, made her go still, her arm stuck awkwardly between the rear seat and her body.

"Yeah?" Someone else stood on the other side of the car, blocking the light so his shadow fell across her. "And I told you a thousand times, it's Sam."

"Not when you're eating pansy food like that. At the least you might've gotten mayo with it. Pretended to be a man." The speaker managed to inflect his words with the scorn he apparently felt for a whole wheat turkey sandwich without mayonnaise.

A key rattled and the driver's door squealed open. The owner of the voice climbed in, his weight denting the seat back, and Lori's tiny hiding space narrowed until she was pinned between the front and rear seats. She couldn't have moved if she wanted to. She held her breath, although her heart thudded in her ears so loudly, she was certain the driver could hear her.

The ancient car had no automated door locks, so the driver had to reach over and manually unlock the passenger door. The guy named Sam got in, ducking deep to avoid hitting his head against the low roof. Lori caught a glimpse of brown hair flopping forward into his eyes.

"Says the man who's having cheese puffs for lunch," Sam said. "You do realize that's a kids' snack, right?"

There was the crinkle of a bag of chips being torn and the strong smell of cheddar and salt filled the car. "These," the driver said around a mouthful, "are not for the faint-hearted. See?" He held out the bag so the other man could see. "*Flamin' hot crunchy*, Sammy."

Sam snorted and took a bite out of his sandwich. "Whatever you say, Dean."

"Sissy," Dean muttered.

"Jerk."

"Bitch."

Lori squeezed her eyes shut, finally understanding that saying about escaping the frying pan. She was stuck in a car with a bunch of idiots. Yet, there was nothing she could do about it, not now. The driver, Dean, turned the ignition and the engine roared, a deep purring sound that vibrated through the floor and that she felt all the way to her stomach. The car quickly accelerated, briefly pushing her tighter against the rear bench before it settled at an even speed. Lori tried to find a more comfortable position, freeing her arm slowly. At least she had escaped Tom's clutches and as long as those two weirdoes didn't realize she was there, she'd be safe. All she had to do was stay hidden until they stopped again and she could sneak back out.

oOo

God, she really needed to pee.

Lori had been folded in on herself behind the driver's seat for what felt like an eternity. Her feet and legs had grown numb to the point that she wasn't even sure they were still attached to her body. The only thing she could be grateful for was that the two men in front had finally stopped bickering. After their debate about the manliness of wheat sandwiches versus Cheetos, they'd argued over last night's baseball scores, squabbled over which tape to insert into the deck—Dean denouncing Sam's music as *crap* and Sam accusing Dean of being stuck in the seventies—and had an insane and lengthy bull session about whether Paris Hilton was secretly a man in drag. The endless arguments, combined with her awkward position, had made her head hurt. But at least it kept them focused upon each other, which made it easier for her to remain hidden.

Oddly enough, despite their vicious name-calling, they never raised their voice or sounded truly riled up. To the contrary, they seemed to enjoy bandying words back and forth, and Lori had a sneaking suspicion that if Sam declared the sky blue, Dean would say it was green, and vice versa. Just to be contrary. But at last the arguments had dwindled and Sam slouched in his seat, chin resting on his chest. Occasionally, a soft snore escaped him. The engine droned contentedly and the tires swooshed over the road in a hypnotizing thrum that might have put her to sleep as well if she hadn't been so uncomfortable. Dean turned up the radio and crooned along—some heavy metal song that she liked. The guy sounded like a dork but at least he had taste. She listened to the words to distract her from her cramped position.

*...just like the curse, just like the stray, you feed it once and now it stays ...*

The car bounced over a pothole in the uneven road, jostling her. Lori bit her lip to keep in a groan. Her bladder lay like a heavy rock at the bottom of her belly and any movement just plain hurt. If they didn't stop soon, she'd have to betray her presence or face the consequences of a rather undignified accident. Neither was a particularly attractive thought and she sent up another silent prayer to whatever guardian angel had rescued her from the truck driver's hands to please, please, *please* make the car stop.

They hit another pothole. "Shit," Dean muttered, barely loud enough for her to hear over the music. Sam jolted awake.

Dean chortled. "Good morning, Sunshine." He cut back on the car's speed a little.

Sam grunted something unintelligible in reply. He stretched out awkwardly beneath the low roof. He rolled his head and—Lori's breath stuck in her throat. Sam's gaze landed straight on her, eye to eye, his widening with shock. He jerked upright. "Dude. There someone in the car."

oOo

"Huh?" Dean glanced over at Sam, who was staring at something—or someone—behind him. He strained to swivel his head further to try and see for himself. The car started to drift and the steering wheel jerked beneath his hands when one of the front wheels caught the road's shoulder.

"*Son of a—!*" He fought to bring the car back onto the middle of the road. Road like this, at their current speed, losing control could get nasty.

Dean slammed on the brakes, even as he threw another, more careful, look over his shoulder, unable to catch more than a glimpse of pale skin and large black eyes. His brother, unprepared for the sudden change in speed, slid forward and smacked hard against the dashboard. Sam cursed in pain, but right now, Dean had no time to worry about him. Sam would have to take care of himself. What the hell kind of critter had they picked up?

Before the Impala had come to a full stop, Dean flung his door open and jumped out. He pulled on the back door and dragged the creature out of its hiding place. It squeaked, and he slammed it against the Impala, hand at its throat, cutting off its air.

Terrified blue eyes, not black, rimmed with smudged make-up, stared back at him out of a young girl's face. She hung heavily in his grip, as if his hand were the only thing holding her up. She tried to speak but all that came out was a strangled whimper. She clawed at his fingers desperately with nails of chipped black polish. It hurt, but he wasn't about to let go.

Sam rounded the Impala's rear. He was rubbing his arm where he had hit the dashboard. "What the hell?" he echoed Dean's earlier thought. "She's just a girl."

"Oh yeah?" Dean grunted, his voice rough. "You sure? 'Cause I ain't. The last time—"

Sam put his hand on Dean's elbow. "Ease up, man. You're choking her. At least let her speak."

Dean loosened his grip a little. The girl's knees buckled, and she'd have crumpled onto the pitted blacktop if he hadn't kept hold of her. "What are you, and what the *friggin'* hell are you doin' in my car?" he demanded.

She tried to speak but no sound came out. Dean felt her throat move beneath his hand as she swallowed heavily and tried again. "I... needed... hide..." she whispered painfully. Sam ducked into the car and came out with a plastic bottle of water. He uncapped it and passed it to her.

"Here."

She drank greedily. Some of the water went down wrong and she coughed. A droplet trickled down her chin, dripping onto Dean's hand and he relaxed his grip a bit more. "There was this—this trucker," she stammered once she had re-found her voice. "I hitched a ride with him, but he kept—his hands... And then we stopped at a gas station and he came looking for me and—and I needed a place to hide and the door was open and I really, *really* need to pee."

Her voice had gone higher and higher with each word and her eyes, brimming with tears, shifted from his face to Sam's and back to him, her gaze dark and fearful. Dean chewed his lip. She was making little sense, and while she didn't look like particularly evil, he knew looks could be deceiving. He let go of her nevertheless—the effort it took to hold her up made his arm tremble—and she slumped limply against the body of the car.

"What's wrong with you?" Sam asked. He had taken the bottle from her and was screwing the cap back on.

"My legs are asleep," she sniffled.

*Small wonder*, Dean thought dryly. The Impala wasn't designed for hiding behind the front seats. "You crept into my car," he repeated in an attempt to gather his thoughts, "to get away from some sleazeball who couldn't keep his hands to himself? That's *all*?" From the corner of his eye he noticed Sam give a slight shrug: no response to the holy water mixed in the bottle. And *damn*, if that hadn't been a fine trick of Bobby's.

The girl, unaware of their silent communication or the test she'd just passed, nodded and scrubbed her nose with the back of her hand. "Yeah. The door was unlocked."

Sam chuckled. "See? I keep tellin' you to make sure the car gets locked up. But do you ever listen to me?" he asked, grinning. "You're lucky you ended up with a runaway girl, and not, you know."

"I'm not a runaway," she protested. Dean stared at her, hard.

She didn't protest further, confirming their suspicions, but she was standing a little firmer; the feeling in her legs must be coming back. Her gaze shifted to a point beyond him.

"Look, I have to go," she said, waving vaguely at something behind him. Dean glanced over his shoulder. A lone bush, sculpted by the wind and bright green with budding spring leaves, had taken root at the edge of the road.

*Go? Ah.*

He took a step aside, leaving her a clear path. She stumbled across the road, still unsteady on her feet, and disappeared behind the bush. Dean swung the back door of the Impala shut before climbing into the driver's seat.

"Sam, get in. Let's go."

"What?" Sam stared at him, like he had grown a second head or something.

"You heard me. Let's go."

"What about..." Sam gestured at the bushes where the girl had disappeared.

"What about her?" Dean wanted to know.

"Dude." Sam stopped speaking, though his mouth moved as if he were trying to find the words. "We can't just leave her."

"No?" Dean quirked an eyebrow. "Why not? We're not running a taxi service, last I checked."

"Have you taken a good look around?" Sam asked. "Where's she gonna go? We're in the middle of nowhere halfway to nothing."

That was true. Empty farm fields stretched as far as the eye could see. It was too early in the year for planting, but the earth had been overturned not long ago and the damp soil was dark reddish brown. The road stretched ahead in a straight, unwavering line all the way to the horizon. There wasn't a house or barn in sight.

"I can walk." The girl had returned from doing her business and she stood forlornly on the opposite shoulder of the road, arms dangling beside her, a picture of abject misery with

her black, spiky hair, smudged face and heavy boots beneath a short skirt. She looked like she'd played dress up with her older sister's goth outfit—and got caught doin' it.

"Dean." Sam hadn't moved from his spot beside the car, the bottle of spiked Evian still in his hands.

Dean raised his hands and heaved a deep sigh. The things he had to put up with. "Get in." Sam grinned. "But only to the next town," Dean warned them.

## Feed It Once

It took most of another hour to reach the next town, basically a crossroads with a handful of houses and stores centered around a tiny church. A small motel and a bar advertising Budweiser that probably catered to the farmhands in the area occupied a patch of land at the north-east corner of the crossroads. By the time Dean had gotten them a room at the motel, the sun had gone down in a colorful display of reds and purples that set the clouds on fire. It had been a tense hour. Dean had remained mistrustful, despite the fact that the girl had passed the holy water test with flying colors. Although he had ordered Sam to keep an eye on their passenger—"to stop her from getting up to any *funny* stuff"—said in such a way that it had made her look even more uncertain—Sam hadn't failed to notice how his brother spent almost as much time looking in the rear view mirror as he had looking at the road. Sam guessed he couldn't blame him; coincidences often came with a price in their line of work.

Dean ambled up, whistling one of those rock songs he liked so much, and flicked an old-fashion steel key in Sam's direction. Sam snatched it out of the air. He inserted it into the lock and pushed the door open. "There's only two beds."

"Yeah." Dean jostled past him, the bag hanging from his shoulder shoving Sam aside. "There's you, there's me. Makes two, doesn't it?"

"What about Lori? You plan on sleeping on the floor?"

Dean dropped the bag onto the nearest bed beneath the window, rubbed his face, and turned. "No, Sammy," he said, articulating carefully as if Sam were slow-witted. "I said, to the next town. This *is* the next town."

"Don't patronize me, Dean. I know what you said. I just don't think it's right."

Dean pulled the pillow out from underneath the coverlet and punched it into shape. "There's a bus going to Kansas City in a few hours; I asked. She can get to her aunt in Phoenix from there. They sell tickets at the office."

Sam looked over his shoulder at Lori. She hovered next to the Impala, her small backpack dangling from her hand. She gave a one-shouldered shrug. "I'll wait at the bus stop."

"No, you won't. Stay there," Sam ordered. He stepped into the room and closed the door behind him before he whirled on Dean. "What's wrong with you, dude?"

"Nothing." Dean plopped the pillow, then himself down on the bed, folding his arms behind his head. "What's wrong with *you*?"

"What's wrong with—Ugh!" Sam threw up his hands in frustration.

