# The Road To Pemberley

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## Summary

It is nearly two decades since the richest alpha in the county of Derbyshire, Dean Winchester of Pemberley, married Castiel Bennet, a humble little omega from Hertfordshire. They have three children, and live happily together. For now...

A Pride And Prejudice Destiel sequel.
The Prologue

The Road To Pemberley was written as a sequel to my first Jane Austen fic, Duty and Devotion, covers the further adventures of Dean, Castiel and their family some nineteen years after the original story was set. The wonderful Jane Austen did not give an exact date for Pride and Prejudice, on which D&D was based, but it was set 'somewhere around the turn of the century', so I guessed at 1800-1801. D&D ended in August 1801 with the news of Castiel's first pregnancy; that child was Scaden Winchester, who plays a major part in this story.

TRTP starts in December 1820 with a visitor taking the road to Pemberley, and ends in January 1824 and Dean Winchester's fifty-first birthday. Since its publication, the story has been added to by a 'midquel', Family Matters (published April 2015), chronicling what happened between D&D and TRTP. You may enjoy this story more if you read the first two parts beforehand, or you may find that TRTP contains much explanation about what happened in the intervening FM-covered years.

I don't do angst as a rule, but there is both a kidnapping and a non-graphic rape in this story. I had never actually written something this big before – TRTP was meant to be about the same size as D&D, which went out of the window when it ended up at least three times bigger – or something this angst-ridden. Most of 1822 (the original ending, before I added on another year, and thanks to all those out there who encouraged me to do that!) has been totally rewritten, and although it's not perfect, I am a lot happier with it than I was. Writing and posting a fic before it is actually finished is an experience I do not want to have to repeat, as destiel stories tend to run away with themselves if not held in check!

It is probably worth saying that, during the quarter of a century covered by these stories, Great Britain and the world changed considerably. D&D saw us at war with France, and the country was pretty much one someone from centuries earlier would still have recognized. FM saw the continuation, truce, renewal, end, further renewal and final end of that war, as well as the first signs of the Industrial Revolution that was to change the country and the world forever. I would recommend to readers that they consider looking at Sanditon, Jane Austen's final and unfinished work, which was beginning to show those changes coming in. I wonder, had she lived, what she would have made of the new world order which was slowly making itself manifest.

Finally, like D&D this is an alpha/beta/omega fic. In this world of Regency England, males make up 60% of the population, split between alphas (10%), betas (40%) and omegas (10%). Females, who in this world are not differentiated, made up the remaining 40%. However, a tendency to produce children of one gender or type often runs in families, which is why Mrs. Bennet's six omega pregnancies was not that unusual, nor was the fact that sons dominated in the families in this story. Child survival rates had improved during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, although the death of one or more children at or just after birth was still fairly common, hence the age gap between Castiel and Michael Bennet caused by two stillbirths. Omegas, like women, were very much the property of the alpha or beta who married them, with sadly often predictable results.

Unfold that cravat and let's get started!
Is The War Over?

Chapter Summary

Dean has to leave Pemberley unexpectedly, and there's a surprise new arrival.

So this was it. The road to Pemberley.

The Reverend Brenton Green reined in his horse and stopped at the turning. Less a turning; the road back to Lambton and the one right to the big house were both paved, whilst the supposed ‘main’ road he had come up the day before from Matlock was little more than a dirt track. He wondered uncharitably whether the house owner only considered his own convenience before dismissing the idea; from the enthusiasm the locals had shown at the inn last night when he had revealed his destination, he knew the owner could not be that bad. Which was just as well, because that was the very person he had to see.

He had also had to slide away from the attentions of two of the serving-staff at the inn. Though he was an omega, his six-four frame and fiery red hair - Northumbrian, not Scottish he had patiently explained more than once - made him look the archetypal Celtic alpha warrior. He had stopped wearing his traditional Northumbrian kilt to local functions after being groped four times at the last one (and one of those by another omega!), but he was proud of his heritage, and knew that at thirty years of age he was in his prime. There was also the touchy issue of his patroness, who stuck rigidly to the belief that clergy (or at least her local vicar) should be virtuously single. Though that might not be a problem for much longer.

He looked at the finger-post pointing away from the main road, and sighed. He was the bearer of bad news, though from what little he knew of the family, the man he was meeting would probably not take it that badly. It was the other matter which would be the problem, persuading a man he had never met to do something he was obviously unwilling to do. It was not going to be easy.

The vicar of Medlington-cum-Hunsford pulled at his reins, turned his horse and headed along the road to Pemberley.

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Castiel James Winchester had woken early that morning. Usually his husband was first up, and would wake him to share breakfast in bed, but last night had been – well, just another Thursday really, but neither of them ever really needed a reason for it. At least this time they had remembered to lock the door; their eldest son Scaden had wandered into their room a few years back, and had subsequently claimed he had been mentally scarred by what he had seen! So this morning the master of Pemberley was dead to the world, a stupidly happy grin on his face, whilst his mate watched him fondly.

Castiel swung his feet out of bed and into his fluffy slippers (rabbit-eared ones, and his husband would deny till his dying breath that he had bought them for him), pulled on his dressing-gown and headed downstairs. He sniffed the air appreciatively; there was the distinct aroma of baking, which meant the frankly terrifying cook Mrs. Moseley was creating something heavenly again. Castiel knew that the kitchen was supposed to be out of bounds for the upstairs people in the house, but he had never considered confining himself to social norms, particularly when there was something
delicious at the end if he did.

Mrs. Moseley eyed him as he entered.

“Good morning, Mr. Castiel?” she smiled, a slight smirk on her face.

“Very!” Castiel grinned back. “Please tell me that’s blackberry pie I can smell?”

“Blackberry and rhubarb”, she corrected, opening the oven door and filling the room with a gorgeous fruity smell. “You seem to have picked up the master’s pie-tracking abilities. It’s for dessert at dinner tonight.”

Castiel groaned in disappointment.

“But that’s hours away!” he whined, pouting in mock annoyance.

The cook smiled.

“Then it’s a good thing I made two smaller ones as well, for you and that handsome husband of yours”, she grinned, setting out two miniature pies on a tray, before adding jugs and bowls of milk, sugar and cream. Then she suddenly stopped and looked up sharply.

“What’s the matter?” Castiel asked, surprised. He knew their cook, who had come to Pemberley from the estate’s holding in the West Indies, was gifted with what she called ‘the Sight’. Dean’s late father had brought her and her half-sister back from his last trip there, shortly before he died.

“Someone is coming to the house”, she said, looking worried. “He’s bringing bad news. A good man, though. Omega. Of the cloth, I think.”

“I’d better go and tell Dean.”

“No. The man’s in no hurry; it’ll be fifteen minutes before he’s here. Let your husband enjoy his pie.” She paused before adding “just don’t let him have any afters!”

“Mrs. Moseley!” Castiel said, blushing fiercely. “Thank you for the pies, though. And the ‘advice’!”

He smiled at her as he left, carefully balancing the full tray. She looked after him, a concerned look on her face.

Yes, let the master enjoy his pie in peace, she thought wryly. The next few years are going to be… difficult. For both of you.

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“Hullo!”

The reverend looked up from his book, to see a teenage boy staring at him, presumably one of the Winchester sons. He had blond curly hair, freckles, blue eyes, and reminded Brenton of those cherubic angels he had once seen in a cathedral.

“Good day, sir”, he said, quietly. “And who might you be?”

“I am Ryazan”, the boy said, looking at the vicar with an intensity the older man found surprising in one so young. “I am the youngest son. I have two older brothers; Scaden, who will inherit the estate one day, and Diniel.”
“Just the three of you?” Brenton blurted out before he could stop himself. Families that small were rare, unless children had died young. “I’m sorry, that was rude.”

Ryazan smiled.

“Papa had me three months early”, he explained. “Fortunately a cousin of his from Russia was staying with us at the time, and he was able to get me into the world alive, although he warned it would be dangerous for papa to have any more children. Ryazan Krushnic his name was, named for his hometown in Russia, which is how I got such an odd name. Papa went to some doctors in London to check, but they said the same, so it’s just us three.”

Brenton privately thought a child in Ryazan’s position shouldn’t be entrusting a stranger with that much information. Obviously the thought must have showed in his face.

“You can be trusted”, he said flatly. Then he tipped his head to one side, as if hearing something. “I think that’s father and papa coming down the stairs now. I should go. Goodbye, Reverend.”

“Goodbye, Master Ryazan.”

The boy was gone, and Brenton hadn’t even seen him go. He blinked in surprise.

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Moments after the boy’s sudden disappearance, his parents entered the room and formally welcomed Brenton to Pemberley. The vicar knew that many in so-called ‘polite’ society would frown on an omega greeting visitors whilst his alpha was present, but he guessed from the adoring looks that Mr. Winchester was giving his mate that this was no ‘regular’ marriage. This was undeniably an alpha in love.

Dean Winchester was in his mid-forties, with sandy brown hair, green eyes and a freckled face. He looked like someone who knew full well he was the owner of the most prestigious property in the county. His omega mate – Castiel, Brenton thought, remembering how the inn staff had said how much they liked him - was a complete contrast, probably slightly younger, but much smaller in build although only an inch or two shorter. He had striking blue eyes and untidy dark brown hair that looked as if he had just....

Brenton quickly curtailed that line of thought. The master of Pemberley looked at the card in his hand.

“Reverend Green, of Medlington Parish”, he said thoughtfully. “You are the vicar to my aunt, Lady Naomi de Bourgh.”

“I have that honour, sir.” He noticed immediately how the omega tensed up at the mention of the lady’s name.

“Then you will be fully aware of the estrangement between us”, Dean said firmly. “My aunt made it patent clear when I married the love of my life that she disapproved of my choice, and that he would never be received at Medlington as long as she was alive. In return, I made it equally clear that, until she did so, the doors of Pemberley would remain closed to her. That was nearly twenty years ago, and I have only met her on a small number of occasions in London since. Are you here to tell me she has changed her mind?”

The vicar could not but notice how lovingly the master of Pemberley held his mate’s hand whilst he was talking, pulling him closer as if to give reassurance.
“I am afraid that is not the purpose of my visit”, he admitted gravely. “At least, not exactly.”

“Please explain yourself, sir.”

“My reasons for coming are twofold. First, I am the bearer of some bad news, if you are not already aware of it. Lady Naomi’s sole daughter, Lilith de Bourgh, died of the winter flu on New Year’s Day. Lady Naomi herself has contracted the same ailment, and is seriously ill. The doctors say it is only a matter of time.”

Castiel moved round his husband, wrapping his arms around him. Dean looked hard at their visitor.

“Did she send you?” he asked sharply.

“No. I am here of my own volition. Her doctors say she may last for another week, but no more. I do not think she would approve of my being here, but she is now so often in delirium that I doubt she even notices my absence. But I think if you were to see her, she would recognize you. It would be a final act of forgiveness, if you have it in your heart to grant it.”

Dean looked up at his mate.

“What do you think, beloved?” he asked. “It means a week or more away from you, particularly with the roads so bad as they are. And she was not good to you at all.”

Castiel leant forward and kissed him lightly on his cheek.

“I think you should go”, he said, though Brenton noticed his voice trembled as he spoke. “She was always too proud to back down from her hatred towards me, but an act of forgiveness on your part would be truly Christian. I shall miss you dreadfully, of course. But if you are delayed until after your birthday, we can always... celebrate it when you do come back.”

From the slight smile the creased Dean Winchester's features, the vicar could guess exactly what form that ‘celebration’ would take. He coughed pointedly.

“It is imperative we start back as soon as possible, sir”, he said. “The doctors are not hopeful. If we could start this morning, we can be in London by nightfall, and in Kent by lunch tomorrow.”

“Yes, I suppose I had better go and pack”, Dean sighed. “Cas, will you ask Mrs. Moseley to sort us out some food for the journey, and some refreshment for the good reverend whilst I get ready? And ask Beddowes to arrange for some servants to come with us for London?”

“I will, beloved.” Castiel kissed him again, and left.

The reverend looked at the frankly soppy look on the face of one of the richest men in Derbyshire. He would have been dishonest with himself if he had not admitted to a slight touch of jealousy.

It never rains but it pours.

That was Castiel’s thought as he watched his mate’s carriage roll off down the drive, the driving winter rain forcing the omega to stay in the shelter of the house. Pemberley was a massive place, but without Dean there it always felt so much emptier, even if the alpha’s scent was everywhere. But it was a poor consolation for the real thing. At least Dean had been able to take Mrs. Moseley’s pie with him, and Castiel had laughed at his mate when the alpha had cuddled the pie box protectively before leaving.
Just over an hour later, Castiel was painting in the art room Dean had had specially designed for him, when Beddowes ambled in to announce another visitor. Looking at the card, Castiel was surprised to see it was Dean’s friend and cousin, Adam Fitzwilliam. This immediately struck him as odd, as he knew the two had met only last week when Dean had called in at Standford on his way back from Derby. He put down his things and went to greet the man.

The intervening years had been good to Adam, who ironically Castiel had first met at Lady Naomi’s house all those years ago. Dean had become jealous of the friendship between them, and it had partially prompted his first ill-starred proposal to the omega, who had rejected him brutally. At the time Adam had been a fifth son and of little interest to his family, but events five years back had changed all that in a matter of days. The death first of the current earl’s eldest and only son George was followed in quick succession by those of Adam’s three brothers in service, one at Quatre Bras and the others at Waterloo just days later. This had moved Adam into the position of effective heir apparent at Standford, with the current Lord, his sole surviving brother William, in his late fifties, estranged from his wife and therefore unlikely to have any more children of his own. Against his brother’s wishes, Adam had subsequently married the daughter of a prominent industrialist, but it had not gone well, and Dean had had to use his influence to extract him from it when she conceived a child with another man. Though he was still handsome at forty, Castiel had subsequently detected a haunted look in the ex-soldier’s eyes.

He greeted the younger man, and bade him sit down.

“Is Dean here?” Adam asked hopefully.

“I am afraid not”, Castiel said. “He had to go to Kent as a matter of urgency. Lady Lilith passed away recently, and her mother is dying.”

“Oh. I am sorry to hear about that.”

He looked awkwardly at his feet.

“Was there something I could help you with?” Castiel asked politely.

“It’s not really the sort of thing you could do without asking Dean first, if you see what I mean.”

Castiel did not.

“Please explain, Adam.”

The former soldier looked like he might not, then the words suddenly began to gush out.

“It’s a friend of mine, a Mr. Garth Fitzgerald. He was the youngest man in my unit in the war, and we became friends. I lost contact with him after the battle, and only found him again by chance last month. He was begging on the streets, so I moved him into Standford whilst trying to find somewhere for him. But he keeps waking up with nightmares, and Bill says he won’t stand to have him in the house any more. I need to set him up on his own, but Bill’s sent me to Yorkshire on estate business today, and he needs somewhere to stay for a few days or even a couple of weeks. I was hoping….?”

He stopped, looking meaningfully at the omega. Castiel smiled.

“The Lodge, the gatekeeper’s cottage, is currently empty”, he said. “Dean’s having it refurbished, and the keeper’s moved round to the North Gate. But it’s still habitable. I’m sure Dean would have no objection to the friend of a friend staying there for a while.”
“Thank you, Castiel. I did bring him with me on the off chance….”

