

Laid
by Big Pink
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Summary: Sam tries to forget a birthday but a brotherly brawl, anonymous sex, and a pregnancy test get in the way. Off the angst scale. One shot.

Rated: T for language and very slightly suggestive scenes, nothing you won't see on the O.C. for pete's sake. Set in a nebulous time frame, after pilot, but before Provenance. Supernatural owns me, I'm afraid, not the other way round.

Post-posting Note: I'm indebted to zippdipp for pointing out that I've screwed up Jessica's birthday. Damn. I'm going to ask you readers to bear with me on this one. Because if her birthday's already been filmed as being January 24, that would make it coincide with Robbie Burns Day, which means 'haggis' to me, and this is my attempt at an angst piece, not a laugh-out-loud funny one. So, please treat this as AU-y then. We okay? Good. Read on...

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His head feels football big. It hurts badly, but he knows this feeling, despite the fact that it's been awhile. It's a hangover, and it's colossal. So as to avoid opening his eyes, avoid seeing what's happened to him, Sam takes blind stock.

His head hurts. The bitter taste of bile fills his mouth, coating his teeth, but he doesn't have any recollection of vomiting. Not that he wants to remember; his mind shies away from the act of recollecting. Recollecting: collecting again, like picking up garbage after raccoons have knocked over the can. I am taking stock, which involves no remembering, he counsels himself, and the words feel wise and appropriate.

My head feels like someone's kicked it. Actually, my nose does. And my eye socket. Don't think about why. My hand hurts, and it's resting at an awkward angle under a pillow. My other arm is still asleep.

All this, present tense, and no need for Sam to probe further.

Sam is in a bed. His left arm is asleep. He is naked. He feels as though he's thrown himself in front of a subway train, but that conjures images of force and velocity, which are two concepts he's not in the right frame of mind to contemplate.

I am thirsty, he thinks. When my arm wakes up, it's not going to feel good at all. But that takes him into future tense, which is no more reliable or supportable than the past. It is warm; he is warm. The blankets are not heavy; this is a down duvet on top of me.

Taking stock.

This bed smells of sweat, and whiskey, and sex. It is a combination that requires Sam to do some temporal math, which he doesn't really want to do, but the smells are compelling, and the not knowing is becoming intolerable. Putting one and one and one together in a sequence.

Then a naked female body softly spoons into him, releasing his numb left arm to come back to full restoration, and this development sends all notions of mathematics and velocity and thirst out the window, considered or not.

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Sam had been moody all day. And who fucking wouldn't be? Dean thought, trying to figure out which of the three guys at the pool table were most likely to a) lose to him and b) kick his ass when they did so. Dean no longer did this for money; the credit cards handled all that. His reasons were more perverse, darker.

It was the sort of place that had plastic beer pitchers, free peanuts in the shell, sawdust on the floor, and an honest-to-god jukebox that played Johnny Cash and Dwight Yoakum if you punched in the right numbers, and Keith Urban if you didn't. Dean thought he'd slash his own throat with a broken pool cue if those girls didn't move away from the fucking controls. They were hanging around for a reason, big blonde hair and tight jeans, and they were checking him out. Fresh meat. Took a pull of his beer, wished for a dartboard. Something he could throw sharp things at.

Sam wasn't looking at anything, dumb bunny. Was staring off into middle space as though he'd find the secret of life hanging mid-way between their table and the bar. It had been a shitty week all in all, and here they were, bottoming out in a country roadhouse where Dean was half expecting line dancing to commence at any moment. The beer was weak, and warm, and he wished Sam would just talk to him, which just went to show what a crappy week it was, what a fucking awful job this last one had been.

Usually he couldn't shut the fucker up. *Blah blah blah*, Dean, *blah blah*, what is the matter with you, *blah* fucking *blah*. Always judging him with those soft liquid eyes, the weeping gaze of a baby harp seal. Is it any wonder I have to look out for him? There he is, sitting as though the world is going to swallow him whole, open as a freaking daisy. It was like minding a half-wit some days.