"Look, man." Dean sat back up and swung his legs over the side of the bed, elbows on his knees. "We don't know anything about this girl. Who she is, who she's running from. For all we know, she could be some sort of devil creature that'll slit our throats in the middle of the night."

"She drank the holy water," Sam pointed out. "Nothing happened." Part of him still remembered what the effect of holy water on a demon had felt like, and it wasn't pleasant. "Trust me, nothing demonic could remain hidden after drinking that."

"True," Dean admitted. "Still, it's a little too much of a happy accident for my liking, her sneaking into *our* car out of any she could've picked."

"If you'd locked the doors like I keep telling you to, that wouldn't have happened."

Dean groaned and fell back against the pillow. "Here we go again." He rolled his eyes but Sam ignored it. "Better be safe than sorry. She's not gettin' in."

"And if she really is just a human girl?" Sam wanted to know.

Dean shrugged. "Then she's not our kind of problem."

"But—"

"Sam, she's probably underage. Jailbait. Don't you think we're in enough trouble with the law already?"

"All the more reason to not leave her out there by herself!" Sam said stubbornly. He glanced out of the window but Lori was gone. He pulled the door open and saw her crossing the street from the motel office to the bus stop. The street lamps blinked on while he watched and an orange glow washed over the bus stop.

"C'mon, Sammy, look around. It's the boonies, nothin's gonna happen. It stopped raining and it's not like she'll freeze to death out there."

"It's not exactly a warm summer's evening either," Sam grumbled. "Let's at least let her wait in the car."

"*What?*" That certainly got Dean's attention and his brother shot up straight. "No! No way, dude. Absolutely not. Has some brainer sucker sucked out what little brain cells you had or

something?"

Sam shifted his gaze from Lori at the bus stop to his brother. Dean's jaw was set stubbornly. Sam sighed. He knew Dean. If he was in this mood, nothing Sam said would make him change his mind. To the contrary, any argument would only make Dean dig his heels in deeper.

"Maybe I'll go keep her company," Sam said. "The mood here is a little too self-centered to my taste."

Dean let himself fall back on the bed once more and closed his eyes. "Suit yourself."

Sam glanced out of the door again. Lori had settled on a bench at the stop, her backpack beside her, and she was kicking her legs back and forth. She looked all right, for now. He could take a shower first—he really wanted a hot shower to wash away the stiffness that came from being crammed up in that damn car all day. He wished Dean would get something more comfortable. Maybe one of those new SUVs, or a truck like Dad had had. Something with more leg space, and better seats. And a CD-player, preferably, so they could get rid of those old, scratchy tapes.

*Keep dreaming, Sammy*, he told himself with a wry sigh.

"I'll go shower," Sam announced out loud to no one in particular as he shut the door. A grunt was all Dean's reply. Shaking his head, Sam dug up a fresh shirt and a clean pair of underpants and disappeared into the small bathroom.

oOo

Towelng off his hair, Sam stepped out of the steam-filled bathroom. The air in the room was chill on his face after the warmth of the shower, and it reeked of pizza and gun cleaning solvent. An empty pizza box smeared with tomato sauce stood atop the dresser opposite the beds. Dean sat in the middle of his bed, cross-legged, gun parts strewn about him on the coverlet, and he was rubbing what looked to be the barrel bushing vigorously with a rag.

Sam frowned. By this time, Dean would usually head out in search of the local watering hole for an after-dinner beer—or something stronger if they'd had a bad day. And he preferred to use a flat, even surface for cleaning guns—like the bed he *wasn't* sitting on, which meant it was Sam who often ended up with gun grease on his sheets.

Sam walked over to the window and peered around the floral-patterned curtain. It had grown fully dark outside while he was in the bathroom, and a few early-spring insects buzzed around the fluorescent lights illuminating the motel's parking lot. Lori still sat at the bus stop across the road, although she had drawn her legs up and wrapped her arms around them, resting her chin on top of her knees.

"Got you some pizza," Dean said without looking up. He waved the rag at a second pizza box beside the small television bolted onto the dresser that Sam had failed to notice. A couple of cans of beer stood next to the box, drops of condensation forming on their aluminum surface. Dean's peace offering.

"Thanks." Sam's stomach rumbled loudly at the thought of food. He dropped the towel, grabbed the box and dug in. He'd go check on Lori in a minute, see if she'd like something to eat too. She appeared to be doing all right so far.

Munching on a slice of pepperoni pizza, Sam snuck a peek at his brother who had proceeded to scrubbing the barrel's insides. Dean glanced up, looked out the window for a few moments before he turned his attention back to his work. His hands never stilled. Dean squeezed one eye shut and peered through the barrel. With a satisfied grunt, he dropped it, and picked up the slide. Again, Dean's gaze shifted from his hands to the world outside. What could Dean possibly—

A smile curled up Sam's lips. *Lori*. Dean might act all tough and callous, but in the end his brother was a big softy at heart. Especially where pretty girls in trouble were concerned. Before long, Sam told himself, he'd relent and go get her.

*He's just sore she proved my point about locking up the Impala so illustratively.*

Sam finished the last slice of pizza and wiped his fingers on the paper napkin provided before he collected both boxes and dumped them into the trash can. "I'll—" he began but the rest of the words died on his lips. Dean had craned his neck and was peering through the window into the dark night, eyes pinched, hands idle, gun parts forgotten.

"What's goin' on?" Dean murmured.

Sam followed his brother's gaze. The lamp beside the bus stop had burned out and the bench was covered in shadows. In what little light the waning moon provided, he could see something moving, a black shape, leaning over the girl.

"Son of a *bitch!*"

As if on cue, Dean catapulted from the bed the same instant Sam dashed to the door and

threw it open. They jostled through, Dean following right on Sam's heels, and raced across the parking lot. Sam ignored the sting of the rough pavement against his bare feet.

"Hey!"

The shape looked up, revealing itself to be a man. The moon hit his eyes and—

"Dean!" Sam hissed, slowing.

"I see it," Dean grunted back.

The man's eyes shone with a pale blue light, as strange as Sam had ever seen. The creature drew back his lips and growled at their approach. Dean stopped running and lifted his arm, moonlight glinting off a knife in his hand. He hurled the blade at the demon, or whatever it was, and Sam held his breath—though it looked human, Sam was pretty sure it was *something* supernatural. If it weren't, if they were wrong... Knifing a human would look really good on Dean's rap sheet.

The creature shimmered like a desert mirage and turned transparent, leaving no further doubt about its nature. Sam could see the grassy field across the road through the thing's body, and the knife whooshed harmlessly through it without even a wrinkle. The creature cackled for a second, and disappeared, winking out like a burst bubble.

"Fucking hell!" Dean swore.

Sam couldn't agree more.

oOo

"Bastard's gone." Dean shut the door behind him and dropped the flashlight onto his bed. The disassembled gun pieces bounced for a moment before the mattress settled. "Can't find my damn knife either." Dad had given him that knife and its loss hurt. It happened too damn often that the things they hunted disappeared into thin air like that. If he'd reacted a bit quicker, ran a bit harder... If he hadn't made her stay outside...

"How is she?" Dean asked. While he searched for the attacker and for his knife, Sam had looked after Lori, carrying her inside and placing her on his bed. Her eyes were half-closed, the whites visible, and there were dark bruises on her face and neck. Her skin was as white as the pillow casing, the black strands of her short hair standing out in sharp contrast.

Sam shrugged. "Not sure. She's not responding."

"Hm." Dean leaned over Sam's shoulder for a better look. "She unconscious?"

"I don't think so," Sam said. "Not exactly."

"What did that son of a bitch do to her, anyway?"

"I think," Sam said slowly, "that he was... kissing her."

Dean grimaced. "That can't be good."

Lori moaned, her eyes rolling behind her eyelids. They fluttered open and she looked around dully, her gaze clouded with confusion. She clearly wasn't firing on all cylinders yet. Then alarm spread across her features and she bolted from the bed, head whipping around wildly, thin arms flapping. "What... Steve...I—"

Who the hell was Steve, Dean wondered.

"Easy now." Sam took hold of her arms and forced her to look at him. "You're safe. He's gone."

Dean smirked. "Big bad knife made him think twice about hittin' on a pretty little thing like you."

"Huh?" She looked lost and frightened. Sam shot him a warning over his shoulder.

"We chased him off," Sam explained. "The man that attacked you."

"Steve," Lori whispered. She lowered herself back down on the edge of the mattress; Sam took a seat on the opposite bed. The gun parts jingled as the mattress shifted beneath his weight.

"You know him?" Dean leaned against the dresser and crossed his arms.

Lori nodded. "He's my stepfather."

"Your—" Sam met Dean's eyes. *Do we tell her?*

Dean gave a tiny shake of his head. *No*. If she already knew, it would make no difference but she might not realize *they* knew and that could be to their advantage. And if she was

clueless about her stepfather, well, much better she remain that way.

"Yes." She sounded hoarse. "Can I have something to drink?"

"I'll get you some water." Sam got up and headed for the bathroom.

Dean snorted. The girl had been assaulted; she was shaking, an inch away from losing it, and his brother was going to get her *water*. Sometimes he wondered about Sam's good sense. Leaning down, Dean dug up his hip flask from his duffel and uncapped it. He reached for a glass from the dresser and poured two fingers of whiskey into it. It was barely enough for a single large swallow, but it would do the trick. "Here."

Lori took the glass and eyed it dubiously. She sniffed at the whiskey.

"Drink up. I'm not gonna poison you. And that itty bitty shot of liquor won't get you drunk."

"I know that." A note of stubbornness crept into her voice. Good. Meant she was getting her bearings back.

"Here, have some—Dean!" Sam, returning from the bathroom, stood there lamely with a glass of water in his hands, scowling at him. Dean raised an eyebrow and smirked.

Lori gulped the whiskey down in one swallow. An instant later, as soon as the liquor began to burn a path down her throat, she started to cough. Fancy that. Perhaps she wasn't as seasoned as he had thought her to be. But her dyed hair, black boots and that leather skirt suggested she hung out with a tougher crowd.

Sam was shaking his head, mumbling something under his breath. It was probably best Dean couldn't hear what he had to say, though he could guess. Sam handed the glass of water to Lori. She drank it eagerly, and gradually her coughing subsided.

"All right," Dean said, lifting himself onto the dresser, making the wood creak. He drew the chair close with his feet and planted his boots on its seat. "You were gonna to tell us about your stepfather."

"He's why I ran away," Lori said softly. "After Mom died—"

"Your mother's dead?" Sam interrupted.

She nodded. "She died two months ago. Fell down the stairs and broke her neck. Steve found her."

*Huh.* Dean met Sam's eyes; Sam shared his thoughts. Any death involving some kind of supernatural being was suspect, no matter how much of an accident it might seem to the rest of the world.

"He started acting... weird, shortly after," Lori said. Her voice was toneless, tired. "At first, I thought it was because he missed Mom so much. They'd been married a few weeks before she died, but—"

"Hold up," Dean broke in. He rubbed his chin and leaned forward, placing his hands on his knees. "Your mother married this guy only weeks before she died?"

"Yes?" Lori looked up. Sam shook his head in warning but Dean pushed on.

"How long she known him?"

"Not long. Four months, I think," Lori said hesitantly. "Mom was crazy about him. You think he had anything to do with her death? She wasn't rich or anything."

Dean shrugged. "Nah. Just think it sucks, is all." The girl was a smart cookie, though. He should remember that.

"You said your stepfather was acting weird," Sam reminded her. "Weird, how?"

Lori shifted uncomfortably. "Sayin' stuff. Like..." She paused and looked away. When she spoke again, her voice was a whisper. "That he wanted to kiss me and..." A blush crept onto her cheeks. "You know, sexual things."

Dean quirked up an eyebrow. "Why the hell would he say that?"

Lori shrugged. "Dunno. But it kept getting worse and worse. He started comin' into my room at night, *looking* at me, you know. I locked the door before going to bed, but one night, I woke up, and he was *there*, leaning over me." She gave a shudder. "I don't know how he got in, but the next morning, I grabbed his wallet and ran."

