Brotherly Concern

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Brotherly Concern

by theotherwolfinsideyou

Summary

After being on the road with Dean for three months, Sam notices he hasn't been nesting. It worries him.

It took Sam three months to notice.

In his defense, he'd had a lot on his mind. Between Dad's disappearance and Jessica's death, Sam didn't have a whole lot of unoccupied mindspace. Not enough to notice what Dean *wasn't* doing.

He didn't know exactly why he realized either. He and Dean checked into their hundredth shitty motel, and somewhere in between Dean kicking off his shoes and settling into the hard bed with a bag of chips to watch reruns of a terrible sitcom, Sam realized he hadn't seen his older brother make a nest. Once. In months.

Sam instantly flashed back to the biology class he'd taken in first semester to fill a breadth requirement. That class had almost tanked his GPA, but he'd paid attention. There'd been a whole lecture on hormone regulation in omegas, and nesting had been a big component. Omegas needed them to feel safe and secure. In addition to emotional distress, a lack of nesting could throw off an omega's heat cycle, and then their whole body would be out of whack. Not all omegas needed to nest to the same degree, but the general takeaway had been that they all needed *something*.

Dean had, decidedly, nothing. He hadn't asked Sam to scent anything. He didn't have any of Dad's clothes. Sam couldn't remember Dean so much as sleeping with an extra pillow.

"Why are you staring at me?" Dean asked.

"Was I?" Sam startled. He hadn't realized how long he'd been looking at his brother.

"You're pretty much drilling a hole in my head," Dean scoffed. "Stop. It's weird."

"Sorry," Sam said as he looked away.

But once the gears were turning, they never stopped. Every time they settled into a motel for the night and Dean went right to bed, Sam felt a pang of concern in his gut. It's not like Dean's lifestyle could be described as *healthy,* but Sam had never known him to neglect his instincts.

The opposite, really; Sam had more memories of Dean nesting then he could count. Whenever they stayed at the same motel for more than a night, Dean would haul blankets from the trunk of their car into the room and make a nest on whichever bed they were sharing. Sam would bet he'd spent more of his puphood cuddled up with Dean in a nest, surrounded by their combined scents and Dad's, then asleep in a bed by himself. Dean had stopped making nest as frequently as they'd gotten older, but Sam remembered him making them consistently right up until he went to Stanford. Him going cold turkey didn't make any sense.

His worry must have shown, because it only took a week for Dean to bring it up.

"Why have you been acting weird lately?" Dean asked, keeping his eyes trained on the road. They were driving to another hunt, what sounded like a vengeful spirit in Minnesota.

Sam figured he might as well rip the bandaid off. “Why haven’t you been nesting?”

“Why haven’t I been what-now?” Dean said, glancing at him in the rearview mirror.

“I haven’t seen you nest once since you got me at Stanford,” Sam continued. “It’s not like you.”

“Do you need me to?” Dean asked. “Do you miss it or something? I figured you were a little old to need me to nest for you now.”

“No!” Sam said. “I’m just worried for you. It’s unhealthy. Not nesting will throw off your hormones, and that can impact your heat cycle.”

“Yeah right, like not throwing some blankets in a pile is going to kill me,” Dean rolled his eyes. “I think I’d know if something was up with my heats.”

“Just because nothing’s wrong right now doesn’t mean—”

“Don’t see why you’re thinking about my heats anyways,” Dean said. “I’m your brother, man. That’s weird.”

“Dean—” Sam groaned. “Nevermind.” He should’ve known bringing it up would lead them nowhere.

“Don’t know what you’d know about nesting and heats anyways,” Dean said. “They teach you all that at one of your classes?”

“Yes,” Sam replied. “Because it’s all true.”

“Leave it to higher education to make alphas think they’re omega experts,” Dean mocked. “Next you’ll be telling me exactly how to—”

Sam turned the music up before Dean could finish his sentence.

Unsurprisingly, that wholly unsatisfying conversation did absolutely nothing to assuage his worries. He thought for a day that maybe Dean was right, that he was an alpha sticking his nose where it didn’t belong. What did he really know about nesting anyways? Jessica had been a beta; Dean was his only model.

But then he’d done a deep dive on a computer in the next library they visited while Dean poured over demonic marks, which, yes, wasn’t the best use of his time, but it did affirm everything he’d learned in class; nesting wasn’t just important, it was *crucial* for omegan health. And Dean was fully neglecting it. One article even suggested that a lack of nesting was tied to higher cancer rates, which made Sam so anxious he almost felt nauseous.

It was his umpteenth night losing sleep over it when he thought about Dean’s wording again. *I figured you were a little old to need me to nest for you now.* For *you.*

“Dean?” He asked.