And other times, it was not. This afternoon, for example.

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Sam possessed a certain grace that Dean would never have, and it involved the reach of his arms and how his body could twist away from danger even when running full tilt. Actually, it involved running, period. If they'd ever stayed in one place long enough, Sam would have made Varsity track, no problem. Dean had joked once, a glancing remark, that Sam ran like a giraffe. On Quaaludes. Sucking the compliment right out of it, as always. But Sam had known, and Dean had assumed, that a reading between the lines would occur. Their whole relationship depended upon it, the reading of that which could not be said.

Right then, Sam was demonstrating that grace, all of it, but it wasn't coming in remotely useful. He was running down the beach, their end of it empty, the bathers further to the east, near the concession stands. Dean had a good view of his sprint from car to surf, or would have, had he the time to watch. Instead, he was soaking wet, bent at the waist over the water, searching without finding, the waves crashing into him. Empty-armed.

The children were gone. It wouldn't matter how fast Sam ran now. Dean had not been able to hang on and he wondered when it would be that he'd forgive himself for that. The breath sang coming out of his lungs.

Still, Sam came, jumping over and into the waves, his eyes wild and searching, and Dean would have given a kidney to spare him the realization that those kids were lost.

Though it must have been obvious – how could it not be? – Sam dove under the waves, and Dean was struck, forcefully, by the feeling that maybe he would lose Sam too, though he knew the water demon only took children. He had that attitude towards Sam, that he was a child, and it sometimes came back to bite him.

Their little hands, slipping through his, thin as seaweed. It was cold, and he leaned his hand on his knees, allowing Sam to search, knowing how pointless it was, but not able to haul him out of the surf. Sam came back up, shedding water like a wet Labrador. Their eyes met.

What now?

And just then, a claw grabbed Dean's ankle, yanked hard, pulled like an old guy at a gas-flooded lawnmower. He was underwater and moving fast, going out, down. It was cold and he hadn't taken a breath before it happened. Fuck, he thought, surprised. Maybe I'm the kid. Maybe this bastard knows me better than I know myself.

This feels fair. Maybe a trade? Him for the little ones?

Not to be, because Sam was not only swift, but strong, and Dean felt a warm hand circle his wrist like a vise. Sam. Oh, Sam. Not here. Don't follow here.

He opened his eyes, not wanting to miss what were likely going to be his last minutes on earth, or under earth, or whatever half-place he'd entered. The water was red. The demon was red. Everything was red. A flash of silver and Dean understood: a silver blade, angled well, words said, even underwater would work.

It would save him, but it would not save *them*.

They stood on the beach for a long time afterwards, staring out at the line of surf. Seven children gone. Little kids, one still in diapers. A handful of families torn apart by this. Sundered. Dean tested the word in his mouth, if it doesn't taste good, spit it out. A howl was somewhere inside him, but he didn't know how to release it. He could not look at Sam. Could not feel anything.

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The road was so long, and it had been one of those drives where Dean had just decided, just decided out of the blue as though Sam's opinion mattered not in the slightest, that he'd drive all night. Rarely a good idea, because it frayed them both. And Sam was frayed enough already, felt his seams picked, threads loose, a nice handy one right here, ready to pull and lo, he'd fall apart. Not the best bloody timing, Dean.

The windows were down and the hot dry air swirled around them. A newspaper article had brought them here, one that had flashed briefly on a paranormal site that Sam liked and Dean disparaged, but real enough once Sam had dug around the local papers: Third child disappears in mystery ocean drowning. Bodies still missing, but seal skins wash up on beach.

They'd come from Virginia, this time, and it had been a long fucking drive. And it was June, and Sam had once liked June, had come to love June in fact. For two precious years, it had become a time of plotting and planning and laughter and romantic dinners and cake.