"Couldn't you have told anyone?" Sam asked. "What about your dad?"

She shook her head. "Who would believe me? My dad died before I was born. I've never even seen his picture. And everyone said how lucky I was to have such a nice stepfather to take care of me after Mom died. He is very good at that, you know, making people believe he is nice. Mom loved him but—" Her voice broke. Tears began to spill down her cheeks. Dean folded his arms, unfolded them, then tried to put his hands in his jeans'

pockets. When he couldn't, he hopped off the dresser and started pacing. Damn. He hated it when they cried. Without a word, Sam offered Lori a box of tissues from the night stand. She took one with a grateful smile and blew her nose. Sam could be such a bleeding heart but he was good at this stuff, Dean had to admit.

A vehicle turned at the crossroads and for an instant, bright lights lit up the room, painting large, shifting shadows on the walls that disappeared a moment later. A heavy engine rumbled outside. Dean glanced out of the window. The bus to Kansas City idled in front of the motel, hiding the bus stop from view. When Lori noticed it, she pushed up off the bed and searched the room with a frantic look until her gaze caught her backpack. "That's my bus. I've to catch it. I—"

Before she could finish, the bus started to roll away, picking up speed as it went. Lori flopped back down on the bed, hiding her face in her hands. Her shoulders heaved in time with her sobs.

"Hey," Sam said gently. He knelt beside the bed, reaching up one hand to cup her chin and lift her face. He caught her eye. "It'll be all right. We'll take you to Phoenix, to your aunt."

Lori stared at him. Her eyes were red, her cheeks glistening. "Really?"

"Really." Sam looked over her head at Dean, daring him to argue. But for once, Dean felt no desire to disagree with his brother and he kept his mouth shut. He couldn't help but wonder, though, what they were getting themselves into.

oOo

Lori'd finally fallen into a bone-weary sleep, helped along with a second shot of whiskey from Dean's flask. Occupying Sam's bed, she rested on her side with her knees drawn up, the flowered bedspread covering her, her breathing deep and regular. She'd been lucky; it seemed she had suffered nothing worse from the attack but a good scare and some bruises.

The room was dark; they'd closed the curtains against the night outside and the creatures that roamed it. The little light that attempted to banish the gloom came from a small desk lamp on the dresser. It cast a circle of warm yellow on the carpeted floor and reflected their shadows in grotesque shapes against the ceiling. Dean finished trickling a line of salt around the door—best make sure—and slouched in the single armchair in the room, putting his feet up on the small side table. He yawned.

Sam had settled onto the hard-backed chair at the desk, turning it around so his arms rested on the chair back. He was staring at the sleeping girl. "Poor thing," he said, keeping his voice low so he wouldn't wake her. "Losing her mother, bein' haunted by an evil stepfather."

"What was that thing, anyway?" Dean asked. He yawned again, not bothering to hide it.

Sam shrugged. "Vampire? Shapeshifter? Evil spirit? Take your pick."

Dean snorted. "Did you see those eyes? Not like any shapeshifter I ever saw. And it wasn't a vampire either, that's for sure. Dude, I could see *through* it, like it was some friggin' hologram."

"Are you sure it was corporeal?"

Dean rolled his eyes. "You miss the girl's bruises?"

"We've seen spirits leave marks before."

Dean sighed. "It made footprints, for Chrissakes. And let's not forget it got itself married to the mother. I'd say bein' transparent makes for lousy wedding pictures."

Sam snorted a laugh. "Yeah... Assuming that thing and this Steve guy are one and the same." He cracked a yawn of his own and was silent for a long moment. He looked back at Dean. "You think...?"

"Hell, yeah." Dean ran a hand through his hair. "Accident like that, with some supernatural critter around? There's only so much bad luck I'll buy. No, man, it killed her."

"And now it's after the daughter," Sam said. "I wonder why."

"How do we stop it, is what I wanna know," Dean said. He sounded bitter, frustrated, and Sam could hear the unvoiced self-recriminations in his tone. Dean could put up a tough front, but Sam knew his brother. Failure never sat easy with Dean, regardless of the circumstances.

"We'll get it next time," Sam said. "We got to figure out what it is first, though. Dad's journal may help with that; I've an idea or two of what to look for. And we should make some calls. Someone may have run into something similar before."

Dean nodded. "You do that." He pushed up out of the chair and stretched his arms high

above his head. "Meantime, toss you for the bed: I'm wanna get some shut-eye. Phoenix is a long way away."

"About that," Sam began, "I—"

Dean made a dismissive gesture with his hand. "Forget it. You had it right; she *is* our kind of problem now. Besides, Phoenix is kinda on the way to California."

Sam smiled to himself. Amazing how they could be like chalk and cheese about the most mundane things, but when it came to keeping people safe from the things they hunted, they always ended up on the same page.

## Beware The Things Inside

Several days passed and they reached Santa Fe without further incident. The Impala, faithful as ever, had carried them along narrow country roads, through backwater towns and dusty hills, and past endless fields of bare earth, prepared for sowing or planting of crops. Soon, they'd be able to drop Lori off at her aunt.

They'd seen no sign of the evil stepfather-slash-demon though they'd kept their eyes open and the doors salted. Perhaps it had simply lost their trail along the many miles from Missouri to New Mexico. Or perhaps Bobby's talisman had something to do with it; maybe the thing lost interest in the girl now that she was protected. It had been a bit difficult to get Lori to accept Dean's charm and wear it on a thin leather cord without explaining why, and Sam had privately protested that Bobby had prepared those amulets for their own protection, but Dean insisted and at last she reluctantly agreed.

A third, scarier possibility was that the demon had gotten from Lori what it was after. A frightening thought, because they still hadn't a clue what that could be; Sam said that he had a theory but wanted to find out more before sharing his thoughts. Which was fine by Dean: let the matter stew a while in that big brain of Sam's and he'd come up with an explanation that made sense. *Then* they could go kill it.

Lori had no idea of the preternatural nature of her attacker, and if it were up to Dean, it would stay that way. Without the demon showing, the hidden compartment in the Impala's trunk could remain closed, and Lori had easily swallowed the 'brothers-on-a-road-trip'-tale Sam spun her. The salt had been a bit harder to explain but, despite some dubious looks, she'd taken that in stride as well. She became less tense around them as the days passed, apparently reassured that her stepfather had given up, and turned out to be less trouble than Dean had expected. Actually, Lori had teamed up with him against Sam, two to one, about Dean's choice of music, and she hummed along to his Zeppelin and early Metallica tapes, something that gained her a lot of respect in Dean's eyes.

Ragging on Sam had broken the boredom of the endless road, the greasy diners and dingy motel rooms. Eventually though, when Sam sunk deeper and deeper into his seat, the expression on his face growing darker and darker, it was Lori who apologized, even going so far as to offer Sam the chance to pick the next tape—a suggestion Dean had stamped down on instantly.

"Uh-uh," he'd said. "Driver picks the music, folks."

"So why don't you let Sam drive?" Lori asked.

"Cause it's my car. You think I'd let him drive just so he can play some of that whiny

emo crap he calls music? I don't think so." From the corner of his vision, Dean noted Sam rolling his eyes.

"Or you could let me drive," Lori pleaded. "I'm almost sixteen."

"Ha." Dean shot her a look over his shoulder. "Not in a million years." Sam muttered something he could not make out. "Sam's the shotgun. And you, sweetheart, are but a passenger." She'd smirked at him in the rear view mirror, and he'd grinned back before turning up the music so loud that the windows rattled and the sound of the engine was drowned out.

Yes, it could've been a lot worse.

The motel they'd picked for the night, one in a long line of motels and gas stations and take-out places along Highway 84/285 heading into Santa Fe from the north, was a bit above their usual standards, but it offered triple beds, breakfast served on real china plates and cable TV.

Dean set the television to an *Oprah* rerun on a local channel, turned down the sound and dropped the remote onto the bedside table before prodding the pillow into a more comfortable shape. He folded his hands behind his head and lay back, watching the screen with half an eye. The room was growing dark; he'd soon have to get up to switch on some lights, but right now, he was too comfortable where he was, stretching muscles weary from too many miles on the road.

The sound of running water stopped as Lori shut off the shower. Sam had gone for some grocery shopping; Dean hoped he'd remember to bring a six-pack, or it'd be a long night. Even with the charm, they made sure one of them was with the girl at all times, just in case that son of a bitch came back for more—Dean half-hoped it did. He'd be ready this time. He touched the guns hidden beneath the pillows, one loaded with silver bullets, the other with rock salt. Sam should be back soon, though, and they could go out together to get something to eat. Maybe Chinese. He'd seen a Chinese restaurant further down the street and he craved some sweet-and-sour pork. His stomach made a growling noise at the thought.

The bathroom door clicked and a wave of hot air entered the already warm room. This time of year, nights at the higher altitudes were chilly, even in New Mexico, and the motel's heater was running. He glanced away from the television as Lori stepped into the room. Her short hair was still damp from the shower, with light roots beginning to show through the black. Her face was flushed from the shower's heat, and Dean noticed that without her makeup on, she looked both much younger and more mature at the same time. Though her legs were bare, she'd put on a plaid shirt, buttoned up halfway, and—

"Hold on a sec," Dean said, sitting up. "That's mine."

Lori smiled in a way that seemed to increase the room temperature several degrees until it reached 'stifling'. "I know." Her voice was low, soft, inviting. Dean shook his head to clear it and drew a deep breath. Lori wandered over to the bed, hips swaying, and he watched her come warily. Something was not right, but he'd be damned if he could put his finger on it. She crawled onto the bed next to him, resting on her knees, and leaned forward; the shirt fell open, offering him an eyeful, and he caught a whiff of the lavender soap the motel provided as an amenity. He swallowed and forced himself to look away.

*This is bad.*

"Whoa," Dean said, digging his heels into the mattress until he had slid back up against the headboard. The metal frame pressed hard against his spine. "What'd you think you're doin'?"

"Hush, Dean." She straightened, put one leg over his and sat back down, resting her butt on—*thank God*—his upper legs. "I'll make it good."

"Okay," Dean said, his voice strange in his own ears, "that's enough. You stop this right now." What the hell had gotten into her? He hadn't given her any signs he'd be interested, had he? She wasn't even sixteen and he had treated her more like a little sister than anything else these past days. He could get in real trouble for this, though, no matter who started it. *But oh Lord, she smells good.* As if on instinct, he inhaled, deeply.

He raised his hands, feebly trying to push her away, but all his strength seemed to have left him. Lori clasped his wrists, stretched his arms over his head and folded his fingers around the frame of the headboard. "Hold on, Dean," she whispered in his ear, the words carried on a caressing breath.

"I—" He tried to let go of the metal bar, but much to his shock, his hands and arms failed to obey his brain's commands. He stared into her face, so close now he could feel her body heat on his jaw. "What did you—"

Lori stopped the question by planting her lips on his. "You have a beautiful mouth," she murmured. Her teeth nibbled on his lower lip, tugging. "I've been wanting to do this ever since I first saw you." Dean groaned, wracking his brain for a comeback but failing to come up with something. It was getting difficult to think.

She pushed up, running a finger along his jaw, down his throat and into the collar of his T-shirt. "*She* wouldn't let me."

"She?" he managed to get out, confused.

Lori laughed. "The silly little girl who grew up in this body, of course."

He blinked. *What the fuck?* "Who...are you?"

"That's not important now, pretty one. All that matters..."

She bunched up the collar of his T-shirt and pulled. The shirt tore apart without much resistance. Dean thought he should protest but the words refused to form.

"... is that I want you," she continued, her voice husky. "And *you* want *me*, don't you, baby?" Without warning, she scooted forward and ground herself down onto his cock, which, displaying a will of its own, strained eagerly against the buttoned denim of his jeans. Dean bucked, involuntarily, and growled, tightening his grip on the headboard, the metal cold beneath his hands. She laughed again, a throaty little laugh.

