The Scent of the Past

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The Scent of the Past

by theotherwolfinsideyou

Summary

Scent is a familial trait, usually passed down by the parent of the same dynamic. At the age of fourteen, Dean starts to smell exactly like Mary.

Dean woke up to incessant little hands pushing at his shoulders. Sammy was kneeling over him, grinning from ear to ear. He groaned; it couldn't be earlier than 6 AM. Sammy hadn't woken up this early since he was eight. Dean had thought that he was out of the danger zone, now that Sammy was ten.

"What?" Dean asked groggily.

"Dean!" Sammy said excitedly. "Your scent came in!"

Dean bolted upright, so fast Sammy nearly fell off him. He tried to scent the air over the overwhelming smell of mildew that dominated the shitty motel room Dad had left them in. He caught Sammy's scent, still full of the milk and honey that characterizes a pup scent, mixed with the harsh note of an alpha. But under that was a sweeter scent. The scent of an omega, still young but no longer marked as that of a pup.

He'd be lying if he said he wasn't excited for this. Plenty of kids in his grade in the last school they'd gone to had already started stinking up the place with their own scents, so clear against the monotony of pup scents. He was fourteen, the usual age of developing a scent, but he felt so much *older* than the other kids; he'd hated not smelling like it. Above all, he was sick of Dad still treating him like a kid, and he knew that stinking of puphood was not helping his case. Pup scents marked you as someone who needed to be protected. Adult scents marked you as an individual, someone to be respected.

It was too hard to focus on it in the bedroom, not with Sammy stinking up the place. He pushed Sammy off of him and beelined to the bathroom. He looked at himself in the mirror, ignoring the large bags under his eyes. His scent gland was more tender than usual; was that part of being an adult? He didn't know. Only one school had taught sex ed while he was there, and it's been in Alabama. "Taught" was a strong word. All they'd told him was that he needed to avoid sex and heat/rut sharing until he was mated, or God would smite him or doom his immortal soul or something along those lines. Puberty had not been a topic of discussion.

He closed his eyes as he massaged his scent gland, coaxing his scent to develop. Little by little, his scent came to dominate the bathroom. It was omega-sweet, much sweeter than his pup scent. All signs of milk and honey were gone. It still carried notes of smoke and oil, the same ones Dad and Sammy had, the ones that made up their familial scent and marked them as related. Much stronger was the scent of forest, maybe pine trees, and above that a scent that strongly resembled apple pie. It felt new and exciting but also familiar, far too familiar for a new scent. Did your own scent always smell familiar? It was a likely explanation.

Then he took another breath, and memories returned to him. Hair that fell in golden waves. A smile that lit up the room. Soft kisses on his forehead. Warms hands that tucked him in at night as he was told he was being protected by angels, that made him feel safer than anything else possibly could.

Mom. He smelled just like his mother.

The realization made his eyes fly open, and he stared at himself in the mirror. He'd thought about it often, that he might grow to resemble his mother. She had been an omega too. But this resemblance was uncanny. He could almost *feel* her in the room, enveloping him with *her* scent. Except she wasn't. It was just him.

Suddenly, he felt very alone. His new scent soured for the first time, burning wood and rotted apples. He couldn't get out of the bathroom fast enough.

Sammy was waiting for him, standing with the pile of blankets they kept in the car in his arms. "You should make a nest."

"I thought you didn't need me to nest for you anymore," Dean said. That'd been a new declaration a few months ago, that nests were for omegas and babies and that Sammy didn't need one anymore. Dean had been a little heartbroken, as he secretly was every time Sammy got older and didn't need him as much, but he didn't really miss the act of nest building. It'd never suited him much. Nowadays he only did it if they'd had a particularly bad hunt, and even then all he'd do was throw a few blankets in the back seat of the Impala and sleep there. Tossing a bunch of blankets together on a crummy motel bed had never held a lot of appeal for him.

Sammy fidgeted. "I don't. But you smell better now. You'll be better at it."

"So which are you then?" Dean teased. "A baby or an omega?"

"Shut up!" Sammy said with red cheeks, before thrusting a blanket at Dean.

Dean stared at it. He still felt the overwhelming urge to run outside, to let the gas of the highway and the rolling wheatfields of Missouri mask his scent. But Sammy was staring at him with hopeful eyes, and it clicked. If Dean was reminding himself of Mom, then he was definitely reminding Sammy of her. Sammy had been six months old the last time he'd been in a nest built by Mom, and Dean had spent large parts of his childhood trying to recreate hers for the both of them. Now he could finally do it properly.

