



Restraint (The Monster Beneath #3)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Jamie thinks he might be going crazy. His strange, sexual dreams seem to have taken a mind of their own and Jamie cant decide if he loves them or hates them. The dark being in his dreams have Jamie jumping at shadows in reality, and driving him to distraction with arousal he cant seem to help.

He knows his dreams cant be real. They cant be.

Monsters dont exist

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A sharp crack of thunder roused Jamie from sleep, the filaments of his dream falling away as he sat up in bed. Grogginess meant that it took him a moment of scanning the room to remember that he wasn't in his old bedroom in his mother's house. No one was crashing into his bedroom to drag him out of bed by his hair, no one was screaming or throwing things. The sound that had woken him was just the storm.

As his heart settled, Jamie remembered a more vivid dream, the one he'd had before the one about his mother.

The one with the... tentacles.

Heat rose to his cheeks. He'd tried to fight them off and lost so quickly. They'd held him helpless, slithering all over his body and inside him, stuffing him full even as they milked his cock.

He groaned and scrubbed his hands over his face. That was what he got for looking up all that stuff before he went to bed. It had put all those thoughts in his head, and his subconscious had gone wild with it.

Even though he knew it was a dream, Jamie couldn't help glancing again at the darkest shadows in the room. He knew it was crazy, but it had felt so real. Like it had really happened. Like he'd really been held down and fucked, invaded by slithering, twisting—

"It wasn't real," he muttered to himself, pressing his face into his hands as he tried to chase away the arousal that spiked through him at the memory. "It wasn't real, and you didn't—you didn't like it."

He stared at the room. His apartment was still and quiet. It was the same old apartment. There was no monster lurking in the shadows.

"You didn't like it," Jamie told himself again. But there was a current of uncertainty there, instead of conviction. It had been terrifying, overwhelming, but part of him had... had almost...

"No," he growled to himself, throwing the covers back. "Stop thinking about it."

A shock of pain lanced up through his core as he moved to stand, and it made him realize how much his arms and legs also ached. Like he'd been tensing his whole body for a long time. Because of the dream...?

There was another rumble of thunder, the beginning patter of rain against the glass. It was shaping up to be a gloomy, rainy day.

On the bright side, it was also his day off. He wouldn't have to go out and try to move stuff with the rain. Kind of lucky that he was off today, for how his body felt.

He needed to run a few errands and to get groceries today, but maybe he would put that off until the afternoon. See if the rain let up before venturing out.

A cozy morning in sounded like exactly what he needed.

Gingerly, Jamie got himself to his feet. He was sore all over, and as he climbed out of the messy pile of sheets he realized he was naked. Again. Hadn't he gone to bed with underwear on?

Some quick searching found them on the floor, almost under the bed. Jamie had to bend slowly down to get them, body protesting. He hadn't planned on showering this morning, but some hot water would do him good.

Standing again, he took stock of himself. His body ached, and his nipples and cock felt overly sensitive again, like they had after his previous dream.

Like maybe that tentacle arm had been milking him over and over again.

Jamie scowled. He was being ridiculous. He'd lost his boxers in the night, so probably he'd just rutted against the sheets in his sleep while he was bare, and that's why he felt over-sensitive.

It... it didn't explain why certain other parts of him also felt sore. Felt well-used.

With no small amount of trepidation, Jamie gingerly reached down between his legs. His fingers touched at his hole, but there was no wetness there.

He felt stupid for being relieved. But if the dream had been real somehow—which was crazy, it was still crazy—there would be some evidence, right? He remembered that part of the dream vividly. Being pumped full of come. Even as he looked down his body, his arms and legs, there were no marks from the struggling he'd done. There was nothing to indicate anything had actually happened.

He walked to the bathroom and flipped on the light. In the mirror he didn't even look tired. If anything, there was a brightness to his face, like he'd finally gotten some rest.

"You're being ridiculous," he told his reflection. "Nothing happened. It was just a dream."

He took a brief, hot shower, mostly just standing under the spray and letting it beat down on his sore muscles. He felt the tension ease, and sighed.

Washed and dressed down in comfy clothes for the day, Jamie padded to the kitchen. The storm outside was in full swing now, and his apartment had grown even darker.

He went about starting a cup of tea for himself and grabbing one of the bananas off the counter. He leaned against the kitchen counter as he ate it, scowling at the room at large.

The back of his neck prickled like someone was watching, but he refused to look. He knew no one was there.

Jamie tossed the banana peel and started on making a bowl of oatmeal on the stove. The prickling on the back of his neck intensified, and he gave in to looking over his shoulder more times than he'd care to admit. Every time, the apartment was empty. Of course it was.

"You're being stupid," he muttered as he started to stir the oats in. The kettle was ready so he poured the hot water into his mug to steep.

When the oatmeal and tea were done, he took both to the small kitchen table to eat. He sat, still feeling those invisible eyes on him. The shadows of the apartment were thick, and Jamie should probably turn the light on but he didn't want to get up again. Didn't want to give into the illogical fear.

As he sipped his tea, he felt something touch the back of his neck. It was a barely-there sensation, like a breeze across his skin. Jamie sucked in a breath and twisted around in his seat.

Nothing was there.

He grit his teeth and reached for the spoon in his bowl. He made himself take a scoop of oatmeal and eat it, ignoring the next phantom touch across his ankles and then up his leg. The table was obscuring a direct line of sight, but he was certain nothing was there. It was in his head. It was all in his head.

“Nothing’s there,” he said. It felt better to say it out loud. Reassuring. “You’re by yourself.”

He tried to focus on eating, pulling out his phone to scroll for added distraction. He was supposed to be having a nice, cozy morning in, not spiraling himself into a crisis.

The food and the warm cup of tea helped, but he still found himself looking over his shoulder as he took his mug and bowl to the sink when he was finished. He rinsed and put them in the dishwasher and not for a single moment did he feel like there weren’t eyes on him.

Maybe another cup of tea would help. Maybe a cup of tea and some reading. Something to get his mind off of this stupid dream.

Jamie poured another cup to start steeping and then walked to the living room to turn on one of the lamps.

The light helped. Almost immediately the strange presence at his back receded. See? He thought to himself, it’s all in your head. It’s just the dark playing tricks on you.

Ten minutes later Jamie had a new cup of tea and a good blanket and had curled himself up on the couch with his phone. He’d only turned on the one lamp, but it cast a warm glow to the room that was perfect with the rain pattering against his windows.