“Tell me more about him, then you can bring him in”, the omega smiled.

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“It's just for a couple of weeks, until I can sort something out for you at home”, Adam told his friend.
“We've got all sorts of places across the county. I'm sure I can find something soon.”

His friend said nothing, but looked at the floor whilst Castiel observed him. Early twenties, brown eyes and hair, but the most striking thing about him was a severe burn that ran down the entire right-hand side of his face and neck, and probably further. He guessed the man must be expecting him to say something about it, so he did.

“How did that happen?” he asked.

Adam looked at him in shock, obviously thinking him more than a little tactless, but the younger man just shrugged.

“Some Frenchies trapped us in a barn when we were covering the retreat to Brussels”, he said quietly. “Decided to set fire to it to force us out, then shot the others when they came out. I stayed put, and got this for my pains. Was lucky not to get captured; they assumed they'd gotten us all and left.”

“You are welcome to stay at the Lodge for as long as necessary”, Castiel said firmly.

“I don't want charity!”

He seemed surprised when Castiel moved quickly to stand in front of him, gently placing a hand on the young man's shoulder.

“Your country owes you for your part in that battle, Mr. Fitzgerald”, he said quietly. “We treat our former soldiers very badly, in my opinion. Letting you live in a place that's only semi-habitable whilst it's being done up is a small price to pay.”

Garth looked at him uncertainly.

“Adam told you about the nightmares?” he said, sounding uncertain.

“He did. He also mentioned you found Standford and his brother quite stressful. Perhaps being away from all that will help you heal. And once you are settled in, you must come up to the house for a meal and meet my husband, when he is back from his travels.”

Garth looked at Adam.

“His lordship.... he'll be all right with this?” he asked.

“If Castiel says yes, Dean will say yes”, Adam told him firmly. “That is guaranteed!”

For the first time, the younger man looked slightly hopeful. Castiel smiled. The look suited him.
Gewgaws and Hard Cash

Chapter Summary

Dean's visit to his aunt yields a few surprises. Castiel visits his brother, where an old nemesis makes an appearance.

The carriage bowled its way along the drive towards the big house, and Dean began to feel increasingly nervous. His formidable aunt might be on her death-bed, but she was still Lady Naomi de Bourgh, feared by all her relations. He really had not wanted to do this, but when his beloved had proved so surprisingly - well, knowing the omega's loving nature, not that surprisingly - forgiving towards a woman who had hated him for the past two decades, he had been left with little choice. But that still did not make him any the less nervous, as Medlington Manor drew ever nearer.

They were through the gates and passing a vaguely familiar low wooded hill to their right, when he was hit by a sudden memory. Of course! That was where he had made his first ill-starred proposal to the love of his life, only to be shot down in flames. He could still remember the bitter humiliation he had felt for days afterwards, and his utter incredulity that someone – anyone! - would have the temerity to reject the suit of the then-Earl of Hexhamshire’s nephew. Then the terrible realization that he was in love with a man who hated him, the long road back to making Castiel think better of him, and his total incredulity at his good fortune when the omega finally accepted him all those long days later at Longbourn. The memory of those stunning blue eyes waiting for him back at Pemberley made him smile slightly, and he eased back into his seat.

The carriage made the short detour via the vicarage to drop the vicar off, and less than a minute later stopped outside the main house. Dean swallowed nervously, but steeled himself and made his way to the living room, where his aunt was resting. Her butler had obviously informed her of his arrival, and she looked sharply at him as he stood before her. Once again, he felt like the proverbial naughty schoolboy.

“So!” she said acidly. “That fool Green did go to see you after all! I thought he might.”

“Aunt.” Dean could not think of anything else to say. ‘Are you well?’ did not seem in the least bit appropriate, given the circumstances.

“I am glad you have come, nephew”, she said, suddenly looking every one of her sixty plus years. “I was going to leave you a letter, but it is better that you are here in person. You may do me a favour or two, if you are so inclined.”

“Of course, aunt.”

“Fetch me the box from over there. The green one, not the yellow.”

Dean went over and brought the box to his aunt. It was an old jewel-box, crafted with a lock that seemed far too big for such a small item, and quite heavy. She took a key from her pocket and opened it.

“This contains all the gewgaws Louis bought me over the years”, she said, her voice softening slightly as she spoke her late husband’s name. “The other box contains all the De Bourgh family
jewels that he inherited from his mother. They are the property of his family, and must go with the house to that fool cousin of his. But these – these are mine. And I want to bequeath them to Castiel.”

He stared at her in shock. She smiled slightly.

“I know I never forgave you for not marrying Lilith”, she said, sounding almost sad. “But that omega of yours was about the only person apart from you who ever stood up to me, and even though I hated him, I came to admire him for it. Take these. I know he won’t ever wear them, but they should fetch a pretty price in the right place in London, and he can use the money for all those good works of his that your cousin keeps writing to me about.”

Dean was truly stunned.

“I do however have three favours to ask of you”, she said, wincing as she shifted on the couch. “But before I do, I wish to state that the contents of that box are your mate's, regardless of whether you do them or not.”

Dean recovered with an effort.

“I understand, aunt. I will do my best to fulfill your requests.”

She reached into a drawer in the side-table and withdrew a sumptuous-looking gold necklace. She then extracted a red satin box from the jewel-case, and placed the necklace inside it.

“First, I want you to take this to Msr. Inias Collins”, she said, placing the necklace into the box. “He was always most respectful towards me, and I should like him to have something of mine. I believe Longbourn is not too far out of your way home, and I should not care to entrust it to the general post.”

“I will do so”, Dean promised.

“Second, that fool vicar of mine. He has been a good man whilst in service here, but I happen to know my cousin has a friend to whom he would like to replace him with. Of course the Church would not normally countenance forcing a man out for such reasons, but I am sure you know as well as I do that Horace has the power to make his life very difficult. I would like you to secure him a living in Derbyshire, if that is possible.”

He smiled.

“As it happens, Kympton is currently vacant”, he said. “I would welcome the chance for Mr. Green to become the vicar there.”

“Good. Now, what day is it?”

He was perplexed by the apparent change of subject.

“Friday the twenty-first, aunt.”

“I thought so. My final request, therefore, is that today you pay your respects at Lilith’s memorial, then tomorrow you start back as far as Hertfordshire.”

“Aunt!”

She sighed heavily.

“Nephew, I am dying. Let us not make bones about it. The doctors say it may be hours, it may be
weeks. I am truly grateful you have come here, but your place is at your mate’s side. Assuming the Good Lord does not suddenly request my presence this evening – and I am sure that is an event He wishes to postpone as much as I do - then I will say my goodbyes to you tomorrow, before you leave. That is my final request.”

It suddenly struck Dean that his aunt had never actually asked him for anything before. She had always commanded, in full expectation she would be obeyed. He swallowed.

“Very well, aunt. I shall do as you ask.”

“Thank you, nephew. Lorrimer will show you where the memorial is, after which you had better go to the vicarage, and inform the reverend of his new post. I need to rest now, but I shall see you at dinner.”

He bowed and left, taking the heavy jewel-box with him.

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The Reverend Brenton Green stared at him in astonishment.

“You want me to move to Derbyshire?” he said at last.

From his tone, Dean felt that he may well have been asking the man to move to some distant overseas territory, not just a couple of hundred miles away in the same country.

“Lady Naomi is of the opinion that her successor, Lord Horace, would want to replace you”, he explained. “I know a little of the man myself, and I fear she may well be right. Kympton is a good living; the parish is extensive, but better provided for than here. And you do not exactly like it here, I think.”

The reverend blushed slightly.

“I say your face when we came in at the main gates”, Dean smiled. “You looked the same way I felt, returning somewhere you did not really want to be. Derbyshire may be a little colder than Kent, but you could adapt.”

Brenton thought about this. The man was right. He had got this living mainly through his very distant connections to the De Bourghs; he was a second cousin once removed to Lady Naomi’s late husband. So if the new Lord of Medlington wanted him out, then out he would most definitely be. At least this way he would still have a roof over his head.

“I accept, sir”, he smiled. “And thank you very much for your generous offer.”

“That is good. My aunt has instructed me to start for home tomorrow, and I have reluctantly acquiesced in her wishes. You of course will wish to remain here…. until matters are resolved, but after that I shall look forward to welcoming you to Pemberley.”

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Back in Derbyshire, Castiel was missing his mate dreadfully, so he decided to make the short drive over to his brother’s house for some company. That was the one thing he could be guaranteed of; Sam and Gabriel had had six children - the alpha often quipped it was seven if you included his mate - so chaos was a normal state of affairs at Lynton.

The Pemberley carriage pulled up in front of the house, but not before Castiel had spotted three of
the children – no, make that his brother and two of the children – playing outside in the fountain. This despite the fact it had snowed earlier in the day, and it was still bitterly cold. Castiel recognized the boys as Lancelot and Galahad (he often wondered if Sam had regretted allowing Gabriel to pick a name for the second birth in return for him naming their eldest, even if the identical twins were close to their papa in appearance) splashing each other and his brother with what must be ice-cold water. Long experience of Gabriel meant he observed the spectacle from the safety of the steps, until his brother succeeded in sousing the boys and quickly rushed out of reach of any retaliation to stand by his brother.

“Pax!” he shouted. “Visitors! Even if it is only His Highness!”

“Gabe!” Castiel scolded.

“Inside, the pair of you”, Gabriel ordered the twins, as they came rushing up. “I promised your father only ten minutes, and we’ve been out for much longer. Begone, or face the Wrath of Sam!”

The boys giggled, and rushed dripping up to where two of the servants stood waiting with towels. Gabriel dried himself off with his own towel and turned to his brother.

“So to what do we humble peasants owe the honour of a visit from… ow!”

Castiel punched him affectionately, and Gabriel faked a collapse as if in pain.

“Dean has gone to Kent to see his aunt”, he explained. “She is dangerously ill, and not expected to live much longer.”

“Lady Naomi?” Gabriel asked, rubbing his own towel over his body as they walked into the house. “I thought they weren’t even speaking to each other?”

“She’s been to his London house a few times, but never here. She never really got over Dean marrying me. She worked herself into thinking he was engaged to her daughter, so I was obviously just a scheming little omega who drove a coach-and-four through all her best-laid plans.”

“And threatened to throw her out of your house!” Gabriel teased. “I remember. I wish I could have been there to see that! The moose is in the writing room, doing figures stuff.”

“You still call him that?” Castiel smiled.

“Sure. He’s big, hairy, ungainly, and hung like… ow!”

“How are we related?”

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Sam greeted Castiel warmly, and immediately ordered some tea and sandwiches.

“I saw Alfie in the library”, Castiel said questioningly. “He looked rather sad. Is everything all right?”

The parents exchanged a look. Castiel knew the eighteen-year-old had been away at boarding school, so to find him home was a surprise.

“No”, Sam said heavily. “He was away at Currier’s last term, but the school got a new head in September, and he started making my son’s life a misery all last term. The fool boy never told us; we only found out when a friend of his wrote a letter begging us to pull him out. We went there and
found the head had actually beaten him. I… may have lost my temper a bit.”

Sam blushed. Castiel knew that whilst Gabriel’s mate was one of the mildest-mannered creatures on the planet, he also had a temper which only the terminally stupid would raise. He had seen it but once, when a servant left in charge of the baby Isaac, Sam’s youngest child, had let him wander away in the garden. Only the calming presence of Gabriel (and there was a phrase Castiel had thought he would never use!) had allowed the servant to escape with instant dismissal and a few bruises, rather than serious bodily harm.

“Is he all right now?” Castiel asked. He quite liked Samandriel, who took after his father in most things, except he had somehow managed to grow even taller, much to his papa’s discomfiture (that boy should have come with a step-ladder!). He knew however despite his grumblings that Gabriel loved his eldest son, and must have been upset to know he had been suffering in silence.

“He won’t talk about it”, Sam admitted, looking as if he were the one at fault.

“And the school?” Castiel asked.

“Several other parents pulled their sons out when they heard”, Gabriel said, smiling slightly as he wandered over to the window. “We expect it to close…. oh.”

The other two looked at him in surprise.


And he was gone. Sam and Castiel stared at each other in puzzlement. What was that about?

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They did not have to wait long for an explanation. Barely two minutes after Gabriel had fled the room, Margaret Bingley entered in a storm of green crinoline. She looked furious, but at the sight of their visitor, her scowl somehow managed to get even deeper. Castiel flinched. The woman had only been back in the house for a year or so, after he disastrous escapade with a German princeling that had led her brother to exile her to one of the estate's more distant cottages.

“Is something wrong, Meg?” Sam asked casually, leaning on the fireplace.

Castiel could read his body language perfectly. The owner of Lynton knew full well what had caused this reaction, and was ready for battle. He really wished he could excuse himself, but Margaret Bingley spoke before he had a chance.

“I have just returned from the dressmakers’, brother!” she almost spat.

“Indeed”, Sam said, casually. “Did you see anything you liked?”

“I did! Except when I spoke to Mr. Glage, he informed me, and I quote, that ‘my account had been suspended’.”

“That is what I told him”, Sam said, and Castiel could see he was far too calm. Whatever this was, it had been brewing for some time.

“May your beloved sister know why?” she hissed.

“I am putting you on an allowance”, Sam said quietly. “I have yet to finalize the exact amount, but I have passed the message to all the shopkeepers in town that from now on, you will be using cash for
all your purchases. No credit is to be extended to you in any way, shape or form.”

Castiel was rather afraid Margaret Bingley would burst something, judging by how red her face was. She glared furiously at him as if he were somehow to blame for all this, then turned on her brother.

“And if I go elsewhere?” she asked, smirking slightly.

Sam pulled himself up to his full height.

“I have indulged you for far too long, Meg”, he said, sounding almost sad. “You live here for nothing, and I have paid all your bills without question. But enough is enough. You will not find me unreasonable in your allowance, but if I receive one more bill with your name on it, then the doors of this house will be forever closed to you, and I will send you to back to live in that cottage.”

She recoiled as if he had struck her.

“The c...c...cottage?” she almost shrieked.

“That is my final word on the subject”, Sam said firmly. “Come, Cas. Let us see if we can find Alfie. Perhaps he might open up to you more than me.”

He led the way out of the room and Castiel followed gladly, leaving a stunned woman still spluttering with rage behind them.

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“Uncle Cas?”

“Yes, Alfie?”

The boy – no, young man; he’d turned eighteen only last week – looked at him nervously. “Nothing”, he muttered, and buried his head even deeper into his book.

“What would you like to ask me?” Castiel said patiently.

“I just thought…..” He reddened, and seemed to run out of words.

“You thought what?” Castiel asked.

“I shouldn’t say.”

“You want to be away from Lynton for a while?”

Judging from the fact Sam’s eldest son somehow managed to go even redder, he knew he had guessed correctly.

“It’s just…. it’s such a madhouse here, what with five brothers, and the twins make it seem even more. And I love my papa, but he’s a handful, too. I just think my father would be upset.….”

“Sam only wants what is best for you, Alfie”, Castiel said firmly. “If you need to spend some time away just being quiet and thinking about things, then I am sure he would be fine.”