"Good boy. I'll make this the best lay you ever had, don't ya worry. You'll go out happy." She bent again, brushing her lips against his. "There are worse ways to go, wouldn't you say? And I get to stay, forever." She pressed her lips harder against his, bruising him, her tongue forcing his mouth open, seeking entrance. Wanting to gag, Dean instead found himself responding in kind. His eyes fluttered shut, and he lost himself in her kiss. After long seconds, when he half-thought he'd lose consciousness for lack of oxygen, she let go. He panted, sucking air into his lungs.

*I must be dreaming...*

Understanding dawned through the buzz in Dean's ears, slowly yet surely. "You're a succubus. I thought—"

She flicked a finger against the tip of his nose and the brief pain made his eyes water. "Tsk. Such a nasty word. I prefer vamp. Enchantress. Or femme fatale. Much more appealing terms, wouldn't you say?"

Whatever the bitch wanted to call it, Dean thought, she was a demon that preyed on men, killing them during sex. And though dying as he came didn't sound half-bad—it certainly beat getting chewed up by a wendigo or being sucked dry by a vampire—he was far from ready to give up just yet. Not after Dad had made a deal with the yellow-eyed demon for his life. Not while he had promised to keep Sam safe.

Dean opened his mouth to protest. But whatever he planned to say fled when she brushed

the shreds of his T-shirt aside and started licking and nipping a wet trail down his throat and chest. His body responded the way nature intended: skin pebbled wherever she touched him and his nipples hardened as she rasped her nails over them. Sounds wrung from his throat, incoherent, meaningless, lustful. She moved down, hummed her pleasure against his skin and the vibration traveled all the way down to his dick. Confined in his Levis, it had grown achingly hard, and the bitch's grinding didn't help any either. Dean moaned in desperation.

As if in answer to his wordless plea, she shifted her position until she was sitting back on his legs, relieving the pressure ever so slightly. But not enough—never enough. He whimpered with need, hating himself for it but helpless to stop.

"Patience, baby," she muttered. "I'll take care o' you in a moment." Her mouth had reached the top of his jeans and she took the first button of his fly between her teeth. She growled playfully, tugged while glancing up at his face, her eyes pale blue and shining.

With a start that briefly cleared the fog from his mind, he recognized them: they were the same unnatural color as on the thing at the bus stop, back in Missouri. He glared at her—or at least tried to, but he suspected the look he shot her was more pleading than angry. In either case, she smirked up at him, bit off the button and spat it out.

"Enough playtime," she mumbled, softly, as if speaking to herself. She grabbed his jeans firmly in both hands and ripped it open. Buttons went flying, clattering across the motel room's tiled Spanish floor and bouncing off the walls. His cock sprang free, bobbing in the faint flickering light of the television. A sigh of relief issued from him before he could stop it.

"Goin' commando, eh?" She grinned. "Figures."

"Ran out of—" What he'd been about to say was forgotten the next instant, when without further commentary, not even bothering to drag the jeans down his hips, she hiked up her shirt—she'd put on no underwear—and sank down on him. There was an instant of resistance, a momentary look of pain that flitted across her face, then her maidenhead gave and she took him in all the way in one single go. She felt tight and incredibly hot, like a furnace, and if his dick had had a mouth, it would have cried out with joy. Dean sobbed, straining to hold back, to keep control; he'd be a dead man if he came, he knew. But he wasn't sure how much longer he'd be able to hold off the surge of pleasure the continued friction built up in his entire body. She leered knowingly down at him, as if she knew what he was thinking. Hell, perhaps she did. She moved, slowly at first but gradually picking up speed, rocking back and forth, up and down. Dean squeezed his eyes shut, focusing all of his remaining concentration on keeping his climax at bay.

## Tell Me Why

Sam crossed the parking lot, whistling a popular tune that had been playing on the grocery store's radio. He didn't know who it was by or what it was called, but it was one of those simple songs that nevertheless would stick inside your head and then be incredibly hard to get rid of. Dean would hate it.

He clenched the grocery bag a little firmer in the crook of his left elbow, carrying the cake he'd gotten for Lori's birthday in his hands. The corners of Sam's mouth twitched at the thought of presenting her with it. She'd be so surprised; she wouldn't have guessed they'd remember. Well, *he'd* remembered; he doubted Dean had. Dean would forget his own birthday if Sam wasn't there to remind him, let alone remember that of others. But a person only turned sixteen once, and that day shouldn't be glossed over and forgotten. It also shouldn't be remembered for spending it in a dark forest wet from spring rains, chasing after a reportedly escaped werewolf with your dad and older brother but well, that was *his* life. Lori was a normal girl; she should have as normal a birthday as was possible while on the road.

And normal birthdays included cake.

A gust of wind blew across the lot, ruffling his hair and rustling the paper bag; Sam shivered deeper into his jacket. The New Mexico night was cold, the heat of summer still weeks away. He hurried onto the motel porch and stopped before the door to their room. He awkwardly shifted groceries and cake into a one-armed grip, digging into his jeans for the key card with the other.

A soft noise drifted through the thin plywood door, the sound of a whispered moan. Sam froze, one hand in his pocket, the other beginning to tremble with the effort of holding the groceries. Carefully, cautious not to make a noise, he stooped and put his purchases on the ground, out of the way. He straightened again and pressed his ear to the door, listening hard, sticking one finger into the other ear to shut out the rumble of a passing truck from the road. There it was again; definitely a moan. And were those bed springs squeaking?

The sound was unmistakable for someone who spent the larger part of his life in cheap, rundown motels with sagging mattresses and rusty beds that rented rooms by the hour. There was a clear rhythm to the squeak, as familiar as the noise itself. Dean had no shame. How often had Sam found himself in this position, waiting outside while his brother banged his latest conquest in their room? More times than he liked to count, that was for damn sure. Except—

*Dean wouldn't...*

Would he?

No longer hesitating, Sam shoved the key card into its slot and flung the door open. The room was covered in gloom, the lights out, but the combined illumination from the television set and the glare of the street lights falling in over Sam's shoulder showed the scene as clear as if a spotlight had been trained on it. The couple on the bed was so engrossed in each other, they didn't even notice him.

"Goddammit, Dean!"

This was low, even for Dean and his string of cheap bimbos. What the fuck was he thinking? True, Lori would turn sixteen the next day but even then, she'd still be underage in many states. And she was twelve years Dean's junior no matter what law you applied. But most importantly, the girl depended upon them. When they took her in, she became their responsibility, their charge, at least until they could get her to her aunt in Phoenix. It was like—like fucking one's younger sister.

"Have you completely lost your mind?" Sam hit the switch beside the door and the room flooded with bright yellow. He got his first good look at the pair, and shame and embarrassment tried to compel him to turn away.

But then he caught the expression on Dean's face.

His brother's features showed the weirdest combination of horror, fear and ecstasy Sam had ever witnessed. Dean had squeezed his eyes closed and his skin was beaded with sweat. He held his jaws clenched so tightly that Sam's teeth ached in sympathy. Dean's knuckles had turned white from the force with which he gripped the metal headboard, as if it were a lifeline that kept him from drowning.

Lori glanced over her shoulder, a wicked smile that was too adult for her on her lips. "Hello, Sam," she said throatily. She never once stopped moving, her body undulating on top of his brother in an ancient rhythm perfected over centuries.

Sam frowned, suddenly unsure, surprised by the unexpected role reversal. "What—" But abruptly all the pieces fell into place, and he understood. He'd been right. And he had been wrong, oh so wrong at the same time. "Shit, no, you won't. Not my brother."

He snatched the girl—*demon*, his mind amended—by the upper arms and wrenched her off of Dean. His brother screamed in pain—*oh God, I hope that myth about vaginal razors is wrong*—as they came apart and she clawed at Sam, pretty face twisted with fury instead of the earlier satisfied smirk. One of her hands caught him on his jaw, long nails gouging

bloody tracks across his cheek. Sam grunted at the pain. Grappling this close-up with a demon was never a good idea, though he wasn't sure what he could do about it. Shoot it? He didn't even know where Dean had stashed the guns, and even if he did, there was Lori to consider.

He hurled her away from him with as much force as he could muster. She rolled across the farthest bed and hit the wall head-first with a sickening thud that made Sam wince. Tense, ready, jaw muscles twitching at the pain from the scratches, he waited. But she didn't move. Cautiously, Sam walked over to her. Her eyes were closed, and an ugly egg-shaped bump that was rising on her forehead showed where she had hit the wall. She was out cold, for now. He turned to check on Dean.

His brother was curled in upon himself, on his side, knees drawn up, breathing hard through his nose. "Dean?" Sam ventured. "You okay?"

"Hurts," Dean gasped.

Sam reached for him. "Let me see."

Dean's eyes shot open and pinned Sam with a glare. "What? You wanna look at my dick? Hell no!"

Sam hesitated. There were a few streaks of red on the sheets. "You're bleeding."

Dean shook his head. "Not mine. Hers." He drew another breath. "Shit, dude," he continued, barking an agonized laugh, "never 'spected blue balls could make a man feel so alive."

Sam snorted a laugh of his own in response. With the worst over, the adrenaline was fading slowly, leaving him shaken and feeling ill. "You knew?"

Dean moved, cautiously unfurling from the tight ball he'd rolled himself up in, taking deep, conscious breaths, shifting his jeans up. "Not at first," he said. "But when she crawled on top of me, butt-naked, and started humpin' me with no warning, yeah, that pretty much gave it away. Fuck, Sam, I couldn't *move*."

"Yeah." Sam looked away from his brother, over to the corner of the room where Lori still lay crumpled in a naked heap of limp arms and legs. "I read about that. Something to do with pheromones that influence the somatic nervous system."

"The what?"

He turned back to look down on Dean. "Voluntary muscle control." He gestured. "Explains why you couldn't move but still got it up."

"I didn't want to—"

"I know." After a moment's silence, Sam changed the subject, "I sort of suspected the stepfather could be an incubus. But I never considered... It's actually quite intriguing."

"Whatever." Dean made a noise in the back of his throat. "Would you mind tying up Miss Intriguing over there before she wakes up and pheromones *your* nervous system?"

"Right." Sam looked around, searching for something tie Lori up with. There was nothing in the room, but Dean had put the keys to the Impala on the nightstand and there was a length of rope in the trunk. He snatched up the keys, and Dean didn't even protest. "I'll be right back."

An ice machine droned mechanically in a narrow alcove a few doors down from their room. Sam filled the plastic bucket provided for that purpose with fresh cubes, got the rope from the car, and returned to the room. "Here." He handed Dean the bucket. "That ought to help."

Dean looked dubious. Sam shrugged. "It's what I read, anyway."

Sam unfurled the rope and stood over Lori, looking down at her. She whimpered, twitching, still knocked out but on her way to regaining consciousness. He'd have to hurry. But—"This is gonna be awkward," he muttered below his breath. She was basically naked, except for the half-buttoned, oversized shirt that barely covered her.

"Not as awkward as her trying to jump your bones next," Dean said from the other bed. He had poured half of the cubes onto the shreds of his T-shirt and was folding the cloth around it.

"Right."

Trying hard not to touch her any more than absolutely necessary, and avoiding looking at body parts he had no business looking at, Sam gathered Lori in his arms and picked her up. He was surprised at how light she felt despite being a mostly dead weight. She feebly moved an arm, groaning softly.

"Hurry up, man." Dean was pressing the ice pack to his crotch and Sam was pleased to see the lines of pain melt slowly from his brother's features.

Sam planted the girl down on the chair in front of the desk, arranging the shirt over her to preserve as much of her dignity as he could, and then wrapped the rope around her wrists and ankles before tying it off firmly to the chair. He ducked into the bathroom, gathered one of the damp towels and placed it across her lap.

Dean snorted.

"What?" Sam said over his shoulder.

"You're such a white knight. You think that bitch is gonna care?"

Sam shrugged. "I care."

"How did sweet little Lori turn into *that*, anyway?" Dean climbed off the bed, moving gingerly. He collected his spare pair of jeans and went into the bathroom where he dumped the slush of half-melted ice from his shirt into the wash basin, the cubes clinking against the porcelain sink. There was a moment of silence, followed by a thud and a muffled curse.

"You all right?" Sam called.

"Yeah."

Lori's eyes fluttered beneath their lids.