He unlocked his phone, intending to go to his library app to pick a book, but his thumb missed it and tapped the browser. It opened to the last tab he’d left open.

The tentacle porn.

He should close the tab. All the tabs still open. Should close them to prevent himself from falling back down that rabbit hole ever again. He didn’t need any more weird

dreams.

His finger hovered over the X on the browser, but then his eyes caught on the face of the man in the art. The man's eyes were closed, his head thrown back in pleasure. It was clear he was enjoying himself. Enjoying being held down, filled .

The helplessness in the dream had been frightening and overwhelming, but Jamie could feel the heat stirring low in his belly as he recalled it. He didn't want it to happen again, but he couldn't deny it had been one of the most intense things he'd ever experienced.

Jamie knew enough about sex to know there was a whole realm of things he'd never had the time or courage to look into. There were toys and... clubs. Games people played.

Once, a couple years ago, he'd accidentally stumbled across a dark, explicit video on the Internet. A man had been secured to a bench and was being hit with what looked like a belt. Jamie had almost dropped his phone in his hurry to back out of it.

At the time he'd been terrified of his mother walking in and hearing it, accusing him of looking at something like that on purpose. But what he'd seen had stayed with him. It had lingered in the back of his mind since, and he didn't understand why.

Jamie didn't have to worry about his mother walking in on him anymore though. If he wanted to look, he could.

No one would know.

He tapped his finger against the edge of the phone, then moved and flicked through the open tabs. Now that he was looking at it clear headed, there was an obvious theme to all of these images. Jamie had scrolled through so much last night, and skipped

past some of the pieces without a second glance. He thought back to that belting video. He knew that he didn't want something like that, but there'd been something to the video he couldn't shake.

Not the pain, but the—the—

Jamie's cheeks flushed. The helplessness. That video and all of the pictures he'd lingered on had that in common. Each had a certain kind of powerlessness experienced by the subject. They weren't just restrained, they were being held in place. Immobilized. Taken. Used .

Jamie clicked on the tab that had the most intense depiction. The tentacles had wrapped all the way up and down the person's body, almost like rope. He clicked over to the artist's portfolio page.

He licked his lips as the images loaded. There was a lot to choose from.

Jamie scrolled through picture after picture, his heart pounding, the heat rising in his body. Then he stopped dead. His breath caught in his throat.

Halfway down the page was something different. An artistic rendering of a man suspended, arms folded into his body. He was covered head to toe in intricate knots of rope.

It was beautiful.

Something shivered all the way down Jamie's spine. This—this made him feel something, even more than the tentacles had. More than anything he'd looked at so far had.

It struck in his chest like a bell with piercing clarity. The image was exactly the kind

of helplessness he wanted. The kind that made his hands shake and his throat dry with pure desire.

Beneath the image, in the information about the piece was the word Shibari .

Jamie opened another tab and typed in the word. His eyes went wide as he read through the definition, then flicked over to look at the photos. It was a Japanese style bondage, and it was intricate and beautiful, and suddenly Jamie wanted that. Badly. He had no idea why, but there was just something about it. Something that had its hooks in him.

What would it be like to be tied up so prettily, like a work of art? To be completely immobilized like that by whoever did the tying? Jamie knew enough to know that intricate knots and rope work like that had to take time and concentration.

If it were being done to him, he'd be the sole focus of the person—the man—binding him.

All of his attention would be on Jamie.

Jamie squirmed on the couch, his cock already hard. He'd never really had that. Had someone interested in him. He'd always been too busy, too tired, too jittery, working as hard as he could to try to escape his mother, to even really dream of finding a—a partner. He barely knew what he wanted, much less what he liked.

What would it be like to have someone who desired him? Who wanted to... play with him. Someone who was focused only on Jamie.

The thought seared into his brain. Like the mere concept had reached inside him and shaken something loose. The tentacles had been good, but this was—

This was what he'd really been looking for. Shibari . He could practically feel the ghostly sensation against his skin. How they would wrap around him so tightly, hold him and not let go. He wanted it.

“No.” The word fell from his lips as he snapped back to himself. To his living room in his apartment. “No, I don’t—I don’t want that—” There was no one there, but he still spoke the words aloud. Tried to rationalize it to himself.

His eyes drifted back to the screen. He could deny it all he wanted, but another pulse of heat went through him. His hand drifted down to his lap, and the second he touched himself he twitched. He was sensitive, but hard.

“I can’t like this,” he whispered. “It’s—”

The word bondage was like a reverberation in his head. It came with all kinds of dark and dangerous connotations. Things that Jamie had seen in the fringes of his Internet usage, but had stayed away from.

His mother had never cared enough to give him a sex talk, but Jamie knew inherently she wouldn’t approve of something like this. It felt... deviant. Different. Scary.

So why did he want it?

He dropped his phone on the couch beside him and scrubbed a hand over his face. At this rate he was definitely going to have a dream about it. He wanted to regret that, but some part of him simmered with eagerness.

“Fuck,” he moaned as he collapsed back against the couch, his hands falling to his sides. His body was tense, ready. So much for the cozy morning in.

Then something in the corner of the room flickered. It was like an energy blip, but

more. Like the air had shifted and something had convalesced suddenly.

Jamie turned his head to stare at the dark spot. The room had gotten dimmer somehow. It was still storming, but the sky hadn't gotten any darker, he didn't think. The lamp was still on. Jamie could see it out of the corner of his eye.

But the room was significantly darker than it had been just a few minutes ago. What...?

And now that he was really looking, the shape of the shadow in the corner wasn't right. It didn't match the way the light bounced off everything in the room.

He squinted at the shadow. There was something there, something...

The shadow shifted. Instead of a cloud of darkness, out sprouted long, spindly legs. A second later a dozen eyes blinked into existence, luminescent acid green against the pitch dark.

The creature– the spider– stepped forward out of that darkness on massive, horrifying legs. It was taller than he was, taller than any spider ever should be, almost scraping the ceiling as it crept out of the shadows.

It was a monster. A nightmare. His nightmare, come to life.

Fear and the adrenaline slammed into him.

“No, no, no, no,” he breathed, panicked as he fumbled up from the couch on clumsy legs, nearly bashing his knee into the coffee table as he stumbled away. He couldn't take his eyes off of it, couldn't bear to look away for even a second.

The spider prowled toward him with those long legs. It was just like the dream–the

black form and the glowing eyes. It was the same thing that had wrapped its tentacles around him, and held him down.

Except this time, Jamie knew he was awake.