“Do you think so?”

“Why do you not ask him? He’s standing right behind you.”
Samandriel jumped as if he had been shot, and looked round fearfully to see his father standing there. There was an awkward pause.

“Well?” Sam said eventually. “You don't want to keep Cas waiting. Or do you need help with the packing?”

The young man threw his arms round his father and hugged him, trying but failing to not cry, then bowed quickly to Castiel before tearing off upstairs. Sam smiled at his visitor.

“Thanks”, he grinned. “I owe you one!”
Dean struggles to return home - but Castiel makes sure his efforts are well rewarded.

It was snowing as the carriage finally left the smoke and grime of the capital behind, and bowled its way through rural Middlesex. Dean looked out of the carriage window, and as always with this type of weather, he was reminded of his late sister.

Fate had not been kind to Anna Winchester. After Castiel had been installed as Laird of Pemberley, she had become markedly more outgoing, and at twenty-one had made a good marriage to Edward Phelps, a minor baronet just over the Staffordshire border and some twelve years her senior. Dean had been tempted to oppose the match on those grounds alone, but his mate had lobbied hard on behalf of the couple, and he had eventually granted his consent. The marriage had been a happy one, but of their four children, only the oldest, named after her mother, had survived. The others, all alpha sons, had died shortly after birth, and the couple had been devastated. Then almost exactly a year ago, the baronet had been injured in a hunting accident, and had died soon after. Anna had returned to Pemberley when the snow lay thick on the ground, and had never been the same again. She had died in March, the day the snow finally melted, and Dean had followed her requests in laying her to rest beside her husband at his local church, despite some of his family telling him she should be placed in the family vault. After discussions with Anna's daughter, who had moved in with them and was now commonly referred to by her mother's name, he and Castiel had planted a cherry-tree in his sister's memory in the back garden, where family members often went for some peace and quiet. Dean missed her badly.

The road to Lucas Lodge took Dean close to both Netherfield and Longbourn, and he knew he would have to pay a perfunctory visit to the latter. Mrs. Bennet had softened towards him since his marriage to her son, although her attitude would certainly have been far different had she known that, following her husband's death some years ago, Dean had been paying a monthly rent to Mr. Collins to allow her to remain there. She now had only two of her sons with her, the second youngest, Raphael, having gone to the United States to become a preacher (Dean had always found that amusing, remembering his first meeting with the Bennets in which Raphael and Balthazar had behaved shamelessly at the county ball). Michael was still unmarried and as studious as ever, and Balthazar... was back.

Balthazar Wickham, though he probably did not want to be reminded of that name. He and his husband had had a stormy relationship, and in spite of Wickham's promise to stay with his mate for at least a decade, Dean had been amazed that they had lasted a full fourteen years – no children, perhaps mercifully - before Wickham was killed at Waterloo. Or at least Dean hoped he had been; the body had never been found, which meant his widower had had to wait a full five years for the marriage to be declared over. Probably didn't want to wait five minutes, Dean thought sourly, if accurately.

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Dean had taken the precaution of sending a letter ahead to warn Mr. Collins of his impending arrival, and he and his mate were out on the steps of Lucas Lodge to greet him. Old Lord Zachariah had died
of in a prostitute's bed several years before (Dean could find no-one who really missed him, even his widow Lady Amelia), at which time Mr. Collins had quit Kent and moved into Lucas Lodge with his family, his mate and their three children. The dowager Lady Amelia and her two Bassett hounds had moved into the Old Lodge, as she infinitely preferred their company to that of her grandchildren.

“Welcome back!” Mr. Collins smiled, as Dean alighted from his carriage. “I am sorry it could not be under happier circumstances.”

“Indeed”, Dean said. “I would have stayed with my aunt, but she was insistent that I return home, and I could not disobey her.”

“I quite understand”, Mr. Collins said. “Would you like to have dinner served immediately, or do you wish to step across to Longbourn first?”

Dean suppressed a smile that the former vicar was tactful enough not to openly imply that he would prefer his visit to that house to be of as short a duration as was socially permissible.

“If possible, I would like to take some brief refreshments first”, he said. “The roads are poor at this time of year, and the journey has been tiring. But I would then like to go over and see Mrs. Bennet before dinner, if that is acceptable?”

“Naturally!” Mr. Collins beamed. “Inias, dearest heart, ask Mrs. Billings if she can serve us tea and cakes in the orangery. In twenty minutes' time, if that is acceptable, Mr. Winchester?”

“Thank you, sir, that would be ample.”

“Excellent! Let us go in.”

Dean observed silently that, compared to how he had been when they had first met, Mr. Collins was a lot less voluble. But there was also a hint of strain in his eyes, and in those of his mate. As he followed his valet upstairs, he wondered if they might enlighten him as to the cause during his visit.

+~+~+

It only took a few minutes to make the short drive to Longbourn, which was much as Dean remembered it. The snow had stopped for now, though the skies were still an ominous leaden grey, and in the distance he could make out the white-speckled slope of Barton Rise, where he had made his second proposal of marriage to Castiel, and had finally been accepted. He smiled fondly at the memory, and wished he was with his mate rather than here.

His luck, however, was in. Upon arrival at the house, he found that the two Bennets he least wanted to see were not there. Only Michael Bennet, a tired-looking man in his mid-thirties, was home to receive him. He reminded Dean a little of his late father, though he supposed long-term exposure to Mrs. Bennet would make any man look like that.

“Mother took Balthazar to the lawyer in London, and they plan to stay there overnight”, he informed Dean. “In a few months' time his marriage will become void, and there were some forms that had to be completed.”

Dean tried not to show his relief.

“I will write her a note when I return to Lucas Lodge, saying how sorry I was to miss her”, he said, not failing to notice the slight smirk on the omega's face. “I would call again, but I wish to be on my way back to Derbyshire first thing tomorrow morning.”
Michael Bennet nodded. He looked as if he was trying to say something, but could not think of how to put it.

“Do you wish me to take a letter to your brother?” Dean offered. “I could call and collect it on my way north?”

“No.... well, yes....”

He looked embarrassed.

“You are my brother, Michael. Do you wish to say something to me?”

The omega hesitated.

“Is there any chance.... are there any jobs in Derbyshire?” the omega asked breathlessly. “It's just... I hate it here! Ever since Balth got back, everyone looks at me as 'his brother'. And Mother clearly prefers him. I would just love the chance to get away.”

“Have you spoken to Cas about this?” Dean asked.

“Not yet. I... I didn't want to worry him.”

Dean thought for a moment.

“I presume you would be looking for something in education or learning?” he asked.

“I would take anything to get away from this place!”

He said it with such vehemence that Dean was almost taken aback.

“I shall make inquiries when I get home”, he said. “I promise I shall write to you as soon as something is available.”

“Thank you, brother.”

Dean smiled, make his farewells and left, uttering a silent prayer of thanks to the heavens for the safe deliverance of his eardrums. And, bearing in mind Mrs. Bennet's cooking, his stomach.

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Dinner at Lucas Lodge that evening was a strained affair, and Dean noticed that two places at the table were conspicuously empty. The two sons present were Mr. Collins' two youngest, Ion, now about fifteen, and Paul, who was almost a teenager. That meant the missing son must be the eldest, Nehemiah, who if Dean remembered correctly was almost eighteen. But then who was the other place for?

“My brother”, Inias Collins said heavily, noticing Dean eying the empty seats.

“Uriel?” Dean said, surprised. “Does he still live here?”

The dark look on Mr. Collins’ face suggested that the answer was probably in the affirmative.

“We are having further issues with our son and heir, Mr. Winchester”, he admitted. “He has always been wayward, but ever since my brother returned from London in, ahem, somewhat inauspicious circumstances, young Nehemiah has been like one of those wretched new railway locomotives they keep placing on display everywhere. Always going off the rails!”
“Crowley, dear.” Inias reached over to take his mate's hand, and the beta noticeably calmed down a little.

“How are your children doing, Mr. Winchester?” Mr. Collins asked, deftly changing the subject.

“Very well”, Dean smiled. “Scaden is as quiet and studious as ever, Diniel looks the image of his papa but definitely has my attitude towards life, and Ryazan – well, we're just glad to have him. And Anna has been better of late, though she still hardly ever talks.”

“It was very good of you to take her in”, Mr. Collins intoned seriously. “Not all families would have done so. How old is she now, if you do not mind me asking?”

“Seventeen, the same as Scaden, though she is small for her age. Well, thin-boned; she is actually taller than Cas, but so incredibly slim. I do not understand how, as she eats more than any of my sons, but she never seems to put on weight.”

Inias smiled knowingly at his well-rounded husband.

“Not a word, dear!” smiled Mr. Collins, waving an admonitory finger across the table. “Not one single word!”

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Dean left early the following morning, stopping only briefly at Longbourn to pick up Michael Bennet's letter and to iterate his promise to find him a position somewhere in Derbyshire. It was snowing again shortly after he left there, but luckily it was only a short drive to Watling Street, which would take him most of the way home. It was fortunate that, ever since the Act of Union two decades ago, the government had set about buying up the old Roman road to improve communications with Ireland, so the first part of the journey was quite fast. And even better, Dean's carriage outran the snowstorm just before turning off the main road, so much so that he decided to risk stopping for lunch and a rest at Lichfield.

That proved to be a mistake. He came out of the inn after just three-quarters of an hour to find the world around him had suddenly turned very white. The roads were still just about passable, but by the time they reached Derby it was clear the carriage could not continue. Dean, however, was determined to get home; looking at his watch he knew it would be his birthday in less than eight hours, and he wanted to celebrate it with his mate. He hired a horse in the city and set off to traverse the final twenty or so miles to Pemberley.

Less than a mile into the journey, he was beginning to wish himself safely back in the city tavern. The snow blew directly into his face, and if he had not known the country so well from all his travels around his wide estate, he would certainly have got hopelessly lost. He was fortunate in that the River Derwent ran beside the road home for almost its entire length, and so he was able to chalk up the places he passed through – Belper, Ambergate, Whatstandwell, Matlock, the turning to a Lambton invisible in the screen of white that surrounded him – knowing he was getting closer and closer to home, and his mate. Finally he turned his tired horse in past the gatehouse - curiously someone was living there, judging by the smoking chimney; he would have to ask Cas about that - although the driving snow meant he could not see the house until he was almost at the stables, where he handed the horse over to a surprised groom.

Trudging into the main hall, he knew he must present a sorry spectacle, almost as bad as the one when Castiel had first seen him here, soaked and bedraggled after that summer storm....

Without warning, he had an omega all over him, kissing him passionately.
“Cas!”

“My love! I am so glad to see you! I was so worried, what with the weather, and not knowing how long you might be gone, and…”

“Hush, beloved! I am here now. You did not think I was going to miss my own birthday, did you? It’s not every day an alpha turns forty-seven!”

Castiel drew back a little, and Dean could see those stunning blue eyes were filled with tears.

“I was so afraid!”

“I am here now”, Dean repeated firmly, taking out his pocket-watch and looking at it. “You did not think I would miss your annual birthday present in… five hours’ time, did you?”

Castiel had slipped a hand inside Dean’s fine shirt, and he suddenly realized that hand had moved down and was now stroking him… just there!

“Why wait five hours?” Castiel growled seductively. “I will see you upstairs in five minutes, beloved!”

And he was gone. Dean gulped, then turned to Beddowes, who as usual had magically materialized right next to him.

“I understand, sir”, the butler intoned gravely. “We shall expect to see you some time tomorrow. Food will be left on the table outside your room. Just ring the kitchen bell when you are ready.”

As he chased Castiel up the stairs, Dean thought he had some of the best servants in the world!

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Almost exactly twenty-four hours later, the master of Pemberley and his mate were sat at dinner together. Both were smiling.

“I did drop by and call on your mother whilst I was in Hertfordshire, but she was in London”, Dean said, reaching for the bread, and wincing at the sudden movement. “She and Balthazar were out. I met Michael, though. He told me he wants to move here, if I can find him a post.”

“I was wondering how long he would be able to put up with Balthazar in the same house”, Castiel said. “The local school is growing, so they will need a new teacher some time soon. Though he can always tutor Dino and Ry, once Wellings is gone.”

“He is going?” Dean was surprised.

“He told you last week, when I was there”, Castiel reminded him.

“You know I always forget things when you are with me, beloved. My mind is often somewhere else.”

“In the gutter, usually!” Castiel whispered.

“Hey!” Though Dean had to admit his mate was not far wrong.

“It is going to be busy here, then”, Castiel said. “Samandriel is coming over for some peace and quiet, and we have the reverend’s soldier friend I told you about, Mr. Fitzgerald, staying in the gatehouse.”
“Oh, that reminds me. Lady Naomi asked if I might find a living here for the reverend himself. Apparently her successor wants the post for a crony of his, and she thinks he would force him out. Kympton is vacant, so I said I would install him there.”

“That is good. He seemed a very nice man. We shall have to go and hear him preach once he is installed, to show our support.”

“That's my Cas, always thinking of others”, Dean beamed.

There was a polite cough from behind him.

“What is it, Beddowes?”

“A letter, sir.”

Dean took the letter and opened it, then paled slightly.

“What is it?” Castiel asked, concerned.

Dean sighed heavily.

“It looks like our reverend friend will be travelling north sooner than expected”, he said. “Lady Naomi passed away two days ago, just hours after I left Medlington.”
February 1820

Lady Naomi de Burgh's funeral was held in London, since she hailed from that city, and Dean felt obliged as her nephew to go. The day before he left, however, he gave his mate the box of jewels. Castiel gasped when he opened it, and looked at Dean in amazement.

“But why?” he asked eventually. “She always hated me!”

“I think in the end, she considered you more a worthy adversary”, Dean said, smiling. “She did not expect you to keep any, by the way. She had heard all about your good works from Adam.”

Castiel blushed. It was true that he was almost as beloved as his husband around the area, and everyone knew the new school in Lambton, opened a few years back, had been his idea. Dean had made sure of that at the dedication ceremony, much to his mate’s eternal embarrassment.

The omega looked through the heavy jewels, and pulled one out. It was shaped like a small hand-mirror.

“This reminds me of the Alfred Jewel”, he said, thoughtfully. “I saw it at that exhibition in London last year. I think I shall keep this one piece in honour of your aunt, and sell the rest.”

“And what would you like to do with the money, beloved?” Dean asked.

Castiel thought for a moment.
“I think a hospital for the town, if there is enough money”, he said. “If you do not think it inappropriate, would you take them with you to London so they can be valued?”

“Of course”, Dean beamed. “The Laird Castiel Hospital. I like it,”

“Dean!”

“Cas, I want the people to know just how much you do for them. You would not let me name the school after you. Please?”

He turned what he hoped a pair of begging eyes on his mate, who laughed. The puppy dog look was something the master of Pemberley was usually on the receiving end of, either from his mate or his best friend, and it looked so out of place on the alpha's craggy features. Castiel laughed.

“The Winchester Hospital?” he suggested.

Dean sighed resignedly.
“I only wish you were as immodest as you are beautiful”, he said.

Castiel blushed.