Dean took the blanket.

The next few days were an adjustment. It felt like the world had been treating him with kiddy gloves, and now they were taken off. When he went out for food, adults looked him in the eye and took him seriously. When he strolled into a bar to try and win some money playing pool, no one forced him out or asked him where his parents were, not until he tried to order a beer. He'd entered another world. Alphas *looked* at him now, something that made Dean feel both exhilarated and deeply uncomfortable. He wasn't being treated as a pup anymore. He was treated as an omega.

He kept the nest he'd built in the motel well-maintained. He liked it better than any of the nests he'd built growing up; it felt more personal, safer. When he closed his eyes, he felt like he was back in Lawrence, the closest thing to a home he'd ever had. Sammy slept cuddled up next to him, something he hadn't done in years. Sometimes, he felt like he'd never left his mom's nest.

It was three days later when Dad returned. Dean had been brushing his teeth when he heard the lock click, and by the time he'd emerged from the bathroom Sammy had already greeted him.

"Dad!" Sammy said. "Dean's scent came in!"

Dad looked like he'd seen a ghost.

No. Scratch that. Dad barely reacted when he saw a ghost. He looked more shocked now than he ever had on a hunt. And his eyes; there was a sadness there, deeper than Dean had seen in years.

Dean hadn't known what to expect from Dad. He knew that keeping his hopes up would only leave him disappointed, but a large part of him had wished that Dad would look excited. Aging was the one thing Dean could count on Dad approving. There were always encouraging words when he grew another inch or filled out more. Every step away from being a liability on hunts was a step towards Dad's approval.

"Yes. I can tell," Dad said. His voice was flat. "Congratulations, Dean. You're almost a man now." He didn't sound very congratulatory. He sounded like he wanted to get out of the room as fast as possible. "Anything happen while I was gone?"

"No," Dean replied, still holding his breath.

"Good," Dad said, before turning on his heels. "Pack up. We leave in ten minutes."

He waited in the car while Sammy and Dean packed up their few belongings. It pained Dean more than he expected to dismantle the nest and shove the blankets back into their bag. Once everything was packed up, Sammy grabbed Dean's wrist and dug his cheek into it. Dean's heart clenched; Sammy hadn't liked being scented since he was six.

As Dean slid into the Impala's passenger seat, a part of him still hoped that Dad would do *something* . That he'd say a real congratulations, perhaps, or at least clap him on the back.

"Sammy's going to sit in the front for now," Dad said instead, in the hard voice that he used to make orders.

Sammy never sat in the front. It took all of Dean's concentration not to let his scent sour. He wiped his eyes as he and Sammy traded seats, hoping that Dad didn't see through the side mirror.

As they drove, Dad kept the windows rolled all the way down.

* * *

While the world treated Dean more maturely, Dad most certainly did not.

He took him on less hunts, and stayed away longer than he usually did. When he did take him on hunts, he made Dean stand back farther than usual. You'd think he and Sammy were the same age with the way Dad treated them. The more Sammy liked to spend time with him, the

more Dad pulled away. Some days he hardly looked at him. It was like being around Dean pained him.

In the schools they were enrolled in, however, Dean had never been more popular. Alphas loved him. He found himself in more broom closets and cars and alleyways than ever, until he eventually lost his virginity in the back of Carmen Thompson's pickup truck in rural Montana. After that he had a long string of alphas. It was never very hard to find one.

He'd never felt more alone.

Months went by, and eventually he couldn't bear it anymore. He scrounged up some cash from a pool game, went to the closest corner store, and bought himself a bottle of scent blockers.

He took his first pill on the store's threshold. By the time he got back to the motel, it'd kicked in. Sammy looked at him uneasily, but Dad looked at him, *really* looked at him, for the first time in almost a year. Dean grinned. After that, he rarely went a day without taking blockers in the morning.

Alphas didn't like him much anymore. Sammy grew distant; Dean knew his lack of scent disturbed him. It disturbed himself, sometimes. He left no trace of himself anywhere he went, made no impact on anyone he met. Scent blockers were usually used solely for professional reasons, but he never stopped taking them. He couldn't nest. He felt like a ghost.

But Dad was finally treating him like an adult. He was taking Dean on hunts again and trusting him to have his back. He didn't look like he wanted to bolt whenever Dean entered a room, or start stinking up the place with the scent of grief and sadness. Dean kept taking the pills.