This time, Jamie knew the monster was real.

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After the wonderful night they'd had, Noh had expected Jamie to get up, get ready, and leave for work like usual. He'd been delighted when instead the morning took a different course. As the rain moved in and the apartment grew dark, Noh's excitement increased. Jamie didn't turn on any lights as he moved around, making himself a meal and sitting down at the table in the dim.

Noh, of course, had watched the whole food preparation diligently, memorizing exactly how Jamie had made his breakfast. Then he'd followed Jamie to the table and cuddled in close.

He couldn't help himself. He'd been wrapped up with Jamie all night, and he just wanted more of that. It was a perfect morning, the rain, the cuddling. Did a Bogg need anything more?

It was still early days of their relationship, so Noh tried not to be hurt when Jamie then took a cup of tea to the living room after and turned on a lamp. Noh had had to shrink back into the darker corners to avoid the light the second he'd seen Jamie reaching for it.

He reminded himself that Humans needed light to see. Jamie probably wasn't annoyed with him or trying to chase him away, it was just too dim for his Human eyes. Jamie even glanced in his direction, as if checking on him.

It cheered Noh right up.

Over time, as Noh continued feeding Jamie his come, Jamie's eyesight would grow sharper, better in the dark, but they weren't there yet. Noh just had to remind himself

that Jamie may need the lights now, but someday he wouldn't. Or maybe they'd meet in the middle—Noh's tolerance for the light expanding as Jamie's sight in the dark grew. A thriving symbiosis.

Though the light of the lamp was too bright for Noh to be directly cuddled around Jamie, the rain kept coming and the rest of the apartment was nice and shadowy. Noh instead enjoyed moving about in the daytime for once. He manifested eyes in all directions to watch his beloved.

Jamie got himself cozy on the couch with a blanket and his mug of tea and then pulled out his phone. Noh's interest perked up.

Last night he'd sat right over Jamie's shoulder and watched him flip through the device. It had been so enlightening! His mate was so smart, he'd known how to overcome the language barrier by showing Noh what he'd wanted. He'd found dozens and dozens of images that had clearly aroused him, and Noh had to admit the success of last night was all because of Jamie. He'd guided Noh's hands, showed him exactly how he wanted to be treated.

Was Jamie going to do it again?

He watched Jamie tapping his phone, but from the distance he couldn't make out what was on the screen.

Noh turned his attention to the lamp. It wasn't that bright. It was a warm, low luminance in the room. It made him wonder...

Noh had felt the sunlight this morning, had felt the threat of it and had known instantly that it would harm him still. But he'd spent all night suckling at Jamie's cock, swallowing his spill. He didn't produce anywhere as much as Noh had given Jamie, but it had still been the most Noh had ever gotten in a single night.

He wondered now if it had made a difference. If it was enough to ward him against a small light like this.

On the far edge of the light ring, Noh manifested a tendril. Slowly, so slowly, he eased it toward the light halo.

There was warmth when it touched him, but it wasn't a sharp sort of warmth. There was no burning, no smoldering fire, no excruciating pain.

On the other side of the room, where the light was hitting a little brighter, Noh made himself another tentacle and slid it out from beneath the cabinets. The light on his skin was warmer there, but tolerable.

He stared at himself in the light, turning the tentacle this way and that. It was almost unreal to see his form in the warm glow. Even at his strongest, before this cursed apartment, Noh had never managed to tolerate any amount of light. His kind were so light sensitive that any touch could result in permanent damage. Too much light and he'd burn up. Cease to exist.

With his true mate, with enough shared between them, he would no longer have to fear such a death. Eventually he might even tolerate the sunlight itself.

What a wonder that would be!

Focus , he reminded himself, pulling his mind back to the present. One thing at a time.

Next he needed to test something directly in the light where Jamie was sitting. Fringe light was progress, but how close could he get to a bulb?

Forcing himself not to hesitate, Noh slipped beneath the flooring and came up under

the couch. He didn't have a heartbeat, but his whole body was swimming with nerves. He made himself one slithering arm and peeked it out the back of the couch where the full light of the lamp was hitting.

This was a much more intense wave of heat. Noh had come too close to one of the stove burners once, and it was similar to that. The heat of warning, but there was no pain. Being in the lamp light would likely wear him out, but he seemed to be tolerating it. It wasn't searing away his being.

Oh!

As always, Jamie had been one step ahead of Noh. Did his little mate know about Bogg's? Jamie knew he kept to the shadows, he'd seen Jamie glance in his direction plenty of times, but it seemed he also knew about the exchange.

Perhaps he'd been expecting Noh all morning! Expecting him to come out because he knew Noh was more light tolerant now. Jamie knew their evening had been enough.

Oh, Noh had the most clever, most perfect mate!

His attention snapped back to Jamie poking at his screen. To the reason he'd wanted to test his light tolerance in the first place.

Right now Jamie was looking at something on his phone, and no doubt expecting Noh to be paying attention. The last thing Noh wanted to do was disappoint him. His mate had done so much for him already, and Noh needed to make sure he was providing in return.

He kept himself transparent, as not having a solid form did help the light be less hot against him, and tucked himself up against Jamie's back.

Sure enough, on the screen, Jamie was looking once more at erotic things. Pleasure zipped down Noh's spine. Jamie had been waiting on him to catch up.

On the screen were images similar to the tentacled ones. Similar but different.

Noh peered at it closely. The Humans were all bound up in the images, but it wasn't with the fleshy arms of a creature. It was done in some sort of braided rope. This rope was twisted together in intricate, pretty patterns. It wound around the Humans' arms and legs and torsos, and even sometimes across their mouths, pushing between their lips.

Noh watched as Jamie went through page after page, and like with the tentacles, they all began to run into a theme. Jamie liked the ones where the Human was bound head to toe. Where they look so tied up Noh didn't think they would even be able to move a muscle.

He liked the ones with the pretty braided spreads of rope across the torso or back.

The rope, Noh thought, wasn't crude or garish, but beautiful. Did Jamie want to be beautiful like that? His mate was already the most stunning Human he'd ever seen, but in ropes like that...!

When Noh peeked around, he could see the flush on Jamie's face. He watched Jamie's hand move between his legs, touching himself where he was already aroused.

Noh crept closer, all his eyes trained on Jamie. His mate looked edible, ready to be ravished. Did Jamie want Noh to please him right now? Did he want Noh to bind him up all prettily, like a beautiful little gift?

Noh .