He drifted lower in the seat, caught the signpost announcing their arrival in Armpit, Texas. He didn't care. He didn't care, he realized suddenly. Fuck those kids and their stupid parents who let them play too close to the ocean when something needful was lurking. Life was a crapshoot. What about highway fatalities? Betcha vehicles killed more people than all the demons, ghosts, and other spookyshit they dealt with combined. The Winchesters didn't blow up Ford factories, did they? Why couldn't people just look after themselves?

He'd loved June, once. Taught himself how to make chocolate cake from scratch, as a surprise.

"Make yourself useful," Dean said, voice rough, the first words he'd probably said since crossing the state line, and that had been hours and hours ago. "See if you can figure out where that beach is."

Dean cared, Sam could tell, and it made him even more miserable than before, knowing that. Dean cared way too much when it involved kids. Though he pretended they were satanic spawn, Dean had an ease around kids that defied Sam's careful logic. Big brother, always a big brother, defined Dean in the same way the words 'handle with care' seemed to be taped to Sam's back like a bad joke.

Despite this, Sam could only imagine Dean as an uncle, not as a father. To imagine Dean as a father was to admit that there might one day be something that mattered more to Dean than family past: family future. Something that would make him grow up in a way that would force Sam to as well.

Looking for a blue line.

In the bathroom, not knowing if he wanted to grow up, bare feet cold against the tile, the smell of morning around them, his arms around Jess's waist, not able to see more than a blur of blonde and dark in the steamed mirror. Arms around her, chin resting on her wet shoulder as they waited to see if they would have to grow up today. Waiting for a blue line.

"Well?" Dean's voice was harsh this time, reminded Sam suddenly of their father, and the juxtaposition between two different memories was suddenly too much.

Clamping his jaw shut seemed the only way to deal with it, because it was too early in the morning to throw his body out a moving car. He crossed his arms, wished they hadn't driven all fucking night, that he'd stopped Dean from driving all fucking night, what would one fucking night have mattered, and he knew the answer that Dean would have given, which was: Tell it to the parents.

He rummaged in the glove compartment for the map, eventually finding calm in the ordered grids, the squares that defined the land, the built environment both acknowledging and defying the geography underneath.

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Why was it that cotton plus H₂O equaled lead?

Dean threw himself on the sand, just dropped, not wanting to think, to feel, to do anything but lie there. No seal skin this time. They didn't need to wait for that. But the parents. Oh, fuck, the parents, who were even now looking up from their picnic along the beach, coming to a stand, tiny hands shading tiny eyes, looking for two kids who were not coming back. Dean rolled over, the salt water stinging his ankle, knowing without looking that there would be a deep red acid burn around it where the demon had gripped

him. He heard Sam swearing, knew that they only had a few moments before the parents came down the beach and all hell broke loose and how the fuck were they going to explain this?

Listened, for the next couple of minutes as Sam – Sam, who seemed brittle and calm, both those weird things – explained in Spanish to the hyperventilating parents that they’d never seen the kids. Sam’s Spanish was good, slightly academic, as though learned from a travel guide. Dean’s Spanish was learned from comic books. A nice timid couple, maybe legally here, maybe on a vacation, who knew? They obviously hadn’t read any local papers. This beach was picked clean of kids, hadn’t you heard? Oh, fuck, Sammy, Dean thought, staring up at the sky, willing away the nausea and the deep shame. Nothing to be done. That thing won’t be grabbing any more kids, missus, but your ones? Kiss your babies goodbye.

He thought he might throw up, so he dragged himself to his knees and then to his bare feet and lurched towards the line of saw grass that marked where true land began. Far out to the ocean, he could see a faded grey derrick and he tasted oil in his mouth and thought again about throwing up.

He got in the car, sat there for half an hour, watching Sam watching the sea, wind picking up, blowing sand around him. The couple had gone back down the beach, towards the little conglomeration of concession stands, where they could find a phone, where they could seek help.

Seek help. Dean took a deep breath. Shook his head instead of crying, which was exactly what he felt like doing. He wasn’t alone anymore, and that kind of release was unacceptable.