"Found the answer." Dean reappeared in the bathroom's doorway. He was still bare-chested but had changed into his unripped pants. "Stupid chick took it off." Bobby's small pendant dangled from his index finger on its thin leather cord.

"Actually, I don't think it mattered," Sam said. "That charm—"

"What's... happening?" Lori's voice sounded hoarse, rusty. She writhed against the chair's back. She glanced down, noticed the rope tying her to the chair, the state of her undress. She pulled at the bonds but Sam had known what he was doing and they wouldn't budge. Sam could tell the instant she realized she couldn't get away—panic flooded her eyes and her head turned left to right. She took in the room: the rumpled bed, Dean half-naked and glaring, the bloody marks on Sam's cheek. Her chest heaved as she gasped. "Oh God. Oh God."

Sam knelt before the chair, trying to catch her eye. "Lori? What's the last thing you remember?"

"Careful, Sammy." Something clicked, and Sam glanced over his shoulder. Dean had picked up one of his guns and cocked it. He held it in such a way that it wasn't quite pointing at her yet, but it wouldn't take much.

"Dean, I think it's *her*."

Lori glanced up at him, gaze brimming with tears that threatened to spill over. She was either a very good actress, or she was real. "Please let me go?"

"In a minute," Sam promised. "First, you have to tell me what you remember."

She swallowed, hard. "I don't—" She fell silent, her expression slackening a bit and her gaze fading into that far-off look of someone dredging up a memory. "I... was in the shower," Lori said after a pause. A small frown drew her brows together. "And..." She refocused on Sam, eyes flicking briefly at Dean before they returned to his face. "How... how did I get here? What did you do to me?" She twisted against the rope, coarse fibers digging into her skin and she failed to hold back the tears any longer. She started to cry, fat drops trickling down her cheeks.

"Okay, that's it." Sam stood up. "I'm cutting her loose."

"What? No." Dean strode around the bed. He caught Sam's wrist before he could use the knife in his hand. "That *thing* was trying to kill me. We can't be sure—"

"Dean, look at her." Sam wrenched his arm out of his brother's grip. "Maybe you're right, maybe we can't be sure the demon won't come back. But right now I'm *very* sure that the person tied to that chair is nothing but a frightened, sobbing girl who has no idea what happened to her."

Dean glanced down at Lori. He let go of Sam's arm. "Something goes wrong, it'll be on your head," he said. But he didn't stop Sam from slicing through the rope.

oOo

"We're gonna need help." Sam leaned against the door of the motel room. Arms folded across his chest, that worry wrinkle visible between his brows, he looked both troubled and determined.

"Yeah?" Dean put the gun down on the nightstand and rummaged through his things in search of something whole and not too dirty to wear. He dug up a faded black T-shirt—

one of his favorites—and sniffed it. It would do.

"Yeah." Sam pushed away from the door and started pacing across the narrow space between the beds and the small desk. "There's some info in Dad's journal about succubi, but it doesn't say how to cure them."

"Cure them?" Dean dragged the shirt over his head and shoved it in the waistband of his jeans. The Glock followed, sitting heavily against his spine. The touch of the weapon made him feel better. Safer. "You make it sound like it's a disease. Way I see it, you can't cure a demon. You just kill it."

Sam sighed. "Dean, you'd kill Lori too."

Dean ran a hand through his hair before he collected a wrinkled blue shirt from his bag. "I know." It sucked, big time. Lori was a sweet kid, not an evil bone in her body. Well, before she'd pulled that whole sex-crazed chick-act she was. "But you said it yourself, she isn't possessed. *That*, I know how to deal with. This?" He shook his head. "I don't know, man."

"Let's at least give it a try," Sam pleaded. "We can take her to Bobby's. There's bound to be something in those books of his."

"How does this work again, anyway?"

"All right." Sam stopped pacing and sat down on the corner of his bed, the one that was still neatly made-up. He brought out Dad's journal from his duffel bag and flipped through it. "I suspected the stepfather might be an incubus, after the way Lori said he came after her."

"The sucking face, a few days ago," Dean added.

"That, and what he did to the mother, getting her to marry him in a couple of weeks. It started to add up." Sam stopped browsing the journal and showed Dean a page filled with scribbles in their father's handwriting. "Here it says than an incubus can impregnate a human woman."

"Make little incubuses?"

"Yeah, sort of." Sam turned the journal back around and poured over the page, holding it close to his face so he could decipher their father's scrawl. "Except the offspring is a hybrid. A combination of human and demon."

Dean rubbed his chin. "So, what're you saying? Lori is a half-breed?" Taking up where Sam had left off, he started going back and forth between the bathroom and the outer door, too wound up to sit still. The bathroom door was closed. Lori was taking a long time getting dressed in there; she probably needed a while to regain her composure, get up her courage to come out and face him. He wasn't sure he was ready to face her.

"Apparently."

"You knew all that, and you never told me?" Dean asked. "Shit, dude. With a warning like that, I might've stopped her—it."

Stopped the demon from assaulting him. Stopped it from using him to violate Lori. *Only in our fucked-up world...* She'd been a virgin, for God's sake. His stomach threatened to rebel and he took a deep breath to calm it. He got out his flask and took a sip, relishing the heat as the liquor trickled down and concentrating on the sweet ache in his throat.

"Sorry," Sam said, dragging Dean's thoughts back. "It was all conjecture and circumstantial. I didn't want to mention it without something more substantial to back it up."

"So you put my dick on the line." Dean winced at the memories. His balls throbbed in misery, his cock itched like he had the crabs and the fiery marks on his chest where her nails had raked him protested against the soft cotton of his shirt chafing them.

"I got back in time to save your sorry ass, didn't I?" Sam said, a little defensively, though Dean could hear the guilt underneath.

"Barely," Dean grunted. "Sam, I was thisclose to losing it."

"Look," Sam said, putting the journal down. "I'm sorry. I suspected the stepfather but I never thought that Lori herself might be a threat. If I'd known, I'd never—"

"I know," Dean interrupted. It wasn't Sam's fault. He should've pushed harder; he knew Sam had had his suspicions, and he'd let him take his sweet time to mull them over.

The room grew still, and they could hear water running in the bathroom. At last Sam broke the silence.

"I don't understand it," he muttered. "Lori's sixteen, she said her mother met the guy not long before they married and then she died a month after. Hardly enough time to knock the woman up, let alone raise a kid."

"We're missing something," Dean agreed. "If Lori's not the half-breed, how come she turned all Lolita on me? And why did the bastard come after her?"

"I don't know," Sam said. "Perhaps it assaulted her mother before and came back for Lori? You know how evil tends to stick to patterns. I'm taking a wild guess here, but she could even be the demon's offspring. Remember Lori said her mom never wanted to discuss her dad? How she's never even seen a photo of him?"

"Makes a sick kind of sense, in a very fucked-up way." Dean glanced at the bathroom again. He felt for his 9mm, securely lodged against his back. "But if Lori had that bitch inside her all along, why did it show itself today? Why not two days ago, or a week from now?"

Sam smiled grimly. "Look outside," he said.

Dean shoved the curtain aside and glanced out of the window. The pane needed a washing; a coating of dirt and dust showed against the glare of lamps that lit up the motel grounds.

"What do you see?"

"Nothing." It was pitch black beyond the overlapping circles of brightness the streetlights cast on the parking lot. The Impala hulked beneath the window, neatly parked up against the sidewalk. A heavy semi accelerated on the road and disappeared in the distance, the twin red taillights quickly swallowed by the darkness. "It's night."

"Look up," Sam said. Dean obeyed. The sky was cloudless, stars dotting the blackness like so many pins of light. A falling star streaked across his view.

Dean shrugged and looked back at Sam.

"New moon," Sam said with a slight smile. "Tonight's the new moon."

"So?" Dean said. "Isn't it the full moon we should worry 'bout? Werewolves, the witching hour, all that?" He wiggled his hands in a 'boo'-gesture.

"Yes," Sam said. "But according to this," he held up Dad's journal, "the phase of the new moon is a powerful time in the lunar cycle as well."

"Turning women into lusting nymphomaniacs?" Dean suggested. He chewed his bottom lip, absently trying to remember if it'd ever seemed easier to get laid during a new moon.

Sam offered a lopsided half-smirk, as if he knew what his brother was thinking. "Not all women," he said. "Only hybrids. And only under certain circumstances. I think the incubus woke it when it assaulted Lori. Now, it's the new moon and tomorrow's her sixteenth birthday. She'll be considered an adult in many cultures. It's neatly symbolic."

"And you read all that in Dad's journal?"

"No. I also called a few people and checked on line, while you were teaching Lori the words to Led Zeppelin." Sam closed the journal and carefully stashed it among his clean shirts. "Anyway, a half-breed succubus needs to kill to consolidate its hold. I wasn't sure that was true but seeing as how we ended up with Lori tied to the chair and not that creature kinda confirms it."

Dean remembered the demon's promise. *You'll go out happy. And I get to stay, forever.* "So, we keep her from killing anyone for the next few days."

"If only it were that simple." A quick, sad smile crossed Sam's face. "No, once the succubus has been awakened, it'll continue to try until it succeeds."

"Then what can we do?"

"That," Sam said, "I don't know. That's why we need help."

Dean pondered it for a moment. If there was a way to help Lori, to get rid of the succubus once and for all, they'd find it. She deserved every chance they could give her. "You call Bobby," he decided. "I'll see what's takin' her so long. But Sam?"

Sam reached for his phone and hit speed-dial before he glanced up. "Yeah?"

"If we can't fix this..." Dean didn't have to finish. The look in Sam's eyes told him his brother knew. If they couldn't drive out the demon, they couldn't let Lori live. Not just for the sake of the many nameless men she'd kill, but also for her own. Being a demon's puppet, that was no way to live.

## Fear Shakes Me

Lori had fled into the bathroom as soon as Sam cut her free, clutching the shirt to her breasts. Hot tears streamed from her eyes, and she couldn't seem to stop them. They made it difficult to see, and she'd located the bathroom door as much by touch and instinct as by sight. A long sigh of relief escaped her as soon as the door latched shut behind her. She twisted the lock, listening for the little click that indicated she was safe. At least for the moment.

She stared into the mirror. It was still fogged over from her earlier shower, the vapor turning it opaque so the bathroom was reflected in indistinct blurs of color and shape, but she'd wiped the center with a towel and it showed her clearly. Her cheeks glistened with moisture and she brushed at them with the back of her hand. Lori dabbed her eyes with a corner of the towel until no new tears came. She needed to think; she was no little girl, and she'd have to take care of herself now. But what was she going to do?

She struggled to remember what had happened to her, but try as she might, nothing came. The last thing Lori knew she'd been shedding her clothes and turning on the hot water tap in the shower. After that, nothing, until she woke up tied to that chair, half-naked, while the two brothers who had promised to keep her safe looked ruffled and upset and threatened her with a gun.

What the hell had happened? She wished she could remember. There was dried blood on her thighs and she felt sore, raw. Lori remembered seeing posters all over school a while back, warning girls about guys who might slip drugs into their drinks. Date rape drugs, they'd called it. Could that be what they'd done to her? It would explain why she couldn't remember a thing. Nausea rose in her throat and fresh tears burned behind her eyelids. She splashed cold water on her face until her stomach settled and her eyes remained dry.

She tore at the shirt, not caring that buttons came loose, and flung it into a corner with a disgusted grunt. The clothes she discarded before the shower still lay in a heap on the floor, and Lori quickly scooted into them, feeling slightly better once she tugged the skirt down over her hips and put on her shirt. She reached for her boots next.

She could hear Sam and Dean talking, but the door muffled the sound so she couldn't make out what they were saying. Discussing her, no doubt. What *had* happened? It wasn't easy to imagine them as malicious or depraved rapists; they'd seemed so nice. Weird, but harmless. Harmless enough that she had started to trust them, at least. They'd promised to take her to Phoenix, and they'd rescued her from Steve—although, now that she really stopped to think about it, she wasn't entirely sure what had happened that night either. Lori shivered as she realized that most of what she knew was what they'd told her.