As if answering his question, Noh's name dropped from Jamie's plush mouth. Noh felt it like a live wire through him, better than the tastiest electricity. His mate said his name again.

Oh!

Jamie was so wonderful, so bold and unafraid to tell Noh exactly what he wanted. To show Noh how to best please him. He wanted this, wanted it now, and Noh was helpless but to obey.

It flustered him though. Noh didn't know very much about this intricate rope binding, and hadn't had any time in the night to study or experiment.

But his mate was asking. Noh wasn't going to fail.

He plundered his mind for any knowledge he may have acquired on anything similar.

And came up with only one thing. The only other place Noh had seen such intricate weavings were the small creatures that shared the under the bed space with him sometimes. Spiders, that was what the Humans called them. Their little bodies made a silken rope and they spun it into all sorts of beautiful arrangements.

Noh, in the long, boring hours stuck in the apartment before Jamie, had spent plenty of time studying their webs. He'd spent entire afternoons watching spiders weave them, and his brain had cataloged all of that.

He might not yet know how to do those beautiful rope bindings that Jamie was looking at, but he could do something. He had the knowledge of how the spiders wove their webs, and maybe that would be good enough?

The next time Jamie slept, Noh could slip out and better research this. Now that he

wasn't bound to the apartment, Noh could go and find information sources. Humans had whole buildings of things like that, he knew.

Or since he was now able to bear the screen of Jamie's electronics, Noh could try to use them. Look further into these photos.

He shrank back away from Jamie into the shadows, pulling himself together in the far corner of the room as he sifted through his memories to get the information that he needed. It would not be exactly what Jamie had just been looking at, but he could do close. He could satisfy his mate, he knew it.

So he drew himself a body that was shaped in the spinning spider's image. He figured if he looked the part, then maybe Jamie would be amused and forgive him that this was the only type of rope weaving Noh knew how to do.

Noh gave himself long, long spidery legs, a spider body, even their furred feet. With all of his energy, his body ran from the floor to almost the ceiling.

Jamie's head snapped up immediately. Noh felt that electric flutter through him, the excitement, the anticipation. He could hear Jamie's heart already pounding, his breathing elevated.

Noh fairly trembled with eagerness to please. Jamie wanted Noh, perhaps wanted him as badly as Noh wanted Jamie. He was ready for Noh to give him what he desired.

On his brand-new spidery legs, Noh stepped out of the shadows, a dozen of his eyes blinking into existence so he could take it all in. He did his best not to flinch as he stepped into the light, but it still must have shown, because Jamie stood and started backing away from the couch and toward the darkness of his bedroom.

His mate was so sweet and perfect.

Noh followed, wanting to prove to himself and Jamie that he could be in the light. The warmth was almost too hot on his body with this visible form, but he bore it as he followed Jamie across the apartment.

His mate was almost as eager to play as Noh was, calling Noh's name over and over as he backed into his bedroom, his eyes not leaving Noh for even a moment. He babbled other words that Noh couldn't yet understand, but was okay. Noh knew what Jamie wanted, and he prowled forward, ready to please his mate.

When Jamie was close to the bed, Noh struck. On all those spindly legs he was able to move quickly as he skittered into the dark bedroom. From his body he made an approximation of the thin spider webbing. It was black instead of the gossamer white that spiders made, but he hoped that Jamie wouldn't mind.

He caught Jamie's wrists first, then had a thought. Jamie was still dressed. In all of the images he'd seen, the Humans had been naked.

It was a bit more difficult with these spider appendages to do it, but Noh made quick work of stripping Jamie's shirt and shorts off. Jamie shouted and squirmed underneath him, testing his holds, wanting Noh to prove that he was a strong, sure mate even in this spidery form.

When the clothing was all scattered on the floor, Noh started immediately wrapping the rope around Jamie's wrists. He did his best to keep it neat and tight, but not too tight. Humans had such delicate bodies, and he didn't want to hurt Jamie.

After he'd tied Jamie's wrists together, he looped the end of the rope around one of the slats of the headboard.

"Noh, please!" Noh almost shivered to hear Jamie begging so prettily already, wanting more, and he did his best not to disappoint, catching Jamie's ankles and

wrapping those too in rope. Noh didn't tie them together, but looped the rope ends of each through a separate slat on the bottom of the bed. He could readjust that later if he needed to, but at the moment it held Jamie down. Kept him from thrashing too badly, keeping him immobilized just the way Jamie wanted to be.

Once he had Jamie strung out on his back on his sheets, Noh straddled the bed with his long spider legs, looking down at his beautiful, perfect mate and all his bare skin.

Noh crooned a sound he'd heard Humans make before. It was something they did when they were excited or content. Noh didn't have the kind of vocal organs that Humans did, so he did his best approximation of the sound.

Jamie again cried Noh's name, looking up at him with wide, watchful eyes. Waiting to see what Noh would do next. Waiting to see if Noh would do what Jamie wanted.

Noh wasn't going to fail his mate. The pictures Jamie had liked the best had had a lot of that rope twining up and down the Human body. He wanted to be covered, not just tied at both ends.

Oh! And Jamie had enjoyed having Noh's tentacle in his mouth last night, so that was something he should do again too. Noh reached down and started to wind some of his black threads around Jamie's head, sliding it between his parted lips when he opened them to speak. It muted Jamie's sweet cries and words, muffling how he moaned Noh's name, and Noh was sorry to miss them, but it was more important to give Jamie what he wanted.

Besides, there was also something so sweet about seeing Jamie still try to sob Noh over and over, even when his mouth was full.

Noh went about weaving the rest of the web across the points of Jamie's body. It was halfway between a spider web and what he'd seen on Jamie's phone. It wrapped

down his arms and around his torso to his legs. It divided his body, but tied all the pieces together.

Each time he checked the ropes carefully, making sure they held but weren't too tight.

Noh made what he thought was an attractive design, and when he pulled back he couldn't help but be proud of his work. The dark rope had a sheen to it when it was that thin, almost purple or green in the dim lighting. The contrast with Jamie's pale skin was beautiful. Stunning. He couldn't look away with any of his countless eyes.

He knew this was Jamie's desire, but it struck him deeply how much this was also a gift from Jamie to Noh. His mate wanted to be trussed up like a present just for him. Immobilized so that Noh could play with him however he wanted.

And if Jamie wasn't going out today, maybe that was exactly what Jamie had planned.

Noh hadn't missed that while he'd worked on the ties up and down Jamie's body, Jamie had gotten hard. Both his nipples and his cock were at attention, his skin flushed with how ready he was.