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Dean was away for a whole week, including another night spent at Lucas Lodge, during which he called on Mrs Bennet to discuss her son Michael moving to Derbyshire. He found it a draining process; she wailed that she would only have one son left to her, and Longbourn would be so empty when he had gone. Though Dean noted that when he tentatively suggested Michael might stay, she suddenly became full of resigned acceptance, saying her son must do what was best for him. She inevitably angled for an invitation for herself and Balthazar to visit Pemberley, and Dean felt obliged to promise to allow it ‘when the roads were better’. And made a mental note to see if Castiel would allow him to be ‘away on business’ when it happened. He would probably have to pay for an extra wing on the hospital, but it would be so worth it!

He had met the Reverend Green at his aunt's funeral, and arranged with him to move to his new living in two weeks' time, starting as the vicar three weeks after that (the previous incumbent had retired to live with his sister in Lambton, but the temporary replacement he had brought in was booked until March). Michael would come north just a few days later.

Dean arrived back at Pemberley in the second week of February full of news, and not just about his family.

“We have a new king”, he told his mate. “Or at least, a newish one.”

King George III had been declared mad nine years earlier (apparently mistaking one of the trees in his garden for the King of Prussia had been a bit of a clue!), and his son, George Prince of Wales, had become Regent. The latter was an unpopular figure; he had married the German princess Caroline of Brunswick many years before, but they had separated almost immediately, and their only child, a daughter Charlotte, had died shortly after her marriage a few years back. Because of the prince’s subsequently ballooning waistline, he had become known in the papers as ‘the Prince of Whales’.

“So it is King George IV now”, Castiel mused, gently massaging his tired husband's shoulders as he sat in the living room. “But will it be Queen Caroline?”

“Over the new king's dead body!” Dean laughed. “Although it nearly was. He was ill just after his accession, and his brother the Duke of York rushed to his bedside, I’d wager more in anticipation that concern! Shocking, really; their father not even in the ground yet, and they’re at each other's throats! I do not know whether to call it unfortunate as many are, but the new king seems to be making a recovery. For which I am sure the Grand Old Duke of York is less than grateful!”

“Cynical, husband!”

“But correct, light of my life.”

Castiel smiled.

“The funeral passed off without incident?” he asked.
“Yes, thankfully. Lots of relatives, all of whom I am grateful I will not be seeing any time again soon. Talking of which, I met the new lord, Horace. He's about the size of the Prince of Wales – the new king - and he too is very into his cups. About fifty-five by the look of him. No children, surprisingly.”

“From the way you just described him, why is that surprising?”

“Because he is rich, of course. Medlington is one of the richest estates in Kent. Some will overlook even the sheer gruesomeness of Lord Horace in light of an estate like that!”

Castiel kissed him on the hair.

“What was that for?” Dean asked, amused.

“Just I got the gorgeous estate and the good-looking alpha as well!” Castiel smiled. “I hit the jackpot!”

Dean suddenly pulled him round into his lap, causing the omega to let out a surprised squeak.

“And tonight I'll show you just how much of a jackpot you hit!”

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Samandriel looked up as someone came into the library, only to realize it was his cousin. Scaden was a few months younger than him, and would not come of age until his birthday the following month. The younger alpha looked surprised to see him.

“Hullo, Alfie”, he smiled. “What are you doing here?”

“Trying to read”, Samandriel sighed. “It’s not easy, with those workmen making that noise outside.”

“Why not use the reading room, then?”

“Pardon?”

“We have a special room round the back of the house, facing west for the evening sun”, Scaden explained. “Would you like me to take you there? I'm sure it would be a lot quieter than here.”

Samandriel looked at his cousin for a moment. It suddenly struck him as ironic that the two of them were far closer in appearance – and for that matter, character – than they were to any of their collective brethren. Both were taller even than Samuel Bingley, blonde and pale, although Samandriel’s hair was straight whilst Scaden’s was curly.

“That would be much appreciated”, he smiled, closing his book and following his cousin out of the room.

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It was two days later when Castiel returned from a meeting with the architect he had employed to design the new hospital. He had rather wanted his husband to come with him as he was not comfortable with meeting people on his own, since some of them still had old-fashioned attitudes towards omegas being in charge. Dean had claimed he had tons of paperwork to do at home,
however, and fortunately the architect had been an amiable young man who had given Castiel several options as to how to proceed.

The omega arrived home feeling tired, and hoping the workmen who had been repairing the upstairs bathroom next to his and Dean's bedroom were finished. Despite the door through to their room having been sealed, dust still somehow managed to get in and over everything. He went up to their bedroom, and shut the door behind him. There was a dull light coming from the bathroom, and the faint sound of water. He walked closer, and pushed his head tentatively around the door.

And froze.

Dean was standing there, wearing his favourite dressing-gown. But for once, Castiel didn't look first at his husband. The room was utterly amazing! The old bath had been replaced with something that would easily accommodate two people, the floor was strewn with rose-petals, and small candles provided the only light. There was a small table next to the bath, with a heart-shaped cake on it, as well as two hot chocolates. It was... breathtaking.

"Happy Valentine's Day, my love!" his husband smiled.

It suddenly struck the omega that this was one of those rare occasions when his husband was anxious. He was unsure as to just how his omega would react to all of this. Castiel crossed the distance between them in record time, and gently opened his husband's dressing-gown, sliding himself inside of it against the warm, naked body within.

"You did all this for me?" he whispered, trying not to cry.

"I did. You know how we could not celebrate last year, what with first Edward and then Anna's deaths? I wanted to make it up to you this year. A long soak together, and then your favourite meal. And later....?"

Castiel hugged him tighter.

"My very favourite alpha!"

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"I didn't know my father still had it in him!" Scaden laughed the next day.

He and Samandriel were at breakfast. There was no sign of either his father or papa, just a 'Do Not Disturb' notice hung on their bedroom door. And for once, Scaden Winchester was glad Pemberley was so big, and there was a fair number of yards between his bedroom and those of their parents. At least judging from the noises he'd heard whilst climbing the stairs last night.

"We are both lucky in our parents, really", Samandriel observed. "My papa may be a little wild at times, but that is only because he wants to be close to his children. And I know he and my father adore each other."

"Are you missing home, Alfie?" Scaden asked, surprised.

The thought of the over-tall alpha not being around the house seemed suddenly.... wrong in some way. Scaden had got used to having someone of his own age to talk to. His brothers were all right but they had their own interests.
“No”, Samandriel admitted. “I feel I should be, but Lance and Guy are manic at the moment, and I can see father's patience running out with them very soon. I don't want to be in the vicinity when that happens.”

“I'm sure my father won't mind how long you stay here”, Scaden said confidently. “I mean, it's not as if we don't have the room!”

“Very true!” laughed the alpha.

And as Samandriel Bingley smiled, Scaden Winchester knew what those feelings he had been having for the past few weeks meant. Once again, he was in love with an alpha. Something the Church did not forbid, but which it frowned on with great displeasure. And which his father would probably kill him for.

This was not good.

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“Diniel, I wish you to run an errand for me.”

The middle Winchester son looked at his papa in surprise.

“Of course, papa”, he said. “What is it?”

“I wish you to take this hamper over to the Lodge, for Mr Fitzgerald. I have been trying to get him to come to the house for a meal, but he always declines. And I noticed the other day he is far too thin. It concerns me.”

“Why not have a servants’ ball?” Diniel suggested. “Then you could insist he comes?”

“We already have one of those every Christmas”, Castiel said. “I am sure he would see through such a ruse, anyway. I think if I went, he would be nervous. You might put him more at ease.”

“I will try, father.”

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His papa had been a little too generous with the hamper, Diniel thought, as he struggled with it to the Lodge door. He could have taken someone with him to carry it, but he wanted to see more of the reclusive Mr Fitzgerald, and felt a servant would have only got in the way. He knocked politely at the door, which was eventually opened by the former soldier. The man looked at him uncertainly.

“Diniel, correct?” he asked.

The omega was pleased the man had remembered his name, at least.

“Yes. My papa asked me to bring over some food.”

Mr Fitzgerald's face darkened.

“I do not need charity!” he almost snapped.
Diniel took a step back in fear, and his reaction seemed to unnerve the former soldier.

“"I am sorry, that was rude of me”, he said quickly. He stepped forward and easily hoisted the heavy hamper, despite his thin frame. “Please come in, and my apologies.”

“I quite understand”, Diniel smiled. “Thank you for carrying it in. I think my father may have packed an elephant in there!”

The former soldier smiled. Diniel felt emboldened enough to risk a question.

“Can I ask you something?”

“I suppose so”, Mr Fitzgerald said warily.

“Why do you keep refusing to come to the house? My parents don't bite, you know!”

The older man turned away.

“I do not think they would wish to see anyone like this”, he muttered.

“Then you are an idiot!”

The older man's mouth fell open. He stared at Diniel in astonishment.

“If you think either my father or papa judge people on their appearances, you could not be more wrong!” the boy said firmly. “My father employs three former soldiers on other parts of the estate, one of whom has lost a leg. Do you honestly think either he or papa – who got one of those men his job – would think any the less of you just because of your appearance?”

“I... they would....” Mr Fitzgerald spluttered. His brain seemed to have blown a fuse.

Diniel walked over to the door, but paused before leaving.

“I shall ask my papa to invite you to dinner next week”, he said firmly. “I shall expect to see you there, Mr Fitzgerald. If you are not, you can expect me to visit you soon after! It’s not as if I don’t know where you live!”

He swept from the room, leaving one speechless former soldier behind him.

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“Dean, may we go to Kympton today?”

The master of Pemberley looked up in surprise.

“Why?” he asked. “Reverend Green isn't starting for another three weeks.”

“He's preaching today”, Castiel said. “Reverend Unwin had a bad fall in the lane on Friday, and he agreed to step in early. This will be his first time in front of the congregation, and you know what local gossip is like. They will all know he is your choice. I would like us to be there to support him, if that is all right?”
Dean stopped fiddling with his cravat and came across to kiss his mate.

“What was that for?” Castiel smiled. “Not that you need a reason, of course.”

“For being the perfect mate, and always thinking of others”, Dean smiled. “Yes, it would be right for us to support him. But we shall still have to attend the evening service in Lambton.”

“Of course, my love.”

+~+~+

The reading room was definitely the place for peace and quiet, but it was also almost out of hearing for the first of the two dinner gongs. Only the sound of the second gong reached through to a Samandriel totally engrossed in his book, and he looked up at the clock in surprise. When he realized the time, he raced out and along the corridor to his room for a quick change. He came round the corner far too fast, and collided with a Scaden who had just come out of the bathroom. Both men fell backwards in surprise.

“Oof!” Scaden gasped.

Samandriel was about to help him up when he realized two things. The first was that his cousin was wearing precisely nothing underneath his dressing-gown.

The second was worse. He dragged his eyes upwards to see Scaden watching him curiously. He had seen the way (and the where) Samandriel had been looking at him.


He disappeared down the corridor. Behind him, the heir to the Pemberley estate smiled slightly.
March 1820

“No Anna this morning?” Diniel asked his father at the breakfast table.

“She’s ill again”, Castiel sighed. “Doctor St. John is coming over this afternoon to look at her.” He shot a look at the four boys in front of him. “And I don't want any of you bothering him again! He is a busy man.”

“He's a funny man, for an alpha!” grinned Ryazan, helping himself to some toast. “It's almost worth being ill so he can come and cheer us up!”

Castiel was about to respond when there was a distinct thud on the ceiling above them. He looked up and sighed.

“That must be your father”, he smiled. “I had better go and see if he is all right.”

“Maybe he needs to see Doctor St. John”, Diniel suggested.

“He's just tired”, his papa said. “He didn't sleep much last night.”

“Why was that?” Ryazan asked, a little too innocently.

Castiel raised an eyebrow at him.

“Do you really want me to explain in detail?” he asked dryly.

Four very red faces across the table suggested the answer might be in the negative. The omega grinned as he left the room.

“Are your parents as embarrassing as that, Alfie?” Scaden asked, munching on some bacon.

“Unfortunately, yes”, the young man admitted. “And Gabriel is so much worse. I doubt he can even spell subtlety, let alone manage it.”

He reached for the salt at the same time as Scaden, and their hands brushed together. Both boys reddened.

“Hey hey, what's going on?” Diniel teased. “Have you two got a thing here?”

“Shut up, Dino!” Scaden snapped.
“You two?” Ryazan asked, surprised. “Not surprised, though. You're virtually the same person anyway.”

“What do you mean?” Samandriel asked, curious.

“Well, you look similar, have the same interests, do stuff together...” He paused, before adding delicately, “you're not actually doing.... you know. Stuff. Are you?”

“Ew, Ry!” Scaden scowled, before noticing the hurt look on his cousin's face. “Not that I wouldn't do.... it's just..... I...”

He ground to a halt, desperately wishing the ground would open up and swallow him whole.

“I think I've had enough breakfast”, he said at last “See you in the reading room, Alfie.”

“Are you sure you want to do it in the reading room?” Diniel asked innocently.

Omega or not, Scaden still cuffed him as he went past.

+++

Over at Lynton Grange, there was also some gentle early morning teasing going on. Gabriel limped into the breakfast room groaning in pain.

“Morning!” said his husband, far too loudly.

Gabriel winced.

“Can you please keep it down?” he whispered, limping slowly over to his seat.

“Are you feeling all right?” Sam said loudly.

Gabriel glared at him. Lancelot and Galahad exchanged grins across the table, whilst Joscelyn, their next youngest, smirked. Reuben and Isaac were not down yet, for which the omega was relieved.

“Are you going for a walk after breakfast?” Lancelot asked his twin loudly.

“No, I think I will stay in and read a book!” Galahad shouted back.

“I hate you all!” Gabriel scowled.

“You're just getting old!” Sam teased. Three weeks' time, and you'll be forty-five. Maybe you just can't keep up with the young ones anymore?”

“I'm only seven months older than you!” Gabriel snapped back. The effort of talking louder than a whisper made him wince, though. There was a distinct lack of sympathy from his family.

“See, Joss”, Lancelot smiled. “I told you that walking-stick would have made an ideal present for the old man...”

Gabriel grabbed the plate full of bacon and stormed from the room, the sounds of laughter following him up the stairs. He was never drinking again!
“Would you mind if I walked you home?”

Mr. Fitzgerald looked up in surprise, to find Diniel Winchester holding out his coat.

“I... guess so”, he muttered. “Though it's not like I'm going to get lost, exactly.”

“You found your way off the field of Waterloo, which is more than many did.”

Garth was silent. The two left through the front door and set off down the drive to the Lodge.

“You were surprised, weren't you?” Diniel said eventually.

The ex-soldier looked at him.

“Was it that obvious?” he asked softly.

“A bit.” He looked at the older man’s facial scar. “You were expecting them to recoil when they saw that.”

“Most people do. I guess your family is a bit different, that's all.”

“We just know what you went through to get like that. Other people would feel the same, if only you'd talk to them.”

“I don't need other people.”

Diniel stopped. They were almost at the Lodge.

“What do you need, Mr Fitzgerald?” he asked with a sudden sharpness.

“Eh?”

“What. Do. You. Need? It's not a complicated question. Yes, I know your life came to a temporary halt at that awful battle, but you need to think what you're going to do next. Unless you mean to spend the rest of your life hiding from the world?”