Well, no matter, she wasn't going to stay and find out for certain if they had any other strange plans. She'd be safer on her own and Phoenix wasn't far from Santa Fe. But how to get there? She had no money, her backpack was in the other room and she couldn't go back in there. What if they wouldn't let her go? Their voices still drifted through the door, first Sam's, then it was Dean speaking. She glanced around the bathroom. There was a narrow window high in the wall, over the toilet. It was designed to admit fresh air into the bathroom, but she guessed that she might be able to squeeze through. She'd worry about how she was going to get to her aunt once she had escaped.

Lori climbed on top of the toilet seat, lifted the latch and shoved the window open. The cold air struck her, made more noticeable by the lingering heat from her shower. She hopped, dragging herself up further, hands clawing and booted feet scraping across the wall tiles, until she managed to hoist herself up far enough that she could rest on her stomach for a moment and catch her breath. It was a narrow fit, but from there on, it was easy. The top of the window scraped across her back and buttocks, caught for a heart-stopping moment on her skirt, and then she was free. The ground was hard, grit digging into her palms when she landed, but she didn't care. Whatever those guys were into, they could do it without her.

She wiped her hands on her skirt, shivered deeper into her shirt, wishing for a moment that she'd brought the plaid shirt, and jogged away. The highway was nearby, she should be able to catch a ride easily. It wasn't exactly safe—Lori remembered trucker Tom and his grubby paws clearly—but things could hardly get any worse than they already were.

oOo

Holding the phone to his ear with one hand, Sam stuffed his few possessions back into his duffel bag with the other. If Bobby had a solution, there would be no time to lose. A good thing they'd learned to not unpack needlessly but to live out of their bags instead; a hunter's life meant never knowing when you had to leave in a hurry. Dean carried their belongings to the Impala while Sam explained the situation to Bobby. There was a moment of silence on the line while the old hunter digested Sam's story.

Dean returned and went up the bathroom. He knocked softly. "Hey. Lori? We're not gonna hurt you." He tried the knob. "Open up." Dean knocked again and quirked an eyebrow at Sam in silent question.

Bobby was saying something about medieval manuscripts and Sam shrugged at his brother in response. They'd probably scared her half out of her mind, so small wonder if Lori was reluctant to open the bathroom door.

The connection was bad, and Sam turned away, huddling over the phone to hear better. "Yes," he said into the mouthpiece. "We can be in South Dakota some time late tomorrow."

A loud *crack* and a shout drowned out whatever Bobby said in response. "Son of a bitch!" A stream of profanities followed.

Sam looked up, no longer paying attention to the voice over the phone. The bathroom door stood open, the lock splintered where Dean had forced it open. "Gotta call you back," Sam told Bobby hurriedly and snapped the phone shut. He glanced over Dean's shoulder at the empty bathroom. Through the open window high above the toilet seat, cold air carried in the sounds of night. Lori was gone. And with her, the succubus.

"Shit," Dean said once more, for good measure.

Sam thought that *'shit'* didn't seem quite strong enough, though. "We gotta find her," he said. They shouldn't have left her alone.

"You think?" Dean's voice dripped with sarcasm. "If you hadn't set her free—"

"Can we play the blame game later?" Sam asked. "We really have to find her."

"Before she kills some poor bastard with the best sex of his life?"

"Before it'll be too late to stop the succubus," Sam corrected. "Bobby said he might've some ideas. But we have to get her to South Dakota first."

Shaking his head, Dean turned without speaking and strode out of the motel room. Sam followed silently; the set of Dean's shoulders told him more about how upset his brother was than any words could have.

The parking lot was quiet. A few of the occupied motel rooms had cars parked in front of them and light spilling out through cracks in the curtains but there wasn't anyone outside. Raucous laughter drifted from the roadside bar in the next lot. A lone SUV sped by, headlights streaking yellow in the dark night.

"You check around back," Dean said. He was already running toward the road.

Sam jogged around the motel building. A mottled field of grass stretched out toward a row of tall pine trees, needles whispering in the wind and their silent black trunks guarding the motel like so many sentinels. Trash that nobody had bothered to clean up lay scattered

in the patchy grass. There was no one there; it was as deserted as the parking lot in front. Sam swore softly beneath his breath and trotted back.

Dean returned as empty-handed as Sam. "She's gone. Dammit." He pinched the bridge of his nose, then brushed a hand through his hair, both signs of worry.

Sam tried to think where Lori could have gone. She couldn't have much of a lead on them. "Did you check the roadhouse?" he asked.

Dean nodded. "A bunch of half-drunk truckers, and a few cheap whores, 's all."

Sam rubbed his neck. "She must have gotten a ride," he said. In which case the chances of finding her in time were very slim.

"The truck." Dean spun around, grabbing Sam's shoulders. "Remember when you told me to look out, earlier? There was this big semi accelerating, like it had just picked up somebody."

It was a long shot, very long, but... "Where'd it go?"

"East," Dean said. "C'mon." They ran to the Impala and jumped in. Dean gunned the engine, its roar loud in the cool night. He stomped on the gas and, tires spitting gravel, they tore out of the parking lot, in search of the unknown truck.

oOo

The Impala hurtled through the darkness, chasing its own headlights. Almost twenty minutes had passed since they discovered Lori gone, and still they hadn't caught up with the truck. Worry nagged at Sam until he could no longer keep quiet.

"Are you sure they went east?"

"Yes. No. I don't know." Dean shot Sam a quick look before he returned his attention to the road. *This is what you get for letting her go*, his look said. Dean's jaws clenched tightly as he stared back out at the blacktop that was rapidly disappearing underneath the Impala's wheels.

"Wait. What's that?" The car bounced over a pothole, the headlights high for a second. Something lit up in the distance, reflecting the glare. Hope flared in Sam's heart.

"Dunno." There was hope in Dean's voice as well, though.

They didn't have to wait long to discover what they'd seen. A minute later, Dean eased up on the gas and the car slowed down.

"That's gotta be it," Dean said. The semi stood parked at an odd angle, half on the road with its right front wheel in the dirt, like the driver had been in such a rush to stop he hadn't found the time to maneuver the truck out of the way properly. Lettering gleamed white against dark on the trailer. *Dwyer Trucking Co.*, with an Arizona address.

"You sure?" Sam asked.

"Pretty sure."

*Pretty sure* was good enough for Sam. Dean killed the engine but left the lights on. They got out of the Impala and Dean checked his Glock.

"Dean..." Sam warned.

Dean rolled his eyes. "I know. Just in case." He held the weapon in both hands, though, ready to fire in an instant.

Sam knew there wasn't anything he could say that would make Dean change his mind and put his gun away. He could only hope that Dean wasn't too wound up, too trigger-happy, and that he'd use the gun only as a last resort. It was their—*his*—fault that Lori was a danger to herself and the men around her, not hers. Hopefully, it wasn't too late; hopefully, they'd gotten to her in time.

Sam shook off the thought. Outside the car, with the drone of the Impala's engine no longer in his ears, the night had fallen silent. The truck loomed ahead of them like a hulking beast, fast asleep. The windows were up, the doors closed and no light spilled from the cab.

"You think she's still here?" Sam kept his voice low.

Dean shrugged. "Only one way to find out."

They crept up along the wheels, keeping close to the trailer's body. Halfway to the driver's cabin, a man emerged from the shadows surrounding the truck. His eyes shone pale in the bright glare of the Impala's headlights. Those eyes, though very different from the inky black gaze of a demon-possessed human, formed a clear warning that they were dealing with something supernatural.

"You meddlesome lads again," the incubus said, mildly. It crossed its arms before its chest and blocked their path. Though it wasn't very tall and dressed innocuously in blue-collar denim and flannel, his presence gave them pause. It had been drummed into them at a young age that taking on a full-blooded demonic creature was not something done lightly.

"You evil son of a bitch again." Dean raised the gun and squinted with one eye along the barrel.

The incubus smirked. "You know you can't shoot me."

"I can try," Dean said. He pulled the trigger. The instant the silver bullet left the muzzle, the incubus turned translucent, a dreamlike illusion shimmering in the cold night. Like Dean's knife before, the bullet whizzed through it without doing any damage and slammed into one of the semi's big tires instead. It pierced the rubber and air escaped in a sudden explosive whoosh, causing the vehicle to sag a little to the left. From the cabin came a high, desperate keening that sent cold shivers down Sam's spine.

"Fuck!" Dean swore. And below his breath, barely audible to Sam, he added, "Should've brought the shotgun instead."

As if rock salt would have done any better, Sam thought.

The incubus firmed up. "I won't let you stop her," it said. "Not again. I bid my time for too long. She belongs to me!"

"Bastard!" Dean hissed. "Sam, get Lori." Dean threw the gun aside and hurled himself at the incubus. This time, the creature did not fade but met the assault directly. The impact toppled them over, sending them to the asphalt, and someone uttered a loud *oomph*, though Sam couldn't tell who. Together, demon and man rolled across the blacktop, fists flying, feet kicking, snarling curses. Sam didn't wait around to see how his brother fared kicking demon ass; he snatched the handle and started to wrench the cabin door open.

It flew out of his grip in the next instant. Lori—in full succubus mode—burst from the cabin and flung herself at him. Sam backpedaled, unprepared for the impact and off balance, and tripped over his own feet. He landed on his back, the girl heavy on top of him. His skull smacked against the ground with so much force that sparks flared behind his eyes. Ignoring the pain, he bucked, trying to throw the succubus off, but it merely snarled, squeezing Lori's knees to his hips, hands folding around his wrists and nails digging into his flesh. He drew in a ragged breath and tried again.

*Fuck, but she's strong!*

"Don't move, Sammy," the demon whispered—and he found that he no longer could.

Helpless, he groaned, the noise filled with frustration. He panted for air, struggling to regain control over his body. The succubus giggled, leaned forward and bit—*bit!*—his jaw. He shivered. "Sammy wants to play too," it sing-songed in Lori's voice.

The demon's need was so strong, it really didn't seem to care whom it attacked. In the space of an hour, it'd gone from Dean to the truck driver and now Sam at the pace of a crack whore servicing her tricks. But its reward would not be a few minutes of drug-induced bliss; if the demon succeeded, it would gain eternal life on earth.

There was no way in hell he was going to let it win.

From the corner of his eye, Sam caught a glimpse of Dean wind-milling through the air and landing against the truck's flattened wheel in a heap of arms and legs, the incubus on him a second later. The wet smacks of fists hitting flesh mingled with angry cries of pain. He could expect no help from Dean; his brother had his hands full fighting off the male demon.

"Lori?" Sam discovered he still possessed the power of speech. "I know you can hear me. Fight her," he hissed. "Fight *it*."

"Shut the fuck up." The demon slapped him, hard, and his ears rang. Oblivion threatened to overwhelm him and, tasting hot blood in his mouth, he fought off the darkness. He smiled through clenched teeth.

"I'm right, aren't I?" he said, softly. "She's still in there. You haven't won yet." Sam stared into those pale eyes, searching for—for something. A spark of recognition, a sign that the teenager could hear him. Lori had to be there; she *had* to listen to him. Ignoring the pale fire that burned in the succubus's gaze, he held it hard, unflinching, seeking the girl within.

"Lori." Sam tried to sound as commanding and determined as he could. When he was a child, their father had had a certain tone of voice that never failed to make him and Dean run and obey without a pause whenever he used it. It was that same tone that had made Sam put his back up as he grew older. *How had Dad done it?* He tried to remember, to emulate. It wasn't easy, lying on the asphalt, loose stones digging into his back and a succubus fumbling with the fly of his jeans. It was doing that pheromone thing, Sam could tell, though the air reeked only of oil spills and gasoline. Still, it clouded his thoughts, created a buzz in his mind. He inhaled through his mouth and tried to keep his breathing superficial, not sure if it would make any difference. He was running out of time. "Lori,

listen to me. You're stronger than it is. Resist it. Help me."

For a moment, the hands stilled, her eyes flickering to a human blue. "Sam?"

Then the demon growled and butted his chin with the top of Lori's head. This time, the stars burst into a thousand pieces before blackness overtook him.