In that moment Noh almost wished he had Human organs for speech and understood the language better. If he did a bit more learning, he could probably do enough replication, and he wanted to berate himself again that he hadn't made it more of a priority before this.

He wanted to tease Jamie, tell him exactly what he was going to do with him. How good and wonderful his mate was, how hard Noh was going to work every single day to repay Jamie the honor of not only freeing him, but being his mate.

The feeling swelled inside Noh. He'd had vague dreams, of course, of finding his true mate, but none of them had even come close to this.

Jamie, his Jamie, decorated in his darkness, quivering in eagerness for his touch, sobbing Noh's name behind the rope in his mouth.

Noh shivered eagerly. What next? What next?

He had put together a very accurate representation of one of the larger spiders he'd come across, and had the lightly furred toes to go with it. Noh had touched Jamie last night with his smooth tentacles and the bumpy suction cups. Jamie had enjoyed both, and now he wondered how Jamie would respond to these feet. If he'd like them more or less than yesterday's form.

There was only one delicious way to find out.

Jamie let out a muffled cry when Noh brought one of his legs down to touch Jamie's hip. He'd run the silky rope above and below Jamie's cock, looping it around his upper thighs and framing the cute little member between them. Now his toes slipped over the rope to touch skin.

Jamie trembled at the first slow graze. The fur must tickle the way his body was shifting in reaction. Noh ran the very tip up Jamie's cock, brushing over where he was most sensitive. His cock jerked, and shiny wetness pooled at the tip.

Noh couldn't help himself, he bent to taste it.

Most spiders had some form of very sharp front teeth, but Noh had omitted those in his replication. There was no reason to have them in the way, and he didn't want to accidentally hurt Jamie.

So he used one of his own mouths and tongues to lap at the first evidence of Jamie's arousal. It tasted just as vibrant as it had every other time, and swallowing it down gave Noh a rush at the knowledge that he was doing a good job.

Noh took his lightly furred feet and used them elsewhere too. He traced the side of Jamie's face down his throat and to his nipples. He checked the lines of rope as he went, making sure the indents in Jamie's skin weren't too severe. When he got to Jamie's nipple, he brushed a pair of furry toes over the peak. His mate gave a muffled cry and jerked from the sensation, but all the ropes held him steady.

They were even more effective than the tentacles. Wound up and down his body, Jamie couldn't move too far in any one direction without them pulling tight somewhere else. Noh saw the appeal, understood why this was the way his mate wanted to be restrained. Wanted to be helpless before him.

Jamie's eyes were big and blown out, leaking at the corners as more spidery legs trailed down his sensitive sides and then over his legs. Noh had discovered the spots on Jamie's inner thighs, neck, and sides where he was particularly sensitive. He felt proud to know just where Jamie liked to be touched and employed it again now.

Noh watched with ravenous curiosity as Jamie's skin contracted. Goosebumps rose in the wake of his furred touches, and Jamie's cock leaked more precome.

He slid the tip of one of his legs up Jamie's cock again, watching it pulse, hearing his muffled pleasure. Noh shifted himself from hovering above Jamie to between his legs. To that hole that he was dying to get back inside.

The tips of his legs were much thinner than the tentacles had been, but Noh figured once inside Jamie he could change the proportions a little. He didn't think Jamie would mind if he shifted out of this configuration on this occasion. It was all to better pleasure his mate.

He put the tip of his leg to Jamie's hole, and then internally attached it to the part of him that was almost constantly leaking when he thought of his mate. It served as seed and lubricant, and as he eased the tip of his leg in, it made the initial breach slick and easy.

Jamie cried out louder as Noh started to push in. Yes , this is what his mate wanted. What his mate needed from him. He pushed further in, seeking that little spot inside Jamie. Every time he touched it he could feel Jamie's body tremble, and he knew from past experience just how tied to a Human's pleasure it could be.

When he found that spot inside Jamie, his spider leg lost a little of its definition. Noh refigured it to be more like fingers so he could stroke that little bundle of nerves the way that Jamie liked.

Sure enough, a second later Jamie's body tensed, trying to move and unable to, toes curling. More wetness leaked from the tip of his cock, and Noh greedily leaned up to suck it off.

Jamie's body heaved against the ropes as Noh pulled his reconfigured fingers out of Jamie, and then thrust back in. It had been mere hours since Noh had been inside him, but already Noh was overflowing, his come gushing into Jamie to make the fuck wet and filthy.

He kept two of those spider legs on Jamie's cock, tracing up and down the length, brushing the fur down the underside where it got the most reaction.

More beads of precome came to the tip and Noh lapped them up. It was addicting, the taste of his mate, and he couldn't get enough.

He began to fuck Jamie in earnest, starting up a steady rhythm as he withdrew his fingers and then pushed back in, making sure he hit Jamie's prostate every time as he

stroked and sucked at the tip of his cock. Noh was pleased to realize that he was less clumsy with it now. He was getting better at knowing just what his mate wanted most.

He could tell Jamie was close. His cock was so red, hard and straining. It almost matched the pink of his nipples and lips. Pretty, pretty, all of him so pretty.

Noh watched with excitement as he worked Jamie's body towards that goal. Another pair of legs reached up to stroke over Jamie's nipples, dragging the fur back and forth over the sensitive buds.

Jamie cried behind the gag, tears leaking, body trembling as Noh worked him over. He could feel his own edge coming, the larger, gushing orgasm just on the horizon. He would come again when Jamie did, he already knew it. There was nothing so good as pleasing his mate.

Slowly, his hand inside Jamie widened, gaining girth till it was just as big as the two tentacles he'd had inside Jamie last night.

Noh could see the bulge of it in Jamie's abdomen every time he fucked in. It drove him wild to see the evidence of himself inside his mate. To feel how Jamie clenched around him with need.

As he continued to move and suck and fuck and touch Jamie all over, Noh started falling out of the spider form. It was less natural to him than the tentacles had been, and as he drove them up and up toward the end, it was getting harder to pay attention to his large, physical body.

All of his concentration was being taken up by the sound and taste and feel of Jamie. On treating him exactly how he deserved to be treated. Worshipped.

Noh gave a harder suck just as Jamie was on the edge, and felt him break. Jamie's body arched the small amount he could in the bindings, his head thrown back, eyes unseeing as he started to come. It happened right in Noh's mouth and he hungrily swallowed his mate's seed.