“What?” Came Dean’s groggy reply.

“When you were nesting for us as kids—”

“Not *this* again,” Dean complained. “Do you really have to go all ‘alpha brother’ mode on me this late at night?”

“Bear with me,” Sam said. “When you were nesting for us as kids, was that— did you do that just for me?”

“Yeah,” Dean replied almost instantly, as if the answer was obvious.

“*Just* for me?”

“Well, you needed one. All pups with an omega parent do, you know that, and mom was… you know, not exactly *around*. Who else was going to do it? Dad?” Dean snorted. “Can you imagine? He wouldn’t even touch those blankets unless I shoved them in his arms for scenting.”

“So you never felt like making one for yourself?” Sam asked. “Not once?”

“I felt like making them for you,” Dean sighed. “You were the most annoying toddler ever, you know that? You’d cry for hours at night until I made one for you until you were like, four.”

“You’ve told me, trust me,” Sam said. “Have you made one at all since I left for Stanford?”

“No,” Dean said. “Why would I?”

There was a long pause. *Four years?* Sam’s stomach dropped. “Oh.”

“Yeah,” Dean said. “And my heats are still as regular as ever, thank you very much. I’d think I’d know if something was off after four years. Got any more dumb questions, or are you going to let me sleep now?”

“Sorry,” Sam said, even as his concern worsened. *Four years?* He was instantly hit with worst-case scenarios; Dean wanting a pup but having too fucked up a cycle to have one, Dean dying of cancer at the age of thirty, Dean cursing him for not doing his job as an alpha brother and protecting him. The last one was nonsensical; Dean got pissed at him for being *too* protective over him for a younger brother, not the other way around, but the vision came to Sam’s mind all the same. “Goodnight.”

That conversation made the whole situation worse. Sam couldn’t help but feel like he was failing his brother. If Dean got sick because he’d never learned to nest for himself, just for Sam… Fuck. Maybe Dad *should* have built him nests growing up. Now that he thought about it, Dean had started way too young; all the studies he’d read said the average age to leave your omega parent’s nest and start one of your own was twelve. Dean couldn’t have been older than six. No wonder he’d never had a chance to develop the instinct for himself.

“I’ll make you one, if you’re so concerned about it,” Dean said one day, when Sam’s worry must have bled into his scent. “We can get some blankets at Goodwill or something.”

“No, that’s not going to change anything,” Sam wasn’t even sure the nests of their youth had been good for Dean, not if he’d never made them for himself. Just making another one for *Sam* was going to do nothing for him.

Sam stewed in his anxiety for another week, only given relief by the case they’d worked. It’d been a shapeshifter down in Texas, and killing it had required them to wade through the sewers. They’d both showered three times, but the smell still stuck to them. Dean had put two tree-shaped air fresheners on the rearview mirror, and Sam was fiddling them, trying to get them to be more effective, when—

“Sam, if you touch my air fresheners again I’m going to kill you,” Dean almost *growled*, and something clicked.

He looked around the Impala’s perfectly-maintained leather seats, the few trinkets Dean had placed around, the blanket he had thrown over the back seat that always smelt slightly like Sam because he’d drape it over himself when he got cold. He looked at the pocket in the side door, the only place he could place trash without getting his head chewed off. Even the exterior of the car shined. Everywhere he looked, he saw evidence of careful concern. Memories rushed into his head as well; Dean sleeping in the car instead of the motel room during a particularly hard case, him never letting Sam drive, never offering to give a ride to people he said “smelled wrong.”

“Oh,” Sam said. “Oh. Oh!”

“What?” Dean asked. “You come to some kind of revelation, Einstein?”

“You *have* been nesting!” Sam exclaimed. “You’ve been nesting the whole time!”

“I can *not* believe you’re bringing this up again,” Dean groaned. But that wasn’t enough to bring Sam’s mood down.

“The car!” Sam would’ve jumped up and down if he wasn’t seat-belted in. “Your nest is the Impala!”

“Are you crazy?” Dean scrunched his eyebrows. “You think I’ve got a hidden blanket pile in the trunk or something?”

“What is a nest?” Sam asked. “A personal place where you feel comfortable and safe, right? A place you keep scented and well-kept?”

“Huh,” Dean looked around. “Yeah, I guess.”

“Oh thank God,” Sam sighed in relief. His brother was fine. Cancer and infertility were off the table.

He should have guessed it earlier, with the borderline-obsessive care Dean gave to this car. It’s not like his brother had ever been a “typical” omega. He should’ve figured he wouldn’t

have a “typical” nest.

“You going to finally stop riding my ass about this now?” Dean asked.

“Completely,” Sam smiled. “I could hug you, man.”

“I’ll settle for you never bringing this up again.”

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