## Tear Me Open Make You Gone

Consciousness reasserted itself by means of a pounding head and a throbbing lower jaw. The scent of old leather was heady in his nose, the buzz of wheels flying over blacktop and the purr of the powerful engine pleasantly familiar to his ears. Sam realized he was furling up in the front seat of the Impala, crumpled in an awkward pile of limbs like a rag doll someone had dropped.

*Dean.*

He shifted. A whimper escaped him at the stab of agony that shot through his brain in protest against the slight movement; a wave of nausea washed over him, and Sam breathed firmly through his nose, trying to suppress the urge to throw up.

"Sammy? You okay?"

Dean's voice, near and worried.

"No," Sam groaned. He felt far from okay. He eased himself into a more comfortable position and carefully opened his eyes. The night was dark around them, the glare of the headlights against the asphalt zipping by bright enough to hurt. He squinted. "How long've I been out?"

"Not long," Dean said. "You look like shit, though."

Sam snorted, regretting it instantly. He turned his head in small increments until he could look at Dean, and waited for the world to stop spinning. "Right back at ya." In what little glow of the headlights that fell back into the car, he could barely make out half his brother's face, but it was enough. Dean's right eye had swollen shut, there were scrapes on his cheek and a trickle of dried blood betrayed a cut on his temple, right at the hairline. Sam suspected the other side of Dean's face didn't look much better.

"What happened?" Sam asked. "Last thing I remember is you flying through the air like a bad imitation of Superman." *Last thing I remember is being spellbound, paralyzed. Helpless.*

Dean shrugged, and winced. He must've banged up his ribs too, Sam thought.

"Short version: we got beat up. The bad guys got it worse, though." Dean nodded vaguely over his shoulder. Sam inched his head around further to see where he indicated. Lori slept on the back seat, so much rope wrapped around her arms and legs that she resembled a trussed Thanksgiving turkey.

"You distracted her long enough for me to sneak up and knock her cold," Dean continued.

"And the incubus?"

"Gone. Disappeared. I guess it didn't like tussling with me much, seein' it's such a lady's man. Or perhaps smacking it in the nose with the butt of the gun had something to do with it." Dean chortled with wry glee. "Got some use out of the damn weapon, at least. It never saw it coming, or I'd have hit thin air, I think."

"Where we going?" They were on one of the interstates, Sam could tell that much from the smoothness of the paving and the barrier dividing them from the lanes going in the opposite direction.

"South Dakota," Dean said. "If we push it, we can be there by nightfall."

oOo

It was the longest drive of Dean's life. Not even the haul from Philadelphia back to the Roadhouse with a pissed-off Ellen in the front passenger seat had seemed as long and painful as the journey from Santa Fe to Bobby Singer's scrap yard. Several minutes after Sam woke up, so had Lori. Or rather, the succubus inhabiting the girl's body had awoken. And from the moment it opened Lori's eyes, it hadn't allowed them a moment's rest. It begged, pleaded, threatened, cursed—Dean could add quite a few new, colorful expressions to his collection. At times, it pretended to be Lori, crying fat tears. The demon did whatever it could think of to convince them to untie it. Perhaps, on a few occasions, it even had been Lori talking to them; neither Sam nor Dean could really tell, and they were damned if they were taking any chances.

They stopped twice, once for gas, once for coffee. Neither felt particularly hungry or was willing to spend any longer at each stop than strictly necessary, so they survived on donuts and potato chips. Both times, they'd had to gag Lori and cover her with their jackets and a dirty blanket from the trunk to prevent any awkward questions. After the second stop, Dean had argued that they keep the gag in, something Sam reluctantly agreed with. But not even that kept the succubus from making noise: growling, keening, whining pathetically .

Worse, even, than the verbal assault, had been those goddamned pheromones. Dean hated that the most. Unseen, unheard, it wasn't something he could touch, could fight or kill. Yet it worked its effect on them with every breath they took, trying to take away their

free will. They'd kept the air on full-blast and had rolled down all the windows so the cold air streaming in froze Dean's fingers to the wheel until he could no longer feel them. Still, despite those measures, it had been a constant struggle against their own bodies which kept trying to betray them. They never spoke of it, but the way Sam kept writhing in his seat told Dean more than words could. He felt like squirming himself, denim too tight, arms and legs feeling sluggish and heavy, yet despite his discomfort, he drove the entire length of the eight hundred miles it took to reach Bobby's; Dean liked the way Sam's eyes crossed whenever his brother forgot to concentrate even less than his own drooping eyelids or the fuzziness in his mind. Apparently, a constant dreamlike state of half-arousal didn't go well with a lack of sleep and physical injuries, and more than once he found himself on the brink of sleep, the Impala straying across the lanes.

But at last, letting out a weary, heartfelt sigh, Dean could steer the Impala down the rutted dirt track and through the gate to the salvage yard, where half-gutted cars waited for someone to fix them, or to put them out of their misery and scrap them. It was close to sunset, the sky overcast and threatening rain. A chill wind blew from the north, a last attempt by winter to keep the South Dakota plains in its grip. He pulled the car up in front of Bobby's house, killed the engine and rested his forehead against the wheel for a moment. He hadn't felt this worn out since the night the yellow-eyed demon tried to rip his heart out through his chest.

Bobby must have been waiting for them, because in the next moment, a bar of warm light spilled out into the yard and the old hunter climbed down his porch steps. Dean dragged himself from the Impala, aching from the long hours behind the wheel and his recent injuries, while Sam rolled out of the passenger door just as wearily. Dean stretched, lifting his arms over his head, hearing as much as feeling his spine crack. He rolled his head to loosen the muscles in his neck, then wrenched open the back door.

"All right, time you got back to Hell."

The succubus glared at them over the gag with those luminous blue eyes, a silent promise that did not bode well for them if it ever got loose in its gaze. It struggled and twisted as he and Sam tried to drag it out. "Hey, Bobby! Some help here," Dean called.

"Bloody hell." Bobby appeared at his shoulder. "Let's have a look." He squeezed between Dean and Sam, and instantly recoiled. "Whoa." He shook himself.

"Better hold your breath," Sam advised.

"I'll say. Let's get her inside."

Bobby grabbed Lori's legs and together they wrestled the struggling demon up the porch,

through the door and into Bobby's living room. Not much had changed since their last visit. Piles of stacked books tottered high, reaching toward the ceiling in some places. A fire crackled in the hearth to banish the spring chill. Glancing up, Dean saw that the devil's trap was still drawn on the ceiling, and fresh paint showed where Bobby had repaired the cracks the demon they'd once known as Meg had caused when she attempted to free herself while inhabiting Sam.

"Whoa," Bobby said again, once they got the succubus settled onto a sturdy, straight-backed wooden chair and added a few extra ropes to keep her tied to it. He was breathing hard. "You boys got a knack for coming up with the strangest cases." He got his first good look of them. "Y'also seem to've gone head to head with a ten-tonner."

Dean shrugged and winced at the pain of bruised ribs that lanced through his chest. "I gave as good as I got. Sammy, on the other hand, got his ass kicked by a girl."

"Not just any girl," Sam said. He glared at Dean for a moment, who smirked back. "Can you help?" Sam turned to Bobby.

Bobby frowned, took off his baseball cap and ruffled a hand through his thinning hair. "She kill anyone yet?"

"No," Dean said, the same instant Sam said, "I don't think so."

Bobby looked from one to the other. "Which is it?"

"She didn't," Dean said. "Though not for lack of trying." He grimaced as his balls ached at the memory. He doubted he'd forget last night any time soon. Getting roughed up once in a while was par for the course in his life, but to get assaulted the way he'd been by a skinny girl—not so much. "The trucker was alive," he added for Sam's benefit. "In agony, confused, but still breathing. We got there in time."

Some of the tension left Sam's battered face. Dean wanted to kick himself for not mentioning it sooner, but all of his attention had been focused on getting them to South Dakota as fast as possible so they could get rid of the hellcat in his backseat and it had simply slipped his mind.

"Well, that's somethin'," Bobby said. "If she'd murdered him, the girl would definitely be lost. As it is..." He walked over to the far wall, careful to skirt a wide path around Lori, cocked his head, and started scanning titles. Most of the books were ancient, with cracked leather covers. Loose pages stuck out from some of the volumes, and to Dean's eye, they appeared stacked in random piles. But Bobby seemed to know exactly what he was looking for. He pulled a book from the middle of a tottering pillar, nearly dislodging the

rest. It was a heavy tome, thick enough to hold the contents of several phone books, with a black cover printed with faded gold lettering. When he flipped it open, a cloud of dust rose from the yellowed pages. Bobby leafed through it and placed the book back atop the pile with a shake of his head.

"I don't know, boys," he said. "I've never heard of anyone successfully banishing a succubus and keeping the host alive. Most cases I know about happened in the Middle Ages, and back then people believed those women to be witches. They didn't much care about having 'em survive."

"Can't we use the Key of Solomon?" Sam asked. "I know she's not possessed, but isn't this something similar? A demon taking over a human body and controlling it."

"Not quite." Bobby dug up another book, as fat and dusty as the first, and opened it. He read a few lines. "Here it is. A succubus is bound to its host body from birth. From conception, really, I s'pose. Remember the binding spell you were under, Sam?"

Sam shuffled his feet and rubbed his arm through his sleeve. Dean knew the scar was there, a visible reminder to Sam of the evil he had done. Well, the evil the demon had done using Sam's body, but his brother didn't quite see it that way yet.

"It's a bond similar to that that we need to break. The demon is dormant while the host body grows up," Bobby lectured. "Due to its nature, a succubus needs an adult form to do its work."

"Fucking men to death." Dean sank onto a lumpy easy chair. "Yeah, I can see how that wouldn't work in a little kid's body."

"To be accurate, the demon saps its victims of their life force during sex," Bobby amended. "That's what kills 'em. Most myths say it only happens in dreams, but that's not necessarily true."

"You don't say," Dean muttered. He leaned his head against the back of the seat, ignoring the musty scent that rose from its cushions.

Bobby glanced at him but didn't say anything.

"If that demon was in there all the time, how come it didn't react when Sam gave Lori holy water? Neat trick that, by the way." Dean grinned up at Bobby.

"Old hunter's technique," Bobby acknowledged the compliment. "And the demon probably wouldn't have responded if it was still dormant. Did something happen, after?"

Something that could've awakened it?"

"Step pops," Dean said, sitting up straight. It all started to make sense, now. At Bobby's puzzled look he added, "Lori told us she got a new stepfather recently. We caught him soul-kissin' her a few nights ago. We didn't have a clue what he was, though."

"Right." Bobby turned around and dug through his papers some more. "Ah." He held up a scroll and unrolled it. It was brittle with age, creased and torn. Small print covered it from margin to margin, in faded, barely legible ink. "I knew I'd read about it somewhere."

Sam took the scroll from Bobby and looked at the writing. "*To Cleanse and Banish a Succubus*," he said. "From the writings of Brother Bernardo of Mendaza?" He glanced back up at Bobby.

"Medieval monk from Navarre, in Spain," Bobby explained. "Burned at the stake himself after trying to help a woman escape the pyre. He claimed to know how to rid someone of a succubus."

"Did he?" Dean asked.

Bobby shrugged. "Far as I know, the ritual's never been tried. The lore has been translated and passed on through generations, though. That scroll belonged to my great-grandfather."

"Huh." Dean got up and glanced over Sam's shoulder. The script was old-fashioned, the tiny lines crammed together, hardly decipherable, and the language used could barely be called English. Some of it was in Latin. Dean pulled away and glanced at the girl. The succubus appeared to have calmed down and merely glared at them. Perhaps it was growing tired. Or perhaps it was working up to a new trick.

"We're gonna need St. John's wort," Sam said after scouring the manuscript. "And something called archangel root."

"Angelica." Bobby disappeared into a back room. Through the doorway, Dean glimpsed walls lined with shelves, filled with dusty glass pots that held all sorts of dried herbs and other indiscernible stuff. A board holding wicked-looking knives in various sizes filled one entire wall. He blew air through his teeth in admiration.

Bobby returned a moment later with two jars. One held crumpled yellow flowers, the other something that resembled dried bark. He shook the bark out into a mortar and offered Dean a pestle. "Crush," Bobby ordered.