The taste of Jamie's pleasure bowled right into Noh, and the parts of him inside Jamie started to come, a gush of it flooding into the deepest part of his mate, filling him up. It throbbed through Noh in electric pulses, waves drenching Jamie's hole.

In the middle of their peak, Jamie went limp. It was like a sudden switch had been flipped, and while Noh licked and sucked every bit of his release, he spared an eye upward to see that Jamie had passed out. His eyes were closed, face slack.

A new bolt of pleasure zipped through Noh. He'd pleased his mate so well that his body had given up. Had sent him directly into sleep.

He let Jamie's softening cock slip from his mouth and laid himself fully over Jamie's body for a long moment. Noh could read electricity in anything, and could feel it thrumming in Jamie's body. He listened to it for a full minute, making sure everything was running correctly inside him, before easing back.

Humans could be so, so fragile. Jamie would become hardier by absorbing Noh's come, but it was important in the meantime to make sure he was okay. Jamie's care was Noh's number one priority.

When Noh finally stopped coming, he left his thick fingers inside Jamie to plug him up while his body absorbed Noh's come and went about cleaning the rest of Jamie up. He dissolved the ropes one by one, pulling them back into his own body and checking over the marks left on Jamie's skin. They were pink to red in some areas, but already Noh could see them going away.

If Noh had already gained some resilience to light, he wondered how much of himself Jamie had gained. He'd never used ropes on Humans before, so he had no idea if the way the marks were fading was normal, or accelerated for a Human.

He knew that some Human injuries could take ages and ages to heal. Hm.

After all the ropes were gone, Noh extended an arm to find the shorts Jamie had been wearing, that he'd carelessly tossed to the floor. Noh had watched the scowl on Jamie's face the last two times he'd woken naked, and how his mate had fussily found and pulled on his shorts.

Noh preferred his mate stripped down, all of his prettiness on display, but he had to do what was best for Jamie. He needed to be a good mate.

So with some maneuvering, he slid the shorts back up Jamie's legs and pulled himself out of Jamie's hole briefly to slide them fully on.

Still, the legs of the shorts were loose enough for Noh to pull aside and peek under. He looked at Jamie's gaping hole, and the black come that started to ooze out. Gently, he scooped it up and pushed it back inside, leaving himself in there once more, Jamie's tight walls around him.

Noh had no idea how long Jamie would sleep for, but the longer he did, the longer Noh could stay with him, so he would be careful and quiet. The storm was still raging outside, the room dark except for the glow coming from that one lamp in the living room.

He slid another part of himself up and over Jamie's cock. It was soft now, but Noh sucked it into his mouth and let it rest there. If Jamie slept long enough, Noh might be able to rouse him to fullness and swallow down another spill as his mate rested.

A perfect morning if there ever was one.

Some time later, Noh was able to do just that. The storm continued the rest of the morning, and it lulled Jamie into a deep sleep. Noh listened to the rain and Jamie breathing, and carefully coaxed the Human's cock to hardness again, giving him the softest, easiest orgasm he could.

He kept Jamie's come in his mouth for a long time after that, sliding the taste around as he savored it.

Around noon the storm tired itself out and real sunlight started to come back. Noh shrank himself down under Jamie's shorts, staying until the heat on his back grew to threatening levels. He righted the blankets around Jamie as he pulled away, tucking him in.

When Noh crept back into the shadows it was with the taste of Jamie still on his metaphorical tongue, and pleasure thrumming in his body.

Soon, he would be strong enough for the sun. Noh just knew it.

Soon.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:49 am

Jamie woke slowly with the kind of disorientation only a daytime nap could bring. He opened his eyes and the bedroom ceiling was above him. The one he was starting to default to, instead of waking confused as to why there were no cracks or mold spots above him.

The sun was bright and clear through his windows, and a glance in that direction showed blue skies. He pushed himself up to sitting slowly, trying to reorient himself.

It was afternoon. Wednesday.

He'd woken up this morning and it had been storming. He'd decided on a lazy morning in, had made himself breakfast and tea, had gone to the couch and...

The memories directly following that were of an entirely different sort. The prickling unease at the back of his neck had convalesced into a real, tangible fear.

A spider. A horrific thing that had scuttled out of the shadows of his living room. It had been six– no –eight feet tall with a dozen glowing eyes. A monster that had left him tripping over himself to escape.

Jamie scanned the room now, but there was nothing. There were hardly any shadows in the room at all with how bright the sunshine was. Jamie had sworn he'd been awake, had sworn he'd seen that thing and it had been real.

Now that felt... impossible. Like the ravings of someone who was off their rocker.

He pushed down his blankets, but he wasn't even naked. He was wearing the shorts

he'd been wearing earlier. He spotted his shirt discarded on the floor. He didn't remember removing it himself, he only remembered the nightmare creature doing that.

It had tied him up and touched him. Fucked him. Made him come.

Impossible .

Jamie turned his hands one way and then another, then checked his ankles. He expected to see some kind of evidence from how tightly the rope had been gripping him, but there was nothing there. No discoloration, no rope burn.

There was nothing, because it hadn't happened. Because it had been a nightmare or a delusion. Maybe Jamie was losing his mind. He'd been so sure he'd seen it, but the only evidence anything had happened was a vague soreness in his body, and if he'd been tensing or thrashing in his dreams, that was easily the cause.

Jamie climbed out of bed, and went to the bathroom just to be sure. He stripped out of the shorts and stood back to look at himself in the mirror. Despite the weird way he was feeling, he looked fine. Almost better than fine, actually.

Since moving in, all of Jamie's dreams had been strange, and he'd suffered broken night's sleep because of it. Despite that, every day he'd woken up more rested and energized than the last. There were no dark circles under his eyes anymore, no gaunt pull to his face. He didn't know if it was eating regularly or the lack of being yelled at all the time, but the apartment had done him well. The only thing staring back at Jamie in the mirror was a better version of himself.

Even the nap he'd just had, for all its horrors, had left him energized. He was losing his mind, but he'd also never felt physically better.

Just to be sure, Jamie reached a hand down between his legs. It felt maybe a little

tender there. A little sore. But he wasn't even as sore as he'd been that morning. And there was... no wetness there. Nothing to indicate any sort of eldritch creature had come inside him.

"No, you're just crazy," he said to his mirror self.

Feeling out of sorts, Jamie went back to his bedroom and found himself a fresh set of clothes. If the storm was gone and he was topped up on energy, he could at least go and run his errands for the day.

Getting out of the apartment would be good for him anyway. Some fresh air to clear his head.