And Sam turned as though summoned, walked slowly back up the beach, his long legs not graceful, not giraffe-like. Covered in sand, a piece of dulce dried to his t-shirt in the relentless Gulf wind. He stood by the car for a long moment, then yanked open the door, dropped in heavily, scattering sand.

“We going?” he demanded.

“You lied to them,” Dean coughed, wished he hadn’t said it as soon as it was out, because he was picking a scab.

Sam laughed, and it was hard and soft. Master of putting opposites together, was Sam. They were both looking at the water, though neither expected any miracle. “What was I supposed to do? You weren’t exactly helpful. Lying there like you were getting a tan.”

That made Dean turn. “Fuck you,” he said. Meant it more than anything.

Sam raised his eyebrows, laughed again, like their dad, but not, his own particular kind of asshole. “Is that how you normally say ‘thank you’?”

And Dean had no answer that wouldn’t result in something juvenile, no matter how badly it was needed, so he started the car and headed for a bar.

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Sam would admit it all right: Dean could hold his drink. But there was a magic number, usually somewhere between twelve and fifteen beers, when it showed and showed badly. He’d switch to bourbon. His pool game would go all to hell. He’d start saying things too loudly. And he would pay no attention whatsoever to the glowers of husbands and boyfriends.

Sam hated Dean when he got drunk.

It didn't happen often, and Sam could even predict when it would happen, what specially-formulated set of fucked-up things would have to occur before Dean would throw caution to the wind and just put down. Except, if Sam had been feeling generous, which he was not, it wasn't that Dean wanted to escape his feelings, he wanted to *hurt* himself, which was so much worse.

Tonight, Sam was going to let him. Because it had been that kind of week, and he was still furious with Dean for driving all night. And because it was the mid-point of the month of June, which had been a beloved date.

He watched Dean order another round: number nine, by his count. Not quite yet, but soon. It was that kind of night. Dean, not drunk, but not steady either, sat beside him, his pool cue resting between his fingers, passed him a new bottle by the neck.

"Don't like the one you're getting, Sammy," he said, gesturing with his cue to the two girls standing by the jukebox, Keith Urban blaring with all the charm of a car alarm.

Sam didn't answer. He tipped the beer into his mouth, wanting nothing more than to get absolutely legless, to feel nothing. Because feeling something, right now, was more than he could take.

No blue line.

Giddy relief, exams coming up. One less thing to worry about, one bullet dodged. They'd told themselves that. He'd kissed the back of her damp neck, and led her to the bedroom, and they'd missed the first class of the day and it was all okay. Nearly okay. Actually, no, not okay. Because he'd been expecting the blue line. Hoping for it, with her. That's what people did, people like him and her, together. They wanted something more, to launch an arrow to the future.

This whole thing is so fucked, Sam thought, draining the beer, looking to Dean, daring him to say anything. Not a good idea to get so bent in a rough bar when Dean is halfway there already. It was a coherent thought, one the last few he would remember in the morning.

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Inevitably, it came to blows. The two guys and the pool game and the blondes by the jukebox, and it was all so boring Dean could barely stay awake long enough to beat the guy senseless.

The big biker had thrown the first punch, and had thrown it at *Sam*, which was just plain stupid in so many ways: Sam had nothing to do with it, Sam was minding his own business (aside from the one smart-ass remark about the relative size of brains to body mass that had precipitated the first punch), and Dean had obviously been just looking for some excuse to take it outside.

Sam was okay; Dean had seen that immediately. A bloody nose, not too much to get excited about there. Enough blood, however, to make a credible excuse. Not to himself, the authorities, or the barman. A credible excuse for Sam, in the morning, when he was going to berate Dean for picking a bar fight. *But, Sammy, what was I supposed to do? Let him hit you?* Not a bad idea, on some level.

Biker boy had probably been wanting Dean to ask him outside. Okay by Dean, itching to hit something, anything. This biker would do nicely.

And he had. Poor biker boy hadn't stood a chance, was now spitting teeth onto the pavement while Dean rubbed his bruised knuckles and watched him, convinced that he wouldn't take it further.