“I am not hiding!” he snapped.

“Prove it!” the boy snapped back.

“How?”

The two of them were face to face now, glaring at each other.

“There's a ball being held next week, to mark Scay's eighteenth birthday. I dare you to attend.”

“You what?”

“Be there. As my friend. I shall leave the first dance free, and if you come, I shall take it with you.
Goodnight, Mr Fitzgerald.”

The omega nodded at the older man, and was gone. Garth stared after him, totally flummoxed.

+++~+++

He was more himself the next day, which was good, because his friend Adam called round unexpectedly.

“Hullo, Garth”, he beamed. “I think I have found something for you.”

Garth paled.

“You want me to move away from here?” he asked.

Adam was surprised.

“No”, he said. “My brother is being as difficult as ever. But Dean says he needs someone to do a load of painting at the school extension he's having built in the town. I understand Castiel's brother is coming to teach there, and he's helping design it. It's just painting and decorating, but at least it's work.”

Garth hesitated.

“You and Michael would go there every day to work on it, so transport is not a problem”, Adam said. “And you can't hide out here forever, you know.”

“You're the second person to tell me that”, Garth grumbled.

“Oh?” Adam asked. “And who was the first?”

“Diniel, His Lordship's middle son. Annoying little brat.”

“Dino talked to you?” Adam seemed surprised.

“Yes? So?”

“He's normally quite reserved with strangers”, Adam said. “Perhaps he's doing a bit of hero-worshipping?”

Garth glared at him.

“Some hero!”

“To him, you just might be”, Adam said quietly.

+++~+++}

Scaden had had a good birthday so far. Dean had promised to take him to the next horse-fair at Buxton to get him a new mount, whilst Castiel had given him money to buy a whole new outfit for himself in Lambton. His brothers had clubbed together to buy him an encyclopedia set he had wanted, whilst Anna had bought him a new writing set. He had taken his gifts back to his room
when there was a knock at the door.

“Come in”, he said.

It was Samandriel. He was holding a small wrapped parcel.

“Happy birthday, Scay”, he smiled. “I got you something.”

He looked somewhat embarrassed, but handed the gift over. Scaden unwrapped it, to find a beautifully detailed wooden box, with the initials S.W. engraved on the lid.

“It's more than it appears”, Samandriel smiled, producing a hairpin. “Watch.” He inserted it into what looked like a small knot-hole, and jiggled it around for a few moments until a small draw suddenly sprang out of the bottom of the box.

“A secret panel!” Scaden gasped. “Wow!”

“I know what it's like to have brothers who don't always respect your privacy”, Samandriel explained. “I thought you could keep important stuff in there, and only you would know about it.”

“What, like love-letters?” Scaden laughed.

His cousin blushed.

“Only if you have someone who loves you”, he muttered.

There was a silence that was several degrees beyond awkward.

“Alfie....”

“Uh huh?”

“Do I.... do I have someone who loves me?”

“Well....”

“As in, someone in this room right now?”

“Um....”

The cousins looked at each other, and instinctively both leant forward.

“Scay!”

Castiel's voice from outside the door made them both jump.

“Yes, papa?” Scaden called out, trying not to blush.

“Your father is going into Lambton. Do you want to go and get your new clothes today?”

Scaden looked at his cousin, and smiled ruefully.
“I’m coming”, he called back, taking his cousin's hand and pulling him towards the door.

His papa's knowing look once they were outside was very uncomfortable. Thankfully though he said nothing. ++++

When Garth arrived at the ball, he blanched at the sheer number of people present. Dean and Castiel must have invited every estate worker they had, as he could recognize several of the people here. The only nobility, the house owners apart, was Sam and Gabriel, the former sticking out like a lighthouse. He felt immediately nervous, and took a step back, only to find someone standing behind him.

“No you don’t”, Diniel said firmly. “I promised you a dance, and a dance you shall have.”

“Your father.....”

“... will have no objection to his omega son dancing with one of the estate workers, particularly one of so solid a character. And it will show everyone you have the Winchester Seal of Approval. This way to the dance floor, if you please!”

Garth found himself being propelled onto the dance floor before he could object, and saw that the Laird had indeed seen him, and was smiling in welcome. He decided to make the best of it.

++++

The evening was drawing to a close, and Scaden went outside in search of some fresh air. And in search of his cousin, who seemed to have vanished. He found him standing around the side of the house, staring up at the stars.

“Alfie?” he asked, worriedly.

His cousin turned to look at him. Scaden's heart sank.

“I've been thinking”, he said, looking sadly at the heir to Pemberley. “We’re both alphas, at the end of the day. We can never have children. But you're the heir to this place. You have to have sons to inherit. Your dad would never let you marry another alpha.”

“Alfie...”

“No. It's best if we don't pursue this.”

He slipped away before a stunned Scaden could say anything.

His eighteenth birthday had indeed been an unforgettable day. But not for a good reason.

++++

If Scaden Winchester was having a bad day on March 12th, then the 13th proved even worse for his uncle.

Samuel Bingley was sat at the breakfast table the next day when Gabriel came in. The omega looked unusually sombre.
“I’ve got bad news and bad news”, he said flatly. “Which would you like first?”

“Er, the bad news?”

“Your eldest son wants to come home. Like today.”

Sam was surprised.

“I thought he liked it over there”, he said.

“So did I”, Gabriel said thoughtfully. “And this was sudden. I asked around, and no-one else was expecting it. He was as happy as anything yesterday, but he sounded downright miserable in his letter.”

“Any ideas?” Sam asked.

“I think I should ride over and speak to Cassie about it. He might have an insight.”

Sam sighed.

“And the other bad news?” he asked, resignedly.

“You really aren't going to like this.”

Gabriel passed an opened letter over to his mate. He had gotten over his reluctance to open Sam's mail, though in this case he very much wished he hadn't. His husband read through the contents of the letter, and his face darkened.

“Right!” he growled when he had finished. “That is it!”
Snap!

Chapter Summary

A forced departure, an unwelcome arrival, a mysterious stranger, and a coach crash.

March 1820

Gabriel Bingley was not, by his nature, averse to pain – five births and six children meant he'd had more than his fair share already – so when he chanced to look out of the lounge window and see who was approaching up the drive, he should really have done the decent thing and stay to support his husband. Instead he kissed him lightly on the hair (fortunately Sam was sitting down with a book, so could not see what his mate has witnessed), muttered an excuse about needing a lie-down, then left the room as quickly as he could. He had just made it to the top of the stairs when their visitor stormed into the hall, and demanded very loudly to see the master of the house.

“And the storm breaks”, Gabriel muttered, slipping away to the safety of his and his husband's bedchamber.

+--+++

“Samuel Bingley!”

The master of Lynton sighed, put his book down, and turned to look at his visitor.

“Yes, Meg?”

“I have just been in to town, for some... essential items. Not only did I find that the shopkeepers all refused to serve me, but when Jameson drove me back, he stopped at Faraway Cottage and told me he'd been instructed to take me there. And what did I find inside that hovel? All my worldly goods, that's what!”

Sam sighed.

“I did warn you that if you went against my wishes, I would be moving you out of the Grange”, he said resignedly. “I received a bill from the dressmakers in Buxton yesterday. I have paid it - I cannot blame them for knowing of your ways - but you knew full well what would happen if you crossed me again.”

“I am your own sister, Samuel!” she stormed. “Your own flesh and blood! And now you turn me out of my own house!”

“This is not your house, Meg, as you are well aware”, he said patiently. “I have supported you at my own expense for long enough, and you have constantly abused the privilege. I will support a small staff for you at the cottage, and grant you a reasonable monthly allowance, although the first month's will be minus the cost of your little spending spree in Buxton.”
“But brother....”

Sam rose to his full height.

“You will come to this house by invitation only from now on”, he said, his face darkening. “I do not wish to inform the servants of this, but if you try to turn up here unannounced, I shall be forced so to do. Should you at some point wish to marry, I shall grant you a fair dowry, dependent partly on the circumstances of your future husband. You will now leave.”

She stared at him in shock.

“You are not serious!” she gasped.

“Goodbye, Meg.”

She scowled.

“You have not heard the last of this, brother!” she snapped, before sweeping from the room.

+++

Castiel knew that his husband was a good father in so many ways. But when their sons needed to talk about anything on an emotional level, they always went to their papa. The Laird of Pemberley also knew that, sometimes, children (or even young men) had problems for which they would be reluctant to approach either parent. So after seeing Samandriel off back to Lynton Grange, he went and sought out his eldest son. Scaden was sitting in his room, drawing, although Castiel noticed there was little on paper except something that looked suspiciously like wet patches.

“Would you like to talk about it, son?” he asked tentatively.

Scaden lifted his beautiful fair head and looked mournfully at his papa.

“Nothing to talk about”, he muttered.

Castiel walked over and sat down on the window ledge beside him, looking out over the rear of the estate. The sun was setting, and an early evening mist hung over the grass. There was a long silence, eventually broken by the omega.

“People thought your father was mad when he married me, you know”, he chuckled. “Some of his relations wouldn't even talk to him for years afterwards. But he loved me enough to see it through.”

“Yes, but you could have children”, Scaden pointed out. “And I'm the heir to the estate. It's expected for me to find a mate who can take Pemberley into the future. I can't do that with Alfie.”

Castiel ruffled the young man's hair affectionately.

“Shall I tell what I would do in your situation?” he asked.

“Go on.”

“There's three people you need to talk to about this. Third and last, you have to tell your father. Warn me before you do, and I'll make sure he's in a good mood.”

“How will you do that?” Scaden asked curiously.

His papa shot him a look, and the heir to Pemberley blushed fiercely.
“Before sorting life out, learn not to ask stupid questions!” he muttered.

“Precisely”, Castiel said. “Second thing is, you have to talk to Alfie, and see if he wants to pursue this.”

“He’s not interested. He ran away rather than stay to sort things out.”

“Not a strong character, is my nephew”, Castiel smiled. “But then few are. I think he does have feelings for you, Scay, from the way I’ve seen him look at you. It won’t be easy, but love never is.”

Scaden sniffed.

“And the first thing I have to do?” he asked.

“Ah yes”, Castiel sighed. “That will be probably the most difficult conversation of all. Because the person on the receiving end of that one, I suspect, hasn't yet thought through the consequences for them of your ‘grand amour’....”

+~+~+

“I still think it would be better if you'd have let me booby-trap the door for when she came round.”

Sam sighed at his husband. Gabriel Bennet had been a shy, retiring omega when they had married all those years ago, but six children had turned Gabriel Bingley into a very different creature. Not that Sam didn’t love him even more now than then, but sometimes his mate could be a pain.

“I shall invite her round for dinner on Friday”, he said firmly. “And yes, you have to be there. No suddenly falling ill, or throwing yourself down the stairs.”

“What about the children?”

“I shall insist Samandriel attends. The others need not.”

Gabriel hesitated.

“Perhaps he might be let off this time”, he suggested tentatively.

“Why?” Sam asked at once.

“Well... um... haven't you noticed?”

“Noticed what?”

“How quiet he's been since he got back from Pemberley the other day? And not just Samandriel quiet, but really quiet. Not to mention his sudden return. I did try asking him why, but he wouldn't tell me.”

“Perhaps I could....”

“You had better not.”

Sam looked at his mate in surprise.

“What?”

“Because I talked to Cassie, and I've a good idea what the problem is. Let me talk to his first.”
“All right”, Sam said reluctantly. “You’re closer to the kids than me. On every level!”

Gabriel smiled, until he suddenly realized what his husband had meant by that last remark.

“Hey!”

Sam chuckled.

+++

April 1820

Dean was not overly fond of spring as a season, and the weather in this one was awful. That was, it was awfully good; barely an occasional shower to break the fine sunny days that followed one on another. So he felt obliged, much against his wishes, to invite Mrs Bennet and Balthazar up for the weekend after Easter. His husband knew him too well; the minute he mentioned his plans, Castiel told him firmly that Dean was not going to be allowed to have ‘urgent business’ anywhere else that weekend. But if he got through the visit without grumbling too much, his mate would make it up to him afterwards. When Castiel went into details of just what that ‘making up’ would entail, Dean was suddenly almost looking forward to the visit.

Well, to the visit being over, at least. Same thing!

Dean also wrote to Michael Bennet about his mother and brother’s forthcoming visit. Michael had arrived some time back, and had settled into a small cottage not far from Mr Fitzgerald. He taught the three boys one morning a week, but spent most of his time working on the new school extension in Lambton, which enabled him to walk into town with the ex-soldier sometimes. Neither of them was overly fond of speaking, so they maintained a companionable silence which suited them both.

Easter Sunday came early that month, but it was marred when Anna fell ill again. Doctor St. John came over to see her, and diagnosed chickenpox.

“Uncomfortable, but not serious”, he said. “Fortunately both your uncles and their sons have all had it, but you need to get Dean to check through the servants to find out who can be with you.”

Anna scratched her red hair furiously.

“I get everything going!” she complained.

The doctor laughed.

“I know”, he grinned. “People like you keep people like me in business! I’m very grateful!”

She glared at him. She privately thought he was far too young to be a doctor – twenty-five, and he barely looked even that – but after the last town doctor had been caught coming out of a Manchester brothel, he had been recommended by Doctor Alton, the private doctor whom her uncles used. Lambton had been fortunate in that circumstance, and Peter Wentworth Mallard St. John was now widely respected, despite his age. He placed a jar of blue ointment on the dresser.

“Rub some of that on when the itching gets too bad”, he said. “Remember, the more you itch, the longer it will last!”

“That’s easy for you to say!” she grumbled.

“True. I just open my mouth and the words come out. Now, I’d better go and see your guardian, and
check my services aren't needed elsewhere on the estate before I go. I shall come and check up on you in two weeks' time, but if you feel worse, send for me at once. All right?"

“All right”, she agreed unhappily.

He smiled at her and left.

+++

Dean made sure that both Michael and the Reverend Green were present at the first dinner with the Bennets, so they could share his pain. He did briefly consider faking an urgent call from somewhere on the estate, but knew full well what would happen if he tried that. The last time he'd crossed his mate, Castiel had withheld privileges for a whole week. Seven days. One hundred and sixty-eight long, long hours. It had been one of the worst weeks of Dean's life. He wasn't subjecting his body to that sort of punishment again.

The week after, on the other hand, had almost made up for it.

Dinner turned out to be about as bad as he had feared. Mrs Bennet could still apparently talk without drawing breath, whilst Balthazar made it patently clear he found the omega vicar of Kympton attractive, much to the latter's evident discomfort. The poor man excused himself as soon as he could after dinner, and left for the vicarage, Michael taking the opportunity to leave (or escape) with him and walk together some of the way. Fortunately Mrs. Bennet soon after declared herself tired from the long drive, and went off upstairs, her youngest son soon following her.

“Don't say it, Dean!”

The alpha looked up from his chair.

“I didn't say a word!”

“You were thinking about my mother and brother, weren't you?”

Dean blushed. His mate could read him too well sometimes.

“They are your family”, he said carefully. “They are welcome here.”

Castiel finished his book and walked over to him, then kissed him lightly on the hair.

“It's just a few more days”, he smiled. “They will be gone on Tuesday morning. And you know what happens if you are good for the rest of their stay....”

