

**Title:** Cut and Run

**Fandom:** Supernatural

**Rating:** Gen, all audiences

**Spoilers:** Nightmares, Shadow

**Summary:** Dean isn't sure what winning looks like any longer. Originally posted as a drabble in Scribblin Lenore's LJ, but it kept bugging me. (1,680 words)

Thanks to Meg and La Folle Allure for the quick beta.

## **Cut and Run** by Maygra

Dean doesn't ease off the gas pedal until they hit the state line and only then because they need to stop for fuel. But before they can get that they need to get the blood off their faces.

He turns to say something to Sam and the lights of an oncoming car hit his brother's face just so.

The gouges are deep and still wet but much of the blood has been washed away, streaking down Sam's face, along his neck, staining his shirt. Sam's hasn't said a word or asked any questions and his breathing isn't breaking even now; it's low and slow and steady, the kind of crying Sam used to do when they were with their father and he'd told them not to make a sound.

He's made no sound since they cut and run in Chicago.

*Cut and run.*

Dean knows that's not what they actually did but it's what it feels like and it's as hard for him as it is for Sam to let go. Let go, not just of their father but the end of this. Because that's what Sam's done.

Sam saw the end of this in their father's face and now it's gone again and Dean feels like the worst brother ever because some small part of him is glad it's not *yet, it's not now, it's not over* and he's less close to having to let go of Sam than he was a few hours ago.

They're in Indiana when Dean finds a gas station that closed sometime before they got here and he busts the lock on the outside bathroom door. It stinks of bleach and stale urine but there's hot water and the toilet flushes and they manage to clean up enough to drive another few miles and find a motel where the night clerk stares at Dean's bandaged face but asks no questions.

The first aid kit is the first thing unpacked and Dean looks at Sam's face and isn't sure they've got enough of what they need. His side's still bleeding and there's blood on the back of Sam's jacket and his jeans that Dean hadn't really noticed before.

Sam smells of magnesium and cordite and sweat and the chalky undertones of fear and desperation, adrenaline and exhaustion.

"Tell me we did the right thing."

It's the first thing Sam's said and it startles Dean -- Sam's voice as much as his question -- because his tone of voice speaks of anger and his question reveals something more broken than the skin on his face.

Sam's a hulking bundle of tension and holding tight to something between panic and rage.

"We did the right thing. We had to, Sam. You want this done...you're going to have to let Dad do what he needs to."

Dean realizes suddenly he's angry too. Angry they'd been caught so easily, angry that they had to run. Angry at their father for falling for it when he'd ignored their calls before.

Pulling off his outer shirt also includes pulling half-formed scabs free and he can feel blood trickling warmly down his side.

Then Sam's hands are there, lifting his t-shirt, pressing against the wound with a cloth and peroxide and the sting and burn makes Dean hiss and clench his fists and jerk away. "Let me shower first."

Sam pulls the cloth away and turns his back, and Dean does the same, grabbing up clean clothes and towels and heads to the bathroom. They can't look at each other because there's no reassurance they can give, no reasoning with one another just now, just *yet*.

Inside the bathroom Dean runs the water as hot as he can stand, tugs his clothes off with a ferocity that makes everything hurt again and stands at the door until the room is filled with steam, half afraid he's going to hear the door to the room open and close.

When he finally makes it under the water he tries to hurry even though he wants to linger and the water is still draining pink when he steps out.

Sam's gotten his coat and his shoes off but he's only sitting on the end of the bed, head down and one hand clutched in his hair. There's blood on the floor -- not a lot, but enough to stain the carpet and Dean realizes he's leaving a trail of tiny spots as well. This place will look like a slaughterhouse before they check out if they don't handle this.

"I left the water running," he says and Sam nods, gets up, and heads into the bathroom all without looking at Dean.

Dean manages to get the claw marks on his forehead bandaged but his side needs another set of hands. He pulls on sweats pants and folds the bloody towel up and holds it in place with his elbow.