Sam squinted at the script. "Lay a protective circle with the St. John's wort," he instructed. "And we'll need five black candles set at an equal distance from each other in the circle."

"That sounds like some serious mojo," Dean muttered. He ground the pestle hard against the bark-like pieces of root and it shattered into ever smaller pieces. "I hope you know what we're doin'."

Bobby shrugged. "What choice we got?"

Bobby closed the circle with the last of the yellow flowers and carefully placed black candles atop the dried herb. The pale gaze of the succubus followed his every move, though it didn't make a sound.

"You gotta sprinkle the angelica root on the candles," Sam told him.

Dean offered Bobby the bowl with brownish powder. Bobby scattered some of the crushed root onto each of the candles and lit them. A strong, tangy odor filled the room. The succubus twitched, pulling at her bonds, causing the ropes to tighten and dig into Lori's flesh.

"That's right, sweetheart," Dean told her with a smirk. "Time to get scared."

"Are we ready?" Bobby asked Sam.

Sam nodded. "Yeah. That's all. Now someone needs to read the incantation." He offered the scroll to Bobby. "You wanna do the honors?"

Bobby shook his head. "Girl's your charge."

Sam glanced at Dean, who nodded. "Get on with it," he said softly.

Sam took a deep breath and began to read the Latin incantation Brother Bernardo had written down centuries ago. Some of it sounded familiar to Dean, phrases used in exorcism rituals. Other parts were new, phrases he'd never heard before, and occasionally Sam tripped over the strange words.

For long minutes, nothing happened, while Sam read on, repeating the words again and again. The succubus sat quiet, a slight smirk curling Lori's lips. The candles burned undisturbed; the fire in the hearth crackled, shooting sparks into the chimney. Outside, the wind picked up, whistling around the building.

"Well?" Dean muttered at last, growing impatient.

The succubus moved against the ropes. It arched Lori's back, contorting her spine in a way that seemed impossible. A stream of indiscernible sounds emitted through the gag—Dean suspected they were curses, from the way its pale, blue gaze filled with hatred. The demon jerked against the bonds, whipping its head back and forth like a headbanger at a rock concert. Sam continued reading, his voice strengthening, and he no longer stumbled on the Latin. The succubus stiffened, arching backwards even further. Dean winced, half-expecting to hear Lori's spine snap any second. Out of nowhere, a high, keening cry filled the room, so sharp and piercing that Dean clapped his hands over his ears and cringed. The sound seemed to sear through him, growing higher in pitch with every passing second. Outside, a dog began to bark furiously. The front door banged open and the cold northerly wind rushed inside, extinguishing the candles and blowing smoke and ashes from the hearth all over Bobby's books.

Abruptly, everything stopped at once: the wind, the keening. The dog let out another bark or two for good measure before it also grew silent. Lori's body hung limp in the chair; the ropes tied around her were all that kept her from sliding to the floor. Dean slowly took his hands away from his ears and peered at Lori, watching her chest rise and fall in a slow rhythm—she was still alive. Sam finished the incantation one last time and put down the scroll.

"Is that it?" Dean asked. "Is it gone?"

"We have to wait and see," Bobby said.

## The Dirt Still Stains

Lori woke up shortly after. There was an initial moment of full-fledged panic while she tried to wrench herself free but only succeeded in tightening the knots further, but eventually Sam managed to calm her down enough to explain. When they questioned her, Lori said she didn't remember much, although she admitted to recalling flashes of the succubus controlling her. She was a smart one; she could put two and two together and convincing her they hadn't meant any harm didn't take nearly as much time and effort as it might have. In the end, Lori's deepest fear was that the succubus wasn't truly gone.

Bobby assured her it was.

Afterward, however, he took Dean aside, where Lori couldn't hear. "Remember, that demon's mate is still out there somewhere. Probably eager for revenge."

"Mate?" Dean asked, puzzled.

"Yeah. The incubus, her sire. The stepfather."

"That's one screwed-up family bond you describe there." Dean wrinkled his nose in disgust. "I don't think I wanna consider what you just said."

Bobby offered a quick grin of understanding, though his tone remained serious. "So long as you're careful."

"What about her?" Dean dipped his head at Lori. She was sitting on the couch with Sam, his brother explaining something to her with that earnest puppy-dog face that made people believe the weirdest tales.

*Poor kid*, Dean couldn't help think. What she'd gone through was nothing any teenager should've had to live through. He had to give it to her, though, she bounced back quickly.

"She'll be okay," Bobby said. "With the demon gone, she doesn't hold any interest for him any longer. You two, on the other hand..." He didn't finish.

Dean ran a hand over his neck and nodded. "I know." They could handle it; it was just one more creature with their names at the top of its shit list. Soon, the bastards'd have to start drawing lots for the chance to get at him and Sam.

oOo

Pounding rock music reverberated across the quiet junkyard. Something by Metallica, Lori thought. She smiled to herself. A couple of days cooped up in a car with a classic rock fan, and she could barely recall what Nickelback or Pink sounded like, but she'd learned to distinguish Metallica's early thrash metal from the blues rock of Led Zeppelin and AC/DC's hard rock.

That it *was* Metallica, however, wasn't very encouraging.

She glanced down at the mug in her hand. Steam wafted up, bringing the scent of freshly brewed coffee to her nose. Real coffee, black, two sugars, just the way Dean liked it best. But perhaps...

Lori squared her shoulders, closed the door to Bobby's kitchen behind her, and descended the steps of the back porch. *When there is a hill to climb*, her mother had always said, *waiting won't make it smaller*. Her legs seemed unwilling to take her around the house, though, and she dragged her feet.

The Impala sat on a clear patch of dusty ground with tools strewn haphazardly around it. The hood was up, and she imagined she could see the sleek car vibrate beneath the heavy beat of the drums or the thrum of the music's bass lines. Flat on his back underneath, Dean's jean-clad legs and leather boots were the only parts of him visible, one foot moving in time with the music. Lori trudged over, trying to decide how to begin, and stopped next to the car.

"Brought you some coffee," she said, loudly, to be heard over the din that came from the radio.

The rhythmic tapping ceased and Dean stilled. For a long moment, Lori thought he wouldn't respond, but then he pulled himself out from beneath the car and squinted up at her against the weak sunshine that cast blurry shadows across the yard. His gray T-shirt was smudged with dirt and a streak of engine grease overlaid the livid purple bruise that covered most of the right side of his face. He cocked his head expectantly, and she offered him the mug.

"It's hot," she said in warning.

Dean took a sip. "Thanks."

Lori scuffed at the dirt with the toe of her boot, leaving shallow gouges and causing puffs of dust to swirl up. "Dean, I..."

Over the rim of the coffee mug, Dean quirked an eyebrow at her, and Lori plunged on

before she lost her courage. "The other night, in Santa Fe, I... did something..." Dean's mouth tightened and a shadow crept over his face, but she had started this and now she felt like she had to finish it.

"I don't remember it," she hastily continued, "but later I felt... I... Sam said I should speak to you."

"Wasn't you," Dean grumbled. "Didn't Sam explain that? You're not responsible for what that bitch did. I should've—" He stopped mid-sentence, looking away, his mouth a thin, straight line.

Lori's cheeks burned with embarrassment. "I know, but... but it was me, too, and I'm—I'm sorry." The words tumbled out in a rush, before he could interrupt her.

"Doesn't matter now," Dean said, putting the mug down in the dirt. He'd only finished half of the coffee. "What's done is done. All that matters is that it's gone, that you're free of the demon." He dropped onto his back and shoved himself underneath the Impala again.

Tears pricked behind Lori's eyes, and she was glad he couldn't see them. They blurred her vision, and she blinked hard to clear it. She turned away, feet shuffling.

"Lori." Dean's voice made her look back. He'd reappeared from underneath the car. "For what it's worth," he said, green eyes earnest, "I'm sorry too."



A few days later and more than a thousand miles further south, the Impala rolled slowly along the residential street. White-painted bungalows alternated with larger two-story A-frames. There was a well-kept lawn in front of each house, edges already turning yellow from lack of rain. By mid-summer, those lawns would be brown and dry. Driveways led up to two-car garages, and purple-flowered bushes marked walkways leading to front doors. The place was suburbia to its core. Dean wiped at his forehead with the back of his right hand. They'd rolled down the windows and hot, dry Arizona air filled the interior. The sun beat down on the bleached cement sidewalks from a deep blue sky marred on the western horizon with a few fluffy white clouds, but they only served to underline the glaring blue of the rest of the sky.

"Here it is, I think," Lori said. She pointed to a well-maintained bungalow that glowed with a fresh coat of white paint, the windows trimmed with dark green. A mailbox stood

at the beginning of the driveway.

Dean scrunched up his eyes against the glare. "*Franks*."

"That's my aunt's husband's name," Lori confirmed. "My uncle's, I mean."

Dean glanced over his shoulder. Lori looked a completely different girl from the one they had picked up in Missouri. She'd lost more weight than she could afford, turning her from slender into skinny, but she no longer used the black eyeliner and heavy makeup that had made her appear years older than she was, and the light brown roots of her hair showed starkly against the dyed black.

He'd be glad to drop her off here, to get her out of his hair so they could head for San Diego. There was a poltergeist that was scaring the residents of an apartment building into jumping out of their windows—not that the local newspapers called it like that, of course. Lori's presence made him uncomfortable, reminded him of things he'd rather forget: that night in Santa Fe, his failure to keep her safe. And Dean suspected she remembered more than she let on. Her awkward apology in Bobby's scrap yard had convinced him of that.

Dammit, she had nothing to apologize *for*. None of it had been Lori's fault; she'd been helpless. But he—he should've been able to resist, to do *something* to stop the succubus in that motel room in New Mexico. Dean wished he could take that night back. But like Pastor Jim used to say: if wishes were horses, beggars would ride.

Dean let the car roll to a stop opposite the driveway and killed the engine. They got out, Lori pulling her backpack along. She hugged Sam tightly, rounded the front of the Impala and stopped before Dean.

"Thank you," she said softly.

"Yeah," he said, shrugging. She hesitated, started to reach for him, and Dean tensed up a little despite himself. He tried to hide it behind a half-hearted wave-off but Lori caught it anyway. Hurt flashed in her eyes before she looked away. She hefted the pack higher onto her shoulder. "I'm sorry." She crossed the road, making a beeline toward her aunt's driveway.

*Oh, crap.*

"Lori," Dean called after her. She halted at the edge of the sidewalk, slowly turning. He walked over to her, spreading out his arms. A smile lit up her face, and any doubts he might have had about how she felt fled from his mind. She hugged him, her cheek pressed against his chest.

"Me too, kiddo," Dean said into her hair. It smelled sweet and fresh. "And you're welcome."

She nodded.

They waited until Lori had disappeared into the house with a woman who could have been an older version of the girl herself—if you ignored the spiky black hair and the heavy black boots Lori still wore.

Dean put the car in drive and hit the gas. There seemed no need to speak while the Impala rumbled away from the sidewalk and down the street, heading west. Lori would be okay, the succubus was banished—countless lives had been saved. Dean could almost forget the incubus's final words before he had hit it with the butt of his gun a second time and it disappeared.

*"I'll have your balls for this," it had hissed in pain. "Cut 'em off and feed 'em to ya. Our time'll come, and there won't be anything you can do to stop us. Ask your brother; he knows."*

Dean pressed his lips together and frowned. Sam shot him a puzzled look.

"What?"

"Nothing." Sam had enough heaped on his plate without asking him about yet another demon's dire threats that might just be a lie anyway. Dean reached for the radio, shoved in a tape and turned it up.

*...I'll tear me open, make you gone, no more can you hurt anyone. And the fear still shakes me, so hold me until it sleeps...*

oOo

**Additional author notes:** Most of the incubus/succubus lore used in the above story is based on various myths and beliefs that can be found all over the internet, with a large additional dose of the author's imagination and a bit of basic biology. Many myths are contradictory in nature, which in my book makes it all right to mix and match as desired. YMMV. And I'm sure that just about every detail will get Jossed if/when the show ever gets around to addressing succubi and incubi anyway...

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