Dressed, Jamie strode back through the living room, picking up the cup of tea and his phone that was still there. His phone told him it was one in the afternoon. The last time he'd been looking at the phone it'd been near eight. At least he hadn't fallen asleep and slept the entire day away.

When he unlocked the phone, he saw the last browser tab he'd been looking at and flushed shamefully. Yeah, so he'd been asking for a nightmare like the one he'd just had. When he'd been looking at tentacle porn he'd had a tentacled dream. Today he'd been neck deep in shibari, so what did he expect to happen?

Was Jamie going to learn?

Quickly, he closed all of those browsers and then dropped his phone in his pocket. The back of his neck prickled and Jamie spun around, but even in the darkest part of his apartment, there was nothing.

"Groceries," he reminded himself. "Stop jumping at shadows."

He thought about lunch or a snack before he left, but even though all he'd had to eat

was oatmeal and a banana hours ago, he wasn't really hungry. Instead, he took the stone cold cup of tea from the living room coffee table and dumped it in the sink, then found his keys and wallet. He plucked his shopping list from off the kitchen counter where he'd left it, then went to grab his reusable cloth bags. The grocery store wasn't a far walk, but he needed a few heavy items and he'd learned that it was easiest to carry them back in something sturdy.

Jamie squinted as he came down the steps of the building. The sun was directly overhead and searing now that all the rain had gone. He'd been in his dark apartment for too long because it hurt, and he had to shield his eyes.

By the time he had walked the six blocks to the superstore, Jamie made the executive decision to buy a pair of sunglasses at the store too. He'd had a junk pair that he'd used on occasion, but he didn't think he'd seen them when unpacking after the move. The six block walk had been... uncomfortable in its brightness.

He made quick work in the grocery section of the store, loading up on the staples he was running out of, and made a swing past the whirling rack of sunglasses, picking out ones with a bright blue rim. Rick always wore such colorful sunglasses and he made them look good—maybe Jamie could try and pull them off.

Finally, Jamie wandered over to the part of the store that had house goods. No more lights had blown in the apartment, but he wanted to pick up another pack of light bulbs just in case. It was better to have more than enough, than be stuck in the dark.

He grabbed a pack and then his eyes caught on the display right next to it. Nightlights.

For a second he almost reached for one, but the dinosaur design gave him pause. In fact, most of the nightlights had childish designs on them. Because they were for children.

“You’re being crazy,” he muttered to himself under his breath as he made himself pull away. “You’re not afraid of the dark.”

Still, his eyes stuck on them. Wondering .

Then again, the dream earlier had come upon him in the daytime. He’d even been sitting in the light of a lamp; it hadn’t been dark at all. There was no shadow monster, it was all in his head. All Jamie could say for sure was that he’d looked up things on his phone and that at some point he’d fallen asleep. He’d had a vivid dream—extremely vivid—but had woken up to find absolutely no evidence that it had really happened.

Sure, Jamie had moved from the couch to the bed, had taken off his shirt, but that wasn’t outside the realm of possibility. People slept walked, or were so tired they did things they didn’t remember later. It was a little odd, but it wasn’t... supernatural.

Still, it kept dragging at his thoughts the rest of the time in the store. He could barely focus as the cashier rang him up and he paid. He kept thinking about the fear, about the way he’d felt all morning like something was watching him. The way that spider had tied him up like he was prey—

The way a part of him had enjoyed it.

Jamie tried to focus on bagging the groceries. Everything went in his bags and he hefted onto his shoulders. He slid on his new sunglasses before he stepped outside the store. They helped immensely with the brightness, and he was glad he’d gotten them.

The whole walk back Jamie kept thinking about those phantom touches. The way the ropes had clung to his skin, held him nearly immobile. The way those enormous spider legs had caressed him, coaxed him sure but steady toward his orgasm.

That was the worst part of it all. The fear had been drowning Jamie, but it hadn’t

deterred the reactions of his body. If anything, it had made them more intense, and that dream orgasm had been one of the best he'd ever experienced.

Or maybe it hadn't been the fear at all he'd been reacting to so strongly. Maybe it had been just how adeptly those spidery legs had touched him. How they'd known every part of him that was sensitive, where he liked to be touched and how. That they'd fucked him the way he'd always wanted, the way he'd barely let himself dreamt of.

Because it was a dream. Just a dream.

Just a dream he thought he was awake for, that he wasn't still tasting on his tongue.

A week later Jamie was still wearing the sunglasses. He'd even grabbed a second pair at a gas station during a work break, so he could leave one pair in the work truck and have one for home.

He'd never really been a sunglasses person, but he understood now why Rick had such a wide collection. They were so helpful in transitioning from inside houses and apartments to the bright outdoors. He'd quickly grown so used to wearing them that if he went outside without them, he'd squint painfully against the sunlight and have to go right back upstairs to retrieve them.

"Hey," Jack said, interrupting his thoughts. The tone implied it wasn't the first time he'd tried to get Jamie's attention.

"Sorry, what?" Jamie turned to look at Jack who was standing by the breakroom door.

"Earth to Jamie," Jack said with a small smile. "You going to finish lunch? It's time to go."

Jamie looked down and— oh . Right. He'd been eating lunch. Except most of his lunch was still there, only a few bites taken out of his sandwich and the bag of chips half eaten. He'd been picking at it when he'd gotten distracted.

It was happening more and more now. The dreams hadn't let up, and although they hadn't ventured into any new territory, the tentacles and the rope bondage were enough to continuously haunt his waking thoughts. Every night he dreamt of the monster who caressed and touched and fucked him. Every night he had body shuddering orgasms and woke well rested and without a mark on him.

It was confusing.

“Sorry, I'm ready,” Jamie said as he started packing up his stuff. In every moment of downtime his brain wanted to go back to the dreams. Wanted to ruminate about it. He tried to pull apart every detail and figure out how they could possibly be real. Because they felt so real.

But monsters weren't real.

Jack frowned at him. “You didn't finish eating.”

“It's fine,” Jamie said quickly as he tucked everything back in his lunch box. “I wasn't really hungry anyway.”

He could see how that didn't sit so well with Jack after he'd already spent so much time worrying about Jamie getting enough food while he'd lived with his mother. Jamie felt bad about Jack worrying, but he really wasn't hungry. Since the dreams he'd been... more energized throughout the day. Like he was getting real, restful sleep, and he hadn't needed to fill the lack with food.