"C'mon, Sam," he said, the walk to their motel across the street negotiable in a way few things between them were at the moment. Dean was thinking about the half-bottle of Jack he had in the trunk of the Impala. That would do.

Sam didn't follow at first. Dean walked more slowly, waiting to hear Sam's footsteps, wondering what was taking him so long. Finally, he heard the steps, coming at a run. He got out the key, the plastic chevron-shaped key fob such a throwback to their childhood he almost pointed it out as they approached the door. Thought better of it, handed the key off silently to Sam, stopped to get a scoopful of ice from the machine for Sam's nose.

He flexed his hand. Damn, that feels better already. The door was still open a crack, and so Dean walked in, a big grin pulling his face, forcing himself back to something better than the place they'd gone to. You can drag Sam to a bar, but you can't make him happy, he thought, seeing the expression on his brother's red face.

"You know," this over his shoulder as he packed the ice in a towel, giving it to Sam before making himself an ice pack for his right hand, "this could turn out okay."

"In what universe does this turn out okay?" Sam mumbled. He was standing by the window, parting the bent and much-abused mini-blinds to check the parking lot. Maybe to make sure the biker wasn't coming over. Maybe to make sure the biker wasn't still lying there. Dean didn't know and didn't care.

"Really, Sammy, don't you think you could loosen up a little? You know..."

Sam turned, and Dean missed the expression on his face, mostly because he was embarrassed by what he had been trying to say and was flipping through a TV guide three weeks out of date.

"I don't know, Dean. Tell me."

There was a sharp edge to his tone that Dean didn't like, so he glanced up, shrugged. "Fuck, man, but you are wound tight." Sam took a few steps, and Dean looked down at the guide again. *Is TV better in summer than fall?* "Maybe you should just get laid, you know, find someone handy and just let..."

He got no further than that because he trusted Sam, knew Sam, and had never been on the receiving end of an angry blow from him since they were kids and Sam was too small to actually hurt him.

The last coherent thought Dean had that night was, *You gotta be kidding me.*

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Sam crossed the street again, a man with a mission. He opened the heavy door with one hand, the one that hurt like a sonofabitch – don't think about why, Sam, don't think – and took a good look at the bar. The biker and his friends had left. So had the blondes. That's okay.

He ordered a beer, and a shot of whiskey, and finished both by the time he spotted a small group of girls near the taps, flirting with the bartender. He wasn't good at this, he reminded himself. But he'd seen Dean

do it so many times, it was like he'd taken a master class in the art of the pick-up. He'd only had to be good at it once before. It had only mattered once.

Tonight he seduced the girl effortlessly, like he'd done it a million times. Invited himself back to her apartment, let her drive, had another few drinks at her place.

Let it happen.

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He should have done it immediately, but he'd been drunk. He should have done it immediately because he'd been drunk. Jesus, those verb tenses are fucking me up. Had I not been drunk, having had too many drinks, my brother might not have hit me. Had I had the presence of mind to have had had a conversation with my brother... Wait. I might have not had blurted out whatever idiot thing sprung fully formed on my idiot tongue and then my brother might not have had to have...oh, fuck it. Stop putting it off.

Dean takes a length of surgical thread, puts it through the eye of the curved needle, disinfects it all as best he can, and sews up the cut on his eyebrow. The light is better now that it's morning, though he is worse. He is mildly hung over, and his hand hurts like a bitch, and there's the small matter of the cut above his eye and where the *fuck* is Sam?

He's good at this. Shoulda been a doctor, he thinks, but doesn't laugh. Finishes the four stitches it takes, happy enough to feel the pain. Swallows a Tylenol 3 he keeps in the bottom of his shaving kit for just this purpose. Not quite this purpose. For when a ghost kicks him in the shins, or a demon bites him. Not for this.

Sam still has the room key, and Dean now hears it in the lock and despite what's happened and what may still happen, he's relieved more than anything. He takes a deep breath as though that might help, and opens the bathroom door.