He whispered something soft in his husband's ear, smiling as the words caused him to flush a deep red.

“Can I get a down payment tonight?” he asked, pleadingly.

Castiel looked at him consideringly.

“A small one, if you're up in five minutes”, he grinned, and left the room.

For an alpha who was just a few years shy of fifty, Dean Winchester could move surprisingly fast when the need arose.

+++


The Reverend Brenton Green had a list of calls to make that was rather longer than usual the following day, plus he had been late up as well, having overslept after the previous evening’s heavy dinner. He hurried out of the vicarage, only to find someone leaning on the fence, seemingly waiting for him. Not the person he wanted to see right now.

“Mr. Bennet”, he said, trying to smile. “We meet again.”

Balthazar smiled lazily. It would still be a couple of months before his marriage to the late, unlamented Martin Wickham was officially over, but he had not let being (technically) married stop him any time in the past five years, and he was determined not to let it stop him now. Besides, corrupting a man of the cloth, especially a fellow omega, was a challenge!

“Reverend”, he said respectfully. “I did enjoy our little conversation last night. I wondered if I might walk you to your first appointment, and we could talk some more.”

Brenton thought fast. His schedule meant his first call was over an hour away, but they weren't expecting him, and there was someone ten minutes away he could see first. The urge to be rid of this character was surprisingly strong.

“It’s only ten minutes away, but that would be acceptable”, he smiled.

“Excellent!” Balthazar grinned. “Now, as I was saying about Hosea....”

The two of them walked off towards the village, the cleric moving noticeably quicker than usual. Neither of them noticed that they were being followed.

+++

Dean stared at the parish constable, trying to fathom what he had just been told.

“My mother and brother are all right, though?” Castiel asked anxiously.

“They are fine, sir”, the constable said gruffly. “Fortunately the accident happened in town, so there were plenty of people around to help. They have been taken to the Fox & Hounds, and should both make a swift recovery.”

“I should go and see them”, Castiel said, worriedly. He looked uncertainly at his husband.

“Of course I shall drive you”, Dean said, a little hurt that his mate had thought otherwise. He turned back to the constable. “I am just trying to grasp this. Are you absolutely sure?”

“Absolutely, sir. The wheelwright came and told me after he'd repaired the carriage. Someone had partially sawed through the axle. If it had snapped out in the country....”

He did not finish his sentence, but both men knew what he had been about to say.

“I shall drive you to the tavern now, Cas”, Dean said firmly. “Constable, would you like a lift back to town?”

The constable looked surprised.

“Please, sir, if it's no inconvenience.”

“None at all. And thank you for bringing us the news.”

He went to get changed, thinking hard. Who on earth would want to harm either Mrs. or Balthazar
Bennet?
April 1820

“Talk to me, son.”

Samandriel looked up to see his papa standing in the doorway.

“What about, dad?” he asked edgily.

Gabriel came in and shut the door, locking it behind him.

“What really happened at Pemberley?” he said softly. “And do not spin me some line, son. I spoke to my brother. You were happy one morning, but desperate to leave the next. What happened to change things?”

His eldest son looked at him sadly, but said nothing.

“Who did you fall in love with?” Gabriel asked.

Samandriel gasped.

“Who told you?” he demanded.

“I guessed”, his papa said. “You looked like I felt, that time your father went away.”

“You never told me about that!” Samandriel said accusingly.

“It was your Uncle Dean's doing”, Gabriel said. “No, don't look like that; he thought he was protecting his friend, and that I was only after him for his money. He split us up, then of course he went and fell for my brother! Such is love, eh? When he realized what he'd done, he did his best to get us back together again.”

“Father left you? But he loves you!”

“Your uncle persuaded him otherwise. I was lucky to have Cassie; he helped me through that awful year. But the way I felt before Sam came back to me – that's the way you look now.”

Samandriel lowered his gaze.

“One of Dean's sons?” Gabriel hazarded.

His son nodded.
“But Dean wouldn’t object.... oh.” He stopped, and understood. “It’s Scaden, isn’t it? And he has to produce the next heir to the estate.”

“That’s why I left”, Samandriel admitted. I couldn't.... I just couldn't take it any further. His dad would never allow it, and Scay needs children.”

Gabriel sat down next to his son, and gently patted him on the back. He sometimes found it hard to believe that this blond giant was his son, and had come out of his body. Even the eighteen-year-old memory made him wince.

“He does love you, though”, he pressed.

“I think he does. And dad, I love him. But it's never going to happen. I know that now. I just want to stay home till I find a nice omega, and can produce heirs of my own.”

Gabriel said nothing. This was a hard one.

+++

He was still trying to think of a way forward later that same day, and his mate noticed his distractedness.

“Hullo, Earth to Gabriel!” he called across the dinner table.

Gabriel looked up.

“What?”

“You've been out of it ever since this morning”, his mate commented. “I take it you spoke to Alfie?”

“Yes. He is having..... relationship problems.”

“Oh. Scaden, I suppose?”

Gabriel stared at his mate.

“I may not be on their emotional level like you, my beloved, but I can put two and two together”, Sam smiled. “It had to be someone at Pemberley, and the son and heir was the most likely, particularly bearing in mind their types. Will Alfie be all right?”

“I don't know”, Gabriel said, concerned. “I am sure that there is love on both sides. I only hope Dean does not find out.”

“Dean would not recognize an emotional crisis if he fell over it!” Sam snorted. “No danger there. Just let Alfie know he has our support, whatever happens.”

“I will”, his mate promised.

Their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the morning mail. Sam idly read through the first two letters, but let out a groan when he reached the third one.
“What is it?” Gabriel asked, concerned.

“Meg. She is leaving.”

He looked hard at his mate. Gabriel stared back, unflinching.

“No reaction?” Sam said.

Gabriel smiled slightly.

“That is news”, he said. “Where is she going? And when?”

“Ruby has offered her a place up on her estate in Sutherland, Bonnie Scotland. Middle of nowhere, by her description of it. Meg says she can go any time.”

Gabriel chewed thoughtfully on a piece of bacon.

“I could help her pack after breakfast”, he suggested.

His mate shot a look at him. Gabriel smiled and slipped away upstairs to their room, where he very firmly locked the door. Only then did he do the victory dance.

He remembered too late that the bedroom was directly above his mate’s study.

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 Whilst those at Lynton looked forward to a welcome departure, four miles away Castiel and Dean were greeting some welcome arrivals.

“Uncle Bobby and Aunt Ellen!” Dean beamed.

He had grown very fond of Castiel's aunt and uncle, and they had got to see a little more of them recently after Mr. Singer had acquired a small factory in Manchester. Dean was hoping to persuade them to take a house in the area when they retired, which could not be long off.

“Good day, uncle”, Castiel said, smiling at his mate's over-enthusiasm. “I hope we will have the pleasure of your company for a few days.”

“Just passing through”, his uncle said. “Thought I'd spend a day doing some of the best fishing in the county, though.”

“I shall order the equipment ready”, Dean grinned. “How is London?”

“Dirty as ever”, Mr Singer sighed. “The whole city is uptight because those terrorists are going to be hung next month, and then decapitated in public.”

Castiel winced. Government agents had uncovered a plot to blow up the Cabinet, the top members of the government, back at the start of the year. It had become known as the Cato Street Conspiracy, because that was where the plotters had allegedly met. There was a strong suspicion that the unpopular Tory government of Lord Liverpool had engineered the whole thing to improve their chances at the general election which was currently being held after the death of the late king.
“Barbaric!” the omega muttered. “The death penalty by all means, for what they did, but doing it all in public....”

“Pour encourager les autres...” Dean said, ruffling his mate's permanently untidy hair. “And I would wager that there will be a big crowd there.”

“The papers have come out against it, surprisingly”, Mr. Singer said. “Like my nephew, they support hanging them, but not making a spectacle about it. I would not be surprised if this is the last time it happens in public.”

They were interrupted by the arrival of his son, struggling in with a heavy bag.

“Ash”, Castiel smiled. “We haven't seen you in a while. Why the long face?”

“He wanted to go to see that new ship they're launching at Woolwich next month”, Mr Singer explained. “But we couldn't get tickets.”

“Which one?” Dean asked.

“There's two”, Asher said, looking depressed. “They're launching the Beagle on the 11th, and the Barracouta on the 13th. They're improved Cherokee-class vessels, and I wanted to see what they're like close up, but we were in the country when the tickets went on sale.”

“I might be able to get you in”, Dean said.

Asher's face lit up. “Really?” he gasped.

Dean laughed at his sudden enthusiasm. For someone just turned thirty, he could be like a child when dealing with something technologically new.

“A friend of mine knows the quartermaster at Woolwich”, he said. “I shall write to him today, and ask if he can spare an extra few tickets.”

“That's brilliant!” the young man beamed. “Thank you, Mr Winchester!”

“Anything for my beloved's cousin”, Dean grinned, putting a protective arm around his mate. “Shall we go into luncheon?”

Diniel Winchester was, by nature, an optimist. But in the week leading up to his seventeenth birthday, he received two shocks that were to change his life.

His birthday was on the 22nd, and his brother Ryazan turned sixteen the following day. There should have been a far greater gap between their births but for the youngest Winchester's premature arrival. As a result, the family had taken to holding a joint ball for both sons, alternating between their respective birthdays. This year it would happen on the younger son's birthday, and the next two years would mark both boys' respective coming-of-age celebrations.

Five days before his birthday however, Diniel had a conversation with his elder brother which he would not forget in a hurry. He had, of course, guessed there was something developing between Scay and his Lynton cousin. He just hadn't thought it was really serious.
And he really hadn't thought through to the alarming consequences of that relationship developing to its full potential. He looked at his elder brother in horror.

"You are actually serious about him!" he said, almost accusingly.

"I really want to make a go of it", Scaden admitted. "But if I do – it means there will be no children. We could adopt, of course, but I asked papa to check, and adopted children cannot inherit. So when I die, the estate would pass to you or your children."

"And Pemberley would cease to belong to a Winchester, unless my mate takes the family name”. Diniel said slowly. "I am guessing you have not mentioned this to our father yet.”

"Not yet”, Scaden admitted.

"I hadn't heard any screams, so I guessed as much”, Diniel said wryly. "He will hit the roof!"

"Thanks for your support, brother!"

"Just telling it like it is. I guess this means my choice of future partners is a lot more limited, now. I have to choose someone suitable to inherit the greatest estate in the county."

"It may not work out between us, you know. Alfie did move out because of me. I am going to have to work hard to persuade him to change his mind.”

"Oh, you will, Scay!" Diniel laughed. "I know you. Poor Alfie is as good as up the aisle already.”

"Father permitting”, Scaden muttered.

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It was just after this conversation that Diniel's health, normally quite robust, took a strange turn. He was not ill as such, but he woke up sweating every morning as if he had had a nightmare. Yet he could never remember what he had been dreaming about, except it was a person of some sort. He did not mention anything about it to either of his parents, but two days before the party he slipped away on a walk and took a letter to Doctor St. John's house, asking him for a quiet talk during the party. He knew a duty call would only draw attention, and he wanted to find out just what was wrong before alarming anyone. Though he suspected that his papa had worked it out, as usual.

The party was notable for the people who did (or did not) attend. Samandriel had been invited, but neither Scaden nor Diniel were surprised that he had stayed at home 'with a cold'. Both were a little surprised, however, when Mr Fitzgerald turned up, and spent much of the evening actually being social. And the Reverend Green turned out to be a surprisingly proficient dancer, much to everyone's surprise.

Diniel finally managed to get Doctor St. John alone, and the two went to the library for some peace and quiet. He told the doctor about his symptoms, and was even more worried when a frown darkened the young alpha's features.

"Tell me this, Diniel”, he said gravely. "Have you experienced any dizzy spells at all? Or have you set out to go somewhere, only to forget where or why you were going halfway there?”
Diniel stared at him in alarm.

“Yes to both!” he said. “What is wrong with me? It's not.... fatal is it?”

To his relief, the doctor smiled.

“Definitely not fatal” he said, sipping his drink. “But it may cause you one or two problems.”

“What is it?”

“You are a selective, Diniel.”

“A what?”

“A selective. About one in two hundred of all males are, regardless of type. It means that, somewhere out there, there is the perfect match for you.”

“Do you mean I cannot get married until I find them?” Diniel frowned. “There are around a billion people on this planet, doctor. What are the odds on me finding the needle in that hay field?”

“Rather good, actually”, the doctor said, smiling. “You've already met them.”

“What?”

“Selectives only generally discover their nature when they chance to come across a perfect match”, the doctor explained. “Unfortunately it takes the body some time to register it, so it could be anyone you have met up to a week before the first symptoms appeared. It could be anyone in your life, someone you have just met, or someone you have always known. But they are out there, and you have to find them - again.”

“How?”

“Touch is the normal way. Physical contact with the one meant for you, and your body will react noticeably.”

“I have to go round touching all my friends?”

“Well, even the lightest of pats should do it. Just one thing, Diniel...”

“Yes?”

“Whoever your intended is, they will be feeling the same. They will have a strong urge to mate with you. But remember, you are the son of Mr Dean Winchester of Pemberley, right at the top of the social tree. That could put a lot of people off.”

“So if someone suddenly decides to move away from the area, I should get suspicious?”

“Definitely. And of course, this conversation is covered by doctor-patient confidentiality. I shall not even have to tell your parents about it, unless they ask me directly. Which, I suspect, is why we are meeting here.”

“Quite correct!” Diniel smiled. “We had better get back. Mrs Moseley has made two cakes, plus of
course a pie for my father. But knowing him, he may finish it and get to the cake anyway!”

The doctor laughed, and the two men returned to the party. And the rest of the evening passed off uneventfully.

Until Diniel Winchester took to the dance floor, and one of the visitors took his hand to lead him down the rank of other dancers. And judging from both his own body’s reaction and the way his partner nearly fell over his feet, he understood what Doctor St. John had said about a reaction working both ways.....
May 1820

Samandriel sat on a bench in the arbour, watching the old swing he and his brothers had spent so many happy years on. His childhood – but now, he was a man. How did that Bible quote from Corinthians go? ‘When I grew up, I put away childish things.’

He wished in some ways that he was still a child, with the simplicity that had brought. Even growing up in the madhouse with his five brothers, he had at least been happy. Now…. all that was gone.

He became slowly aware that someone was standing beneath the arched entrance, and turned to see who it was. Then he stiffened. His cousin stood there, watching him uncertainly. Scaden Winchester hesitated, then moved slowly forward.

“I am sorry to trouble you, cousin”, he said slowly. “I… in view of certain things that happened between us recently, I wanted to tell you a few things.”

Before he could say anything, his cousin placed a letter on the bench beside him, then bowed and left hurriedly. Samandriel stared after him for a moment, then looked at the letter. It seemed to be looking back at him. Sighing, he opened it and began to read;

‘Dearest Cousin,

I think you would not feel comfortable talking about what did or did not pass between us of late, so I felt it would be better if I put my feelings down in a letter. I want to start by saying something which I know may make you feel uneasy, but which I feel is necessary.

I love you.