Sam takes longer in the shower, comes out with a towel around his waist and another pressed to his face.

"Turn around," Dean says and he's too tired to make it sound like anything but an order but Sam seems to understand the need for as few words as possible.

The claw marks on Sam's lower back aren't deep and neither are the ones still dripping blood down along his thigh and the back of his calf. Swab and gauze, swab and gauze, and Dean has a dizzying moment of dislocation, seeing them patching each other up like an assembly line and doesn't even realize he's resting his forehead against Sam's hip until he feels Sam's fingers on his head, a gentle stroke and rub.

This is shock, Dean knows and usually he doesn't have time for this and slides right past it between the adrenaline rush and the inevitable crash. Sam half twists and sits and nudges his arm up, reaching across for the kit, and doing his own variation on the swab and gauze dance on Dean's side, but he's more careful, not as heavy fingered. He cleans Dean's forehead again and

uses butterfly bandages instead of just a pad and the renewed pain snaps Dean back into the present.

Sam's going to need stitches on his face and Dean needs to be awake and alert for that. He waits for Sam to finish before cracking a ColdPak, and wrapping it in a towel before pressing it to Sam's face. "Need to get the swelling down," he says and pushes Sam back until he lies down.

There's still blood welling into the wounds on Sam's face and it drips and streaks down his cheek, but it's thinned out again by the moisture Dean tries to pretend is from Sam's wet hair even though he knows it isn't.

The swelling goes down slowly, but it's enough and Sam's face is numb for Dean to start. Sam's all but tearing holes in the bedspread when he finishes, but he only flinches and doesn't pull away. Dean cleans Sam's face again when he's done then manages to clean up after them. He worries about the blood on the carpet, about the blood they've missed, the blood they might miss when they leave.

He scrubs his hands again in the sink because he's got Sam's blood under his nails and probably some bits of flesh too and it's the thought of any part of Sam being washed down the drain and into the sewer or the septic tank or whatever that breaks him. Unlike Sam he isn't willing to let his brother see him break. It was the only choice, the only option, and it still doesn't make him feel better because he promised. He promised Sam that they'd find Dad and end this, that nothing bad would happen to him while Dean was around, and there's nothing more lame than keeping half a promise.

He presses his fingers to the bridge of his nose and it hurts no less or more than the throbbing pain in his temples. His body is telling him *enough* and there's no immediate threat, nothing to run from here. He can't run from himself, and he won't run from Sam and Jesus...

Cut and run.

There's no acceptable losses here: not his father, not Sam, not even himself.

The face that looks back at him from the mirror is both familiar and a complete stranger. He wants to punch out both versions of that face.

Sam has dragged on sweats and a t-shirt, stripped off the bloody bedspread and tossed it onto the second bed, along with all their gear and he won't ask. He doesn't need to. He only rolls over to his side to make it easier for Dean to crawl in beside him.

It's not an invitation of any kind; not for comfort or connection and for once Sam sleeps (or pretends to) with his hands curved around the hilt of a knife, a gun within reach, and a scattering of more of the flares within easy reach. They leave the lights on, like it will make a difference.

Dean shifts only slightly, close enough to press his upper arm lightly into the hollow between Sam's shoulders. When Sam leans into that touch that isn't one, Dean closes his eyes.

"It was the right thing to do. The only thing," Sam whispers, convincing himself again or to reassure Dean. Dean doesn't know which it is, and ultimately it doesn't matter. It's done. They lost but came out of it alive.

He'd like to call it a strategic retreat but it wasn't. It was a desperate division of forces.

Dean realizes they might not win this. That he could lose everything that's important to him.

He gathers the loose fabric of Sam's sweatpants between his fingertips and feels Sam press more heavily against his arm.

For the first time, Dean realizes he may not be willing to pay that price. He'll never call Sam selfish again, because if it comes to a choice of stopping this thing, of saving other people or themselves...

He might just cut and run again.

~end~

3/02/2006