Jamie's weight was holding steady, even if his portions were smaller, so he hadn't bothered to be concerned.

“Anyway,” Jamie said as he stood, trying to placate Jack, “I’ll just bring it and have some later when I get hungry.”

Jack gave him a long look, like he wanted to ask something, but then just nodded. “Alright.”

He headed out and Jamie gave himself a second to breathe. This was far from the first time they’d caught him zoning out on the job, and he didn’t like it. They were just dreams . Jamie didn’t understand why he kept thinking about them so much.

So what if they were weird? People had weird dreams all the time. At least, that was what the Internet said. Jamie had done some mild research, and been both relieved and annoyed to find that other people also regularly had monstrous sex dreams.

But he really, really needed to not let it affect his work.

Lunch box packed up, Jamie hurried out of the room, flicking down his sunglasses as he walked outside. Rick was already in the truck and Jack was climbing in. They had a four bedroom house next, and it was going to be a big job. It’d take the rest of the afternoon.

“Hey, there he is,” Rick said as Jamie slid into the truck. “You good kid? Looked like you were doing some heavy thinking when I popped my head into the break room.”

Jamie almost cringed. So Rick had noticed too. “Sorry. Just distracted I guess.”

“Anything you want to share with the class?” Rick asked.

Oh yeah sure, Jamie thought sarcastically to himself. Just that I've been having all kinds of monstrous dreams and they're so good and so horrifying that I find myself thinking about them multiple times a day.

“Nope, just... gathering wool,” Jamie said. It was something his mom used to berate him about, that sometimes Jamie would be up in his head instead of listening to her scream at him. He’d hated when she’d said it, as if he were some sort of simpleton with cotton for brains. It was an easy excuse to use now.

“Alright,” Rick said, letting him off easy. “Let’s do this. Big job, here we come.”

The job was a nightmare. The customer had hardly packed any of their house, and they had tons of large, heavy, fragile items. There were mirrors and paintings and seven feet tall plants in enormous ceramic pots. In one room there were floor to ceiling boxes of books.

Not to mention the house was two stories with a full basement. Rick had frowned when he’d taken it all in and then had to readjust the quote to make it a two day job. It was going to take them nearly twice as long because it wouldn’t fit in a single truck run, and there’d be a surcharge because they’d have to start extra early tomorrow to fit in the rest.

When the woman started complaining about the cost, no one was surprised.

It took a call to the store where Peter backed up everything that Rick quoted her, before she would even listen. After thirty minutes of back-and-forth where Peter threatened to cancel the job altogether, she conceded that yes, she would pay the surplus because she really needed her things moved, and at this point she didn’t have any other choice.

So they got to work.

Even with Jamie’s newfound energy, around the third hour in, he started flagging. There was a lot of up and down stairs, a lot of slow lifting and setting down. Some of

the plants had to come down one at a time, because there was only so much wrapping they could do with leaves before it became a problem.

It was exhausting, heavy work.

Maybe that was why as Jamie started taking down one of the large, gilded mirrors in the upstairs, he slipped. His arms had been trembling for a while, and with his sweaty palms, he lost his grip.

Thankfully, Jamie was quick to react, quick to regain his hold and the mirror didn't hit the ground. The fancy decorative edging cut sharp and painful into his palm as he did so.

Jamie hissed in pain. He could tell that it had drawn blood, and gingerly lowered the mirror down to the ground to rest against the wall.

"Fuck," he hissed as he turned his hand over. Sure enough, there was a long, rough cut across his palm from where the ornamental frame had dug in. Already it was welling with blood.

Jamie was the only one in the room, which he was grateful for. If the client had seen him almost drop her mirror, she would have lost her shit on him.

But he needed to patch himself up before he continued. There was a basic first aid kit in the truck, so Jamie turned and hurried down the stairs.

He heard Rick and Jack in the living room working on moving the large entertainment center, so he didn't bother to alert them. It wasn't his first minor injury on the job. Jamie went down and out of the house to the truck, digging in the back to pull the first aid kit out from underneath one of the seats. He could feel the hot blood in his cupped hand, but so far it hadn't spilled.

One-handedly, Jamie got the kit open and pulled out a few packets of antiseptic swabs. He tore one open with his teeth and finally uncurled his palm. Blood was smeared across the lines on his hand, and Jamie quickly used the antiseptic wipe to clean it off.

Then he stared at his hand in confusion.

Because what should have been a large cut across his palm was somehow... not there anymore. Or, no, there was something, but in the way that a three or four day cut lingered. Where it had sealed up and not even scabbing was left. There was just a lighter color line where the cut had been across his palm.

“What?” He flexed his hand, thinking the cut would reopen, but it didn’t. Because there was no cut. There was just an older mark.

Now that he was thinking about it, the antiseptic hadn’t burned the way it should have when he was cleaning his hand. In fact, the cut had hurt when he was upstairs, but he’d stopped noticing it by the time he got to the truck.

Jamie turned back to look at the used antiseptic wipe. It was covered with blood. He hadn’t imagined that. He’d been bleeding.

And now he... wasn’t? Now he wasn’t even wounded? When he flexed his hand there was no pain, and when he traced over the faint line on his palm, there was nothing that felt like he’d just been injured.

It was so bewildering that he just stood there staring at his hand. It didn’t make any sense. He’d just cut himself. There was still blood on the wipe. How was he not bleeding anymore? How was he not cut anymore?

Wildly, he turned over his other hand to check if for some reason it was the other palm, but it wasn’t.

There were grunts from the front door, and Jamie could see out of the corner of his eye Rick and Jack carrying out one of the pieces of the entertainment center.

Jamie looked at the bloody swab and his own hand. If he stood here much longer gaping, they would get to him and then there would be questions. Questions Jamie couldn't answer.

So he made a decision. With his now healed hand, he grabbed the bloody antiseptic wipe and its wrapping, stuffing them in his pocket, the other hand snapping the first aid kit shut. The kit went back under the truck seat, and Jamie grabbed for his Gatorade in the backseat instead. He was sipping it when Jack and Rick got to him.

"Break time?" Rick said with a heavy puff of breath as he walked the shelving until into the truck. "Sounds good."

Jamie tipped back the bottle swallow so he didn't have to speak. His mind was whirring. He didn't understand what was going on. Didn't understand the dreams or the energy he had now, or the... the way his hand had almost instantaneously healed.

One thing was for certain though, Jamie hadn't imagined the cut. That had been real, and he had the evidence of it stuffed in his pocket.

But if that was real, what... else might be real?