The only time he didn't was when they were staying at Bobby's. Bobby hated them. He thought they were unnatural, that they took away part of the human experience. More than once, Dean heard him saying choice words to Dad about it, about how Dean "shouldn't be pressured" and "it ain't his fault who he does and doesn't smell like." He never stuck aorund long enough to hear his Dad argue back about how painful being near Mom's scent was for him.

It'd be a lie to say that he didn't look forward to going to Bobby's. Bobby's attention was almost enough to make up for Dad's withdrawal. Sometimes they went so long between visits to Bobby's that Dean almost forgot what he smelled like, and was hit with memories of his Mom so vivid he almost started crying.

He convinced himself it was fine. He and Dad had never been closer. The three of them were a well-oiled machine now. Even when Sammy's scent came in, almost identical to Dad's, and Dad took them out to ice cream to celebrate, he convinced himself it was fine. When he had his first heat, curled up in Bobby's attic, and he was in so much pain and his scent grew so strong he sobbed for his mother, he convinced himself it was fine. The family was together. Everyone had to make sacrifices to make that happen. He convinced himself that he was happy.

Then Sammy got accepted to Stanford. And nothing, *nothing* Dean tried was enough to convince him not to break up the family. Even when he went off the blockers and promised Sammy he'd stay off them if Sammy would just *stay,* Sammy got on that plane and left him and Dad behind.

He left an absence greater than Mom's. Dean stayed on the blockers for awhile, but Dad's attention wasn't enough, not anymore. He started only taking them before hunts. Sam's absence was easier when the world started paying attention to him again, when he could fill his time and bed with a slew of alphas. The more Dad withdrew, the more Dean retreated into the sex and alcohol and gambling and the comfort of his mother's scent. They were like two planets trying to find an orbit in a sunless galaxy. Dad bought his own car. Dean started going on more solo hunts. More often than not they paid for separate motel rooms.

Then Dad disappeared. Gone without a word. Dean searched for a week with no results, and then he drove to California.

Sammy was shocked to see him, but when he scented the air and found Dean's scent, a smile still appeared on his face. When Jessica said they smelled like each other, they both grinned. Dean had been on blockers ever since Sammy's scent came in. They'd never heard the comparison be made before.

Sammy was the opposite of Dad. The more Dean smelled like himself, the more comfortable Sammy was around him. And it was liberating, to hunt and be able to use his scent to communicate with his partner, to not have to hide himself. Hunting with Sammy was the most fun Dean had had since his scent came in.

A few months after picking Sammy up from California and three hours into a drive from Idaho to Wyoming, Dean made an offhand comment. It was one he'd made a thousand times before, about having Mom's scent. What wasn't normal was the way Sammy's scent turned bitter with anger.

"Stop *saying* that!" Sammy's voice had a hard edge to it.

Dean looked at him. "Stop saying what?"

"Stop saying it's Mom's scent," Sammy said. "You and Dad always call your scent that. It drives me crazy."

"It is Mom's scent, Sammy," Dean blinked. "I smell just like her."

"So what?" Sammy groaned. "It's *your* scent. Start acting like it. We've never made a big deal about my scent being so similar to Dad's. "

"It's not the same," Dean said. "If it wasn't for our familial scent I'd smell identical to her. It's Mom's scent. Don't act like we don't all know it."

"It's never been Mom's scent to me, Dean," Sammy said. "How could it be? I was a baby when she died. I don't remember what she smelled like."

“Bull. You liked my scent way more after it came in,” Dean shook his head. “You remembered her scent. Maybe just instinctually, not consciously, but you remembered. You couldn’t get enough of it until I started taking the blockers.”

“I liked your scent more because it smells like you!” Sammy exclaimed. “You just smell like *you,* Dean. You always have to me.”

Dean was quiet for a long moment. “Really? You’ve never thought of Mom when you catch my scent?”

“Not once,” Sammy replied instantly. “Why would I? I just think of you.”

And *oh,* wasn’t that a concept. It had always been *her* scent. *Her* scent that made Dad depressed. *Her* scent that comforted Sammy in Dean’s nests. *Her* scent that made Sammy want to be around him more. *Her* scent that alphas liked. *Her* scent that made Dean feel like a whole person. He’d never stopped to consider that he should be calling it *his,* too.

“Because, y’know, it’s *your* scent,” Sammy added.

“Yeah, I got it Sammy,” Dean rolled his eyes. “You don’t have to draw a picture.”

But Dean didn’t call his scent that again, and even after they found Dad, he didn’t ever start taking the blockers.

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