I want to pursue this relationship with you, but only if you are prepared to allow this. I do not know the proper etiquette for one alpha to court another – I strongly suspect there may not be one – but I want you to know that I love you, and I want us to be together. Know that whatever it takes, I will do it, if you will let me into your heart.

I know you are fearful that our fathers – mine in particular – will not be pleased at us being together. I want to tell you now that I would bear anything – even being disinherited – if it allowed me a chance of being with you.

Please, if you have it you to open your heart and let me in, do so as soon as possible, and put an end to my suffering. The days are long, but without you they seem even longer. If you wish to write to me, I believe you can entrust Joss with a letter.
I remain forever yours,

Scaden Winchester’

Samandriel realized he was actually sweating as he reached the end of the letter, despite the coldness of the overcast May day. He read the letter through one more time, then folded it carefully away in his pocket, and started slowly back to the house.

Suddenly, there was a loud yell from not far in front of him. He baulked, then hurried towards it.

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As fate would have it, Scaden was not the only Winchester away from Pemberley that morning in an important errand. His younger brother had spent the week thinking long and hard about the repercussions of what Doctor St. John had told him at the ball, and in particular of what had happened on the dance floor afterwards. He had had no chance to test his theory, though he knew that, barring a miracle, he was right.

Which bearing in mind what his elder brother was pursuing a few miles away, made things…… difficult.

Diniel at least had a reason for his errand. His papa had approved a list of changes to the design of the school extension, after the foundations in one area had proved troublesome, and his son had volunteered to take his written approval down to the Lodge. He was just doing something neighbourly for one of the estate hands, he told himself firmly.

The fact he had used his binoculars to make sure his target was at home was neither here nor there.

He approached the house nervously. The Lodge had been designed like a miniature version of Pemberley itself, down to the same window frames and wall ornaments. And inside it was Mr. Garth Fitzgerald IV.

His selected mate.

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Scaden’s exit from the gardens of Lynton was… memorable. He rounded a corner of the hedge, and found himself suddenly drenched in cold water. He gasped in shock.

Lancelot and Galahad Bingley stared at him in equal amazement.

“We thought you were Alfie!” Lance said eventually.

“Well, I am not!” Scaden snapped, shivering. “If you have quite finished trying to give me or your older brother pneumonia, I had better be off home.”

He was about to storm (or at least squelch) off in anger when he heard footsteps from behind him.

“Scay?”
Damnation!

“Um, I had better be leaving….”

“You are not riding back to Pemberley in wet clothes”, Samandriel said firmly. “We will go inside and dry you off, and you two”, he added, shooting a glare at the twins, “can explain to our papa just what you did.”

“We didn’t mean any harm”, Galahad pouted.

“You never do!” his older brother snapped. “Nearly seventeen, and you behave like seven-year-olds!”

He looked at his sodden cousin, and suppressed a smile. Scaden really did look like a drowned rat. He hustled his cousin inside, trying not to notice how right his arm felt across the younger alpha’s broad back.

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Diniel Winchester’s meeting with his potential future life partner was also going off less than smoothly, although at least it was relatively dry. Garth had bade him enter, but the guarded look on his face told the omega that he knew full well the purpose of this visit.

“You felt it”, the omega said accusingly.

The former soldier glared at him.

“That doesn’t mean I have to respond to it”, he said defensively. “I read that selectives can mate with people other than their intendeds. You can find someone far better.”

“Perhaps I can, Mr Fitzgerald”, Diniel retorted. “Perhaps I can. But what if I don’t want to?”

The soldier drew back at the omega’s apparent anger, and he immediately felt ashamed.

“I am sorry”, he said, blushing, “Doctor St. John said that being with my perfect match would make me… more emotional.”

“I’m no-one’s perfect match, Diniel. Look at me!”

He realized a fraction of a second too late that it was a dumb thing to say, as the young omega had a tendency to take things literally. He stared at the man in silence for well over a minute, until Garth began to feel more than a little nervous.

“You do not believe I can see past the scars, do you?” Diniel said matter-of-factly.

“I don’t know”, Garth admitted. “But you’re only a heartbeat away from inheriting one of the greatest estates in the whole country! There is no way your father would allow you to even look at someone like me.”

Diniel refrained from telling him that things were probably worse than he thought, and instead just stood up with a smile.
“Thank you”, he said quietly.  

The other man was confused.  

“What for?” he asked.  

“If you are worried about how my father will take the news, then clearly you do have feelings for me. I just have to persuade you. I shall leave now, but I will see you again, Garth Fitzgerald. A Winchester never gives up. Goodbye.”

He bowed, and left. The former soldier stared after him, a sinking feeling in his gut.

A few miles away, Scaden Winchester was thinking. In particular, he was thinking that he was now wearing the clothes of the alpha he wanted to marry, sat in the man’s kitchen, drinking hot chocolate with him whilst his own clothes dried slowly by the fire.

He suppressed a smile as he remembered his papa’s joke about always wearing clean underwear in case you were run over by a carriage. He was glad for once he had taken that advice.

“I am sorry about the terrible twins”, Samandriel said, bringing over a plate of biscuits. “Mrs. Parker baked these yesterday, and they’re quite good.”

Scaden took one, and bit hungrily into it, only for jam to squirt out all over his chin. He glared at his cousin, who tried not to laugh, but failed abysmally.

“You might have told me!”

“I would have, if you hadn’t eaten it so quickly!”

“Yes, that comes from my father. He’s always hungry.”

The mention of his uncle served to remind Samandriel of what had come between the cousins, and his smile faded. Scaden looked at him.

“I really am sorry”, he said eventually.

“Nothing to be sorry about, really”, Samandriel muttered.

“I embarrassed you. I should have shown you a little more respect.”

“You were honest. I’d expect nothing less from you.”

Both young men were silent for a few moments. From a few rooms away, they could hear Gabriel laying into the twins about their prank.

“Your papa can be quite scary at times”, Scaden observed.

“So can father”, Samandriel admitted. “I suppose…. parents are protective.”

He looked shyly at his cousin. Scaden was in his house, wearing his clothes, and looking…..
He took a deep breath.

“I think we should go for it!”

He said it so quickly that he was gasping for breath at the end of the sentence. Scaden stared at him in shock, then a smile creased the corners of his eyes.

“Really? Are you sure?”

“No. I do not think I have ever been less sure about anything in my entire life. If this goes wrong, the consequences will be…. horrible. But I want to try.”

“My papa knows”, Scaden admitted.

Samandriel looked horrified.

“But he won’t tell father!” Scaden reassured him. “I know I can trust him. He will even help me break the news to him when the time is right.”

“And when will that be?” asked his cousin.

Scaden took another biscuit, biting it more carefully this time.

“Just after we’ve boarded the ship to that new continent they’ve found around the South Pole!” he quipped.

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Castiel looked up at the clock, and frowned. His mate usually came into the library most afternoons he was in the house, even if it was only for some brief conversation. It was unusual for him to break any routine, for despite what he often claimed, Dean Winchester was a creature of habit. The omega decided to go and see if anything as wrong.

He found his mate in the writing room. Normally Dean would lock the door if he did not wish to be disturbed, so when Castiel found it unlocked, he walked in confidently, to find his husband frowning over a letter.

“What is it, beloved?” he asked. Dean did not shrink from telling his mate anything about the estate, and shortly after Scaden was born had rewritten his will to make Castiel fully responsible for it in the event he died before their son reached adulthood.

Dean looked up, and sighed heavily.

“This is a letter from the under-manager of my estate over in the West Indies”, he said. “He says very different things from the manager, who wrote me only last month. I think I need to send someone over there to assess the situation.”

“Not one of our sons!” Castiel said firmly. “You know how bad the climate is over there. You cannot subject them to that, surely?”

Dean smiled at his husband.
“I would never do that, beloved”, he said. “But I need to find someone I can send there, and fairly soon. Whoever it is, what with the journey there and back, they will be gone for at least a year…."

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“How is the school project going?” Adam asked a few days later, sipping his tea.

Garth placed a cake on the table between them.

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Garth placed a cake on the table between them.

“Very good”, he said, placing a slice of cake on a plate for his guest. “My part is nearly done, now. A week or so, then they can finish the building in time for the new school year.”

“I hear Castiel was very pleased with it.”

“The Laird is too kind”, Garth muttered. “He even asked if I would like to stay on here for a while. Apparently the man who moved out prefers his new cottage, as it doesn’t have a garden for him to have to worry about.”

“Do you want to stay, though, Garth?” Adam asked, concerned. He had already sensed there was something bothering his friend, although he knew him too well to try to push for information. “I have a couple of properties I own at Standford that you could move into if you would prefer?”

The former soldier was strongly tempted. But he somehow knew that even at a distance of half a county, there was very little that would stop a selective – especially a selective omega – from hunting down their true mate.

“Thank you for the offer, my friend, but I think I shall stay here for at least a little longer”, he said, thoughtfully.

Adam sniffed the air.

“Have you had an omega round or something?”

He thought his friend looked momentarily panicked, before he suddenly relaxed.

“Oh, that would be Michael, the Laird’s brother. He was round last night finalizing details of the project.”

“I have never met him. What is he like?”

“A complete bookworm of the first order!” Garth laughed. “But he’s all right. Of all the Laird’s brothers – at least the ones in this country - he is the only one who never married, though if he could go up the aisle with a set of encyclopaedias, he would!”

Adam said nothing, but stored the scent of old books in his memory, and made a mental note to find out more about the Laird of Pemberley’s brother.

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His friend left for Standford later that day, and as it was a warm evening, Garth decided to go for a walk. He decided to avoid the house and instead walked through the gardens to the ornamental lake. He still felt a little uneasy about doing this, but Dean had insisted when he started that he had the
right to enter the grounds whenever he wanted.

It was still an hour before sunset, but the wind was getting up, so he decided to start back for his house. He had taken just two steps when he saw him.

Diniel Winchester. Sitting on the bench by the lake, watching him intently. Not approaching him or doing anything, just sitting and watching him.

He strode steadily – fairly steadily – home. He must have walked quite fast, because he was sweating profusely by the time he got there.

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Six days later, the five Winchesters were having breakfast together.

“You will be pleased to know I solved my West Indies problem”, Dean said, helping himself to more bacon. No-one commented on the growing mound of food on his plate. Castiel had long ago given up, and the last time one of the boys had remarked on it, Dean had explained to them just what sort of regular exercise he took to keep his weight down. In detail. Apparently the door to the breakfast room was not wide enough to allow three people to fight their way through it at the same time, no matter how desperate they all were to leave.

“How so?” Castiel asked. “You found someone to go over there for you?”

“Someone volunteered”, Dean said, munching a sausage. “Mr Fitzgerald, of all people.”

Castiel saw it, though he doubted anyone else did. His middle son flinched for just a fraction of a second before carrying on with his breakfast. The Laird of Pemberley thought quickly.

“Diniel, would you help me with something after breakfast?” he asked casually. “It will only take half an hour.”

His son looked at him, his face impassive.

“Of course, papa”, he said flatly.

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Castiel made sure the door to his room was locked before starting.

“You are in love with Mt Fitzgerald”, he said bluntly.

Diniel stared at him for a moment, then burst into tears. Castiel immediately pulled him close, holding him gently until the sobbing stopped.

“I know you spoke with Doctor St. John the other night”, he said quietly. “I saw you coming out of the library together. Please tell me there is nothing wrong, son?”

“I am not ill”, Diniel said, his sobs gradually ceasing. “But he said I am a selective. And Mr Fitzgerald is the one. The one I am meant to be with. And father has sent him halfway round the world!”
Castiel hugged his son.

“Listen to me, son”, he said, keeping his voice low. “You cannot make people feel things if they
don’t want to. If he really does love you, a year away won’t stop his feelings from growing. He will
come back to you more determined even than you are to make a go of it.”

“He doesn't think he is good enough for me!”

“That could change. Perhaps he just needs more confidence.”

“He might meet someone else.”

“He might. But if he loves you enough, nothing will come of it.”

“What if he doesn’t come back?”

“He will.”

Diniel sniffed mournfully.

“And what about Scay?” he said. “He told me he and Alfie want to make a go of it. That would
mean my children would inherit someday. Father is bound to want me to marry some wealthy alpha
or beta, not a scarred ex-soldier. No matter how much I love him!”

Castiel leant close and raised his son’s head until their eyes met.

“You might remember that your father married a poor little omega from a backwater in Hertfordshire,
just because he fell in love with him”, he reminded his son. “He will want what is best for you.”

“In his opinion!”

“If Mr Fitzgerald proves himself worthy in the West Indies, it will raise Dean’s opinion of him. And
that can only be a good thing.” He sighed heavily. “You boys! Thanks heavens I don’t have any
problems with Ry like I have with you two!”

Castiel would later have cause to remember that particular remark....
Chapter Summary

Spring turns to summer, and Garth departs for pastures new. Scaden goes shopping, Adam gets into an argument, and Ryazan gets wet, though not as wet as some.

June 1820

Garth sighed. It was hard to believe he had been at Pemberley for nearly six months, and his life had changed so much as a result. And now he was heading off halfway round the world, with the prospect of a definite job when he returned. Lord Winchester had told him that Tom, the estate manager, was planning to retire at the end of next year, and if Garth did a good job in the West Indies, he would be his replacement.

There was of course the small issue of that same Lord Winchester’s middle son being in love with him, but for someone who had survived (just) the bulk of Wellington’s Iberian campaign as well as the bloody fields of Quatre Bras and Waterloo, that was a relatively minor problem.

At least, it was until Garth hoisted his bag through the Lodge door and turned to lock it for one last time. Because there, pinned to the door, was a note:

‘I will wait – D’.

He swallowed hard, then remembered the cart driver was tapping his foot, waiting to take him into Lambton, from where he could catch a coach first to Manchester and then onto Bristol for the Atlantic crossing. He snatched the note off the door, and was tempted to screw it up and throw it into the garden. Instead he folded it neatly and put it in his pocket, before striding quickly to the waiting cart.

He probably would have felt a lot worse if he had known the writer of that note was watching him from the side of the house, smiling slightly as he saw his reactions.

+~+++

There were few things in the world Dean enjoyed more than fishing with Robert Singer. Well, there were a few, but none of them could reasonably be done in the presence of guests, and besides, his mate was over visiting his brother, so Dean would just have to wait until later. Though the mere thought of those things had Dean smiling to himself.

His uncle laughed at him.

“That omega has you whipped, boy!”

The master of Pemberley grinned happily.

“I enjoy being whipped, Uncle Bobby!”
“And we are changing the subject right this minute!” his uncle said firmly. “Ellen and me were glad to get us all away from London, if truth be told. It’s a very rough place just now.”

Dean nodded understandingly.

“The coronation, I suppose”, he said sagely.

The new King George IV was not due to be crowned until the summer of the following year, but the ructions from that forthcoming event had been causing the London mob to foment well above its normal level for weeks now. The king’s estranged ex-wife, Caroline of Brunswick, had made it patently clear she expected to be crowned queen alongside her unwilling spouse. He had made it just as patently clear that it would be a cold day in Hell before that happened.

“I hear the king’s friends in parliament were trying to get her debarred from attending”, Dean observed, casting his line again.