Sam is sitting in the chair by the window, and he couldn't look more like a train wreck if he'd covered himself in smeared makeup and called himself Courtney Love. He doesn't move as Dean comes into the shabby room, and Dean worries for a minute that maybe he'll never speak again. But he came back, and that's something. Dean notices that his hands are shaking, so he jams them into his jeans pockets, fingers some change he's got there, ignoring the throbbing of his right knuckles. He looks at Sam's hands, resting on his legs, and Sam catches him.

Suddenly Sam stands to his full height, quickly, and Dean makes a concerted effort not to flinch, not to react. Sam brushes by him into the bathroom, where Dean soon hears the sound of retching, followed by the steady pulse of a shower turned on full.

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The shower is the first thing that has felt good in a long time. It is the 15th today, he thinks. He thought he could blot that out, but he can't. He wets his hair, his body, lifts his hand to adjust the showerhead so the water slams into his face.

He wonders if Dean deliberately left the pillow out for him to see. There was a lot of blood on the pillow. Cut to the head, drunk. Always bled like a stuck pig. Stuck pig. Fitting. But it wasn't really in Dean's nature to twist a knife like that. Not Dean.

The soap is a hard scrap of cheap stuff that hardly lathers at all. There's no shampoo, not in this kind of motel. He tries not to think about where this soap has been, what it's washed up. Nothing worse than this, he reckons.

This day last year, he'd brought Jess a single gerber daisy to the bed, made love to her, gone to the stores while she slept away the morning, bought a card that played a tune when you opened it, returned to the apartment to tell Jess he'd booked her a massage at the spa down the street and, while she was gone, he'd cleaned the whole apartment top to bottom. Upon her return, she'd shrieked, and he could still remember her laughter, the way she'd kissed him, running her hand along the shining countertops. They'd ordered Chinese, eaten it in bed, making jokes about John and Yoko. They'd made love again and he'd remembered too late that the new lingerie was still in a bag in the closet, but he could give that to her later. After, he'd sung happy birthday to her as she'd read *The Courtship of Duddy Kravitz*, trying to ignore his tuneless vocal stylings without much success.

He scrubs hard. Happy birthday, sweetheart, he thinks, and wishes he could somehow just stop feeling anything.

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Sam says sorry as soon as he's out the bathroom and he looks so awful that it's all Dean can do to keep from screaming at him: *What the fuck is the matter with you?* Wrapping an ice-filled towel around his hand, he presses it to his forehead and sighs. What would be the thing to say here? Is there anything that won't come out wrong or condescending or hateful? Nope, he decides, turns, pulls the half-empty duffle bag from the floor onto the bed and tries not to look at Sam for fear that the kid will read what's on his face.

After the apology, which is contrite, which is so fucking *sincere*, Sam retreats to the far side of the room, checks the weapons. The useless weapons. Dean sneaks a glance at him, but isn't quick enough. Sam is staring. And now Dean is staring back.

"You get to do that once," Dean warns, holding up a finger.

Sam's lips press together and Dean knows he's thinking that although he's sorry he hit Dean, sorry he let things go that far, he'd do it again, given the same circumstances.

"What was it that I said?" Dean asks quietly, actually wanting to know, so he can avoid doing it again.

Only a shrug is given, not an answer. Finally, "Wasn't you."

Dean puts down the sopping terry cloth. On the bed. Fuck this place. "Hell it wasn't." But he lets it go, since Sam has retreated further. An arm's length. A thousand miles.

Stuffs crap into the bag, pulls the cord tight and slips the toggle up to the neck. Dean is tired and feels like shit and wants to get on the road so bad he could scream. With sudden, inexplicable clarity, he remembers what he said last night, just before Sam hit him.

And he wishes that he felt that strongly about a woman, just once.

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a/r: many thanks to  [lemmypie](#) and  [rebel_wynter](#) for providing feedback; if I haven't got this right, blame me, not them.