“By friends, I think you mean the members whose ‘friendship’ he’s rented for a while!” Bobby observed sourly. “They called it the Pains and Penalties Bill, Lord alone knows why! It’s bound to fail. I doubt they’ll get a majority in the Commons, and the Lords will throw it out even if they do.”

“So what will ‘Her Majesty’ do then?”

“Probably keep up her act looking after all those orphans in Kent. Though she claims it stresses her out so much, she keeps putting on weight, then fighting to get it off again.”

He looked meaningfully at his nephew, who grinned in response.

“Did Ash enjoy the launch?” he asked, changing the subject.

“He loved it!” Bobby smiled. “Hasn’t stopped talking about it ever since. That’s one of the reasons we came up now; they’re demonstrating one of those new-fangled steam locomotives in Manchester the day after tomorrow, and since we had to come up anyway, I thought now was as good a time as any.”

“Have you heard from Jo?”

“Still overseas doing missionary work. The last time she wrote, it was from somewhere called the Sandwich Islands, slap in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, would you believe?”

“She is all right, though?”

“She says she is fine. She is more concerned for the local people, apparently. All the foreigners coming there have brought in a whole load of diseases, and she says many of the locals have died as a result.”

“So she is not coming home any time soon, then?”

“She says she may visit Central America and do some work there, which worries me. That is a dangerous area, I have heard. But then she plans to come home, probably sometime late in ’22 or early in ’23.”

“That would be good…. hey, you’ve caught something!”
Their conversation was forgotten as Bobby landed what turned out to be the biggest catch of the day.

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“What is worrying you, nephew?”

Ellen Singer frowned at the Laird of Pemberley, as the latter carefully poured tea into two china cups. Her son had gone off to tell his cousins all about the launch and his plans to see the new steam engine, leaving her alone with Castiel. The latter sighed.

“Scay and Dino are having relationship problems”, he said eventually. “I know love is not supposed to be easy – no-one knows that more than me, after what I went through with Dean – but being a parent is almost as bad!”

“You want to help them, but you do not know what to do for the best”, she guessed. “Scaden is a man now, and Diniel isn’t far behind. You can’t baby them forever!”

“It’s a pity Ash or Jo never married”, Castiel said.

“The only way Asher Singer would ever go up the aisle was if the Church allowed him to marry some technological device or other!” she snorted. “And Jo is too set on saving the world. Besides, it’s not as if we have some massive stately pile like this to worry about. I am guessing Scaden has chosen someone unsuitable in some way?”

Castiel blushed.

“I thought as much”, she said, sipping her tea and helping herself to one of Mrs Moseley’s delicious cakes. “Nephew, that cook of yours is amazing! She should be working at some restaurant in London, not idling her life away here. So, back to Scaden. I am guessing his chosen one must be really unsuitable, which is why you haven’t told Dean yet?”

“Dean is a wonderful human being, but Pemberley is a sore point”, Castiel observed. “If he thought any of his sons were doing anything that endangered the estate staying within the family – well, I do not know how he would react. But I think I would rather be observing it from the next continent!”

“More like the next planet!” his aunt laughed.

+---++

As part of training all his sons up as potential heirs to Pemberley, one of the things Dean required them to do was to visit various parts of the estate and report back what they found. The relative liberality of their master encouraged most people to say when something needed doing, but Dean told his sons that being seen by their people was an important part of being a lord. One only had to look at Scotland, where absentee Scottish and English landowners had wreaked havoc in the north of that country, to see what bad management could do. This was why Ryazan Winchester found himself with a list of six calls to make one sunny late spring day.

Six calls. And one of them was to Kympton Manor Farm. Of course there was no need for him to actually go through the village, and absolutely no need to go out the other side and up to the vicarage, but he felt sure he could find an excuse to call on his clerical friend.
Who, a dark voice muttered inside his head, is nearly twice your age, boy.

As it happened, he did not need to think of an excuse to call. The sun was still shining brilliantly when he reached the farm, but although he was barely there for three-quarters of an hour, the skies had darkened by the time he had left. And just as he reached the village, the heavens opened. He hurried to the vicarage, and knocked loudly at the door.

Much to his surprise, there was the distinct sound of someone swearing profusely from inside. There was a short pause, then the vicar opened the door.

The first thing Ryazan noticed was how wet the omega was. His curly red hair hung down onto his shoulders, and he looked like someone had thrown a bucket of water over him. Which was odd, because the rain had started barely a minute ago, and he must have been inside the house to let his visitor in. Ryazan looked at him in confusion.

The vicar blushed.

“This is not exactly a good time, sir”, he said, noticeably not moving aside to admit his visitor.

The youngest Winchester immediately smelled a rat. He knew from his many visits when people were trying to hide something from him. Once before, he had found a couple renting a room in their cottage out, something directly against the terms of their lease. And the vicar looked decidedly shifty.

“Can I come in before I get as wet as you are?” Ryazan asked politely.

The vicar blushed again, but moved aside. And Ryazan did not have to be a parish constable to see immediately what the problem was. The roof in the small extension at the back, which housed the kitchen, had a huge hole in it, through which water was merrily pouring into a nearly full wash-tub.

“Why did you not tell us?” he asked, surprised.

“I thought… I could fix it myself.”

“Since you are wetter than I am, that would suggest you could not. I shall instruct two of the men to bring a tarpaulin over tonight, and tomorrow we shall send someone to fix it permanently.”

“It’s really not that urgent!”

Ryazan looked at him shrewdly.

“How long have you been unable to use your kitchen?” he asked.

“Only when it rains like this”, the vicar admitted.

Ryazan sighed.

“Is there anything else about this place you have ‘forgotten’ to tell us about?”

“The stable roof leaks a bit”, Brenton admitted, reluctantly. “And the bedroom wall is crumbling. The water works some of the time. The…..”
“Enough!” Ryazan said sharply. “This place is not fit for human habitation! Fetch your horse, and you can return to Pemberley with me. Tomorrow we shall set about finding you somewhere else to live, whilst this place is either repaired or torn down and replaced.”

“I really do not want to be a bother.”

“You are a Winchester employee”, Ryazan said firmly. “You deserve good treatment. We would do the same for anyone else. Now get what clothes you will need, and I shall meet you outside the stables.”

He watched fondly as the tall omega hurried away.

Mine, he thought firmly. Some day, mine!

+~+~+

Adam Fitzwilliam had travelled north to meet two former army friends, one in Cheshire and the other in Lancashire. He returned just over a week later, and spent the night at Pemberley before travelling on to Standford. However, at breakfast before his departure, Dean found him in an unusually bad mood.

“Is something wrong, cousin?” he asked courteously.

“I just met your brother Michael!” Adam almost snapped. “Of all the pompous, self-righteous, ill-informed omegas in the country....”

“Hey! No insulting omegas in this house!”

“Sorry, cousin. I forgot. But the man is insufferable!”

Dean was surprised. Michael Bennet might be quiet, and a little bookish for his own taste, but he would never have thought him to be argumentative.

“What did you disagree about?” he inquired.

“Queen Caroline”, Adam said angrily. “That know-it-all om... man thought she was having an affair behind her husband's back.”

“She probably is.”

Adam stared at him in horror.

“Not you too!” he protested.

“I only know what Bobby – Cas’ uncle – told me, but he is always very well informed. All those men who visit her in Kent are not just there to give funds for her 'orphanage'.”

“That cannot be true!”

“Well, I dare say we shall soon see. The London papers are in a class of their own when it comes to digging the dirt on people. But that is definitely the rumour going round, and from what I gather, it may well be right.”
Adam groaned.

“Why were you talking to him, anyway?” Dean asked curiously. “I would not have thought the two of you had much in common.”

“I was going to ask if he would come over and sort out the main library at Standford, once his school project is over”, Adam said. “I can't now, of course.”

“Why not?” Dean asked.

“He would never let me live it down if he is right!”

“He’s Cas' brother. If Cas could forgive me for all I did before I won him over, I am sure Michael can overlook a little royally-inspired argument.”

Adam hummed in disagreement, but said no more.

++

Scaden looked dubiously at the waistcoat.

“Gold?” he asked.

Mr Arthur smiled beatifically at him.

“Sunset Breeze, and it accentuates the colour of your hair, Mr. Winchester”, he said smoothly. “Add in a green tie to match your eyes, and you will look stunning!”

Scaden sighed. He had come into Lambton to be fitted for a new suit, as his father had asked him to attend the wedding of their estate manager, Tom, and the housekeeper, Mrs. Barnes. Their romance had come out of the blue, and Dean could not attend the wedding himself as he and Castiel had to drive into Manchester to sort out some legal matters on the day of the wedding. That was why Scaden Winchester had to be poked and prodded into a new suit, having somehow outgrown the last one. Again.

The colours were finally settled upon, and Scaden left to find the happy couple a present. His father was gifting them a lifetime lease on their cottage, but he liked both the happy couple, and wanted to give them something just from him. He was mulling over various options when he almost walked into someone in the High Street.

“Scay!”

“Alfie! What brings you here?”

“Father’s horse needed to be re-shod, and our own blacksmith is down with the flu”, Samandriel explained. “I said I would walk him into town, then ride him back.”

“It is good to see you”, Scaden beamed. “I haven't seen you since....”

He tailed off, and blushed. There was an awkward silence.
“I have at least an hour before I have to pick up Thunder”, Samandriel said at last, smiling slightly. “I believe there is a good coffee-shop further up the street?”

“That would be good”, Scaden smiled.

The two alphas walked back down the road, both lost in their own thoughts.

+++++

“What exactly would you want me to do?”

Adam tried to concentrate. Michael Bennet must have not long come out of his last heat, and his body was still giving off that smell of old books that made the alpha in front on him... want. It was distracting.

“We want a written list of every book in there, then we went them grouped into categories so we can find things more easily”, he explained, fighting down his natural urges. “The library’s about the same size as the one here, though I think we may have a few less shelves.”

“I would be delighted to help”, Michael said. “I don’t start my teaching job until September, so I could begin Monday week, if you wish?”

“That would be good”, Adam said. “Dean says he will loan you a horse to ride over each day, so transport will not be a problem.”

“I shall look forward to the challenge”, smiled the omega.

Adam smiled back, and left the room. But just before he touched the door-handle, he heard a distinct whisper from behind him:

“I was right!”

He tensed, but forced himself to ignore it. Irritating little omegas!
Dean feels he has never been happier, but an unwise decision in Cumberland leads to an earlier return home than expected, and a rather shocking revelation.

June 1820

Dean was scheduled to make a trip to the capital at the end of June that year. He had wanted to take his mate with him, but unfortunately Castiel had tripped and fallen on the stairs the previous week, and his ankle was still sore, so Dean had to go alone. (He did suggest to his mate that he would probably only be upright for a relatively small part of the trip, a remark that earned him a well-aimed pillow!). Though if one of the things Dean planned to do in London worked out, he would be able to make it up to him sooner rather than later.

London also meant a chance to meet up with his old friend Victor Henriksen, or at least hear from him. Dean had not seen the man for a couple of years now, as he had always been out of the capital on business during his rare visits. So when a dark-coated man showed up at his London house the day after his arrival, he was pleasantly surprised.

“Welcome in, old friend!” he beamed. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

Victor shuffled in and accepted his usual scotch on the rocks.

“I am afraid it is not pleasure that brings me here, my friend, but business”, he said darkly. “A warning.”

Dean was on his guard at once.

“What do you mean?” he asked nervously.

Victor sipped his drink.

“Your butler has been watering the whisky again.”

“Vic!”

“Someone has been sniffing round your mate’s family, my friend”, Victor said slowly. “Someone who has been very careful to cover their tracks. I pulled what strings I could for you, but nothing so far.”

“Cas?”

“All the Bennets. Not you, though.”

“So you don’t know who it is, then?”
Victor looked thoughtful.

“I do not actually know”, he said, “but there is one thing you may like to be aware of.”

“Go on.”

“You remember that awful business about Lucifer Lucas?”

Dean did not like where this conversation was heading.

“Yes”, he said warily.

“It turns out he had a son. Conceived off some woman in Longbourn not long after he arrived, then when Lucifer fled after his attack on Gabriel Bennet, she brought the lad to London. I do not know his exact age, but I think he is about thirty years of age.”

“Does he have a name?”

“He calls himself Zachariah Adler, after his adoptive grandfather, though he was originally named after his father. He tried to move into my line of business some years back, but I managed to persuade him not to.”

Dean smiled. He knew exactly what form Victor’s ‘persuasion’ would have taken.

“Is he dangerous?”

“Yes. But he does not like to get his hands dirty. He always employs someone else to do those tasks he deems beneath him. Fortunately that makes him slightly easier to track.”

“Vic…."

“The minute he or any of his agents leave the capital, you will be informed.”

“Thanks, old friend.”

+-+++-

Dean’s official business in the capital went off without a hitch, and he was soon on his way back to Derbyshire. He was concerned that someone was making moves around his beloved, but he knew he could trust his friend to keep him informed of any dangers from that direction. And he was looking forward to giving his mate a little surprise when he got home…..

No, apart from that!

+-+-+++

The master of Pemberley sank back onto his giant four-poster bed, totally sated. His mate flopped bonelessly on top of him, slowly kissing his way up the alpha’s chest. Much as he enjoyed that, Dean had something to tell him.

“I have a small surprise for you, my angel”, he whispered.
Castiel stopped kissing him and turned the full force of those impossibly blue eyes on him. It took an effort for the alpha to remember what he was supposed to be doing.

“Do you remember that cottage up by Buttermere, where we went for our honeymoon?” he asked.

Castiel smiled.

“I remember everything about that place”, he said, tracing a finger down his husband’s chest and eliciting a sharp yelp when he suddenly reached into Dean’s shorts.

“Patience, o ever-ready one!” the alpha snorted. “My surprise is…. that cottage. The owner finally agreed to sell it to me. We now have our own little slice of Lakeland, and if you want, we can go there for the next two weeks.”

Castiel was looking at him as if he’d just given him the world, not some small cottage in a Cumberland valley. To Dean’s surprise the omega’s eyes were full of tears.

“I love you so much!” he said, trying to hold back the sobs. “And when we get there, we are going to recreate our very first honeymoon night together.” He pulled himself up to lie against his husband, then reached round to whisper into his ear, “in….. every…. little… detail!”

Dean pulled him even closer, and decided that getting up early wasn’t so important after all.

+++

His mate’s happiness at his unexpected gift had made Dean all but forget the events in London, but he was to receive a salutary reminder of them before they left for the Lakes. That same day, when he did eventually make it downstairs, he found Castiel frowning over a letter.

“Is something wrong, beloved?” he asked.

“It is from Inias”, Castiel said. “Apparently Mrs Wilkinson told him that someone had been going round the shops in Meryton asking about us.”

Dean froze, but fortunately his husband was too intent on his letter to notice.

“Us?” Dean asked.

“My family”, Castiel said. “Mrs Wilkinson’s sister works in the grocery store there, and she said someone had been in and asked for directions to Longbourn. But they seemed far too interested in us Bennets. A different person called on Mrs Wilkinson two days later. She did not want to worry my mother with it, but thought it might be a good thing if I were informed. I do not know what to make of it.”

Vic was right, as usual, Dean thought quietly to himself.

“It is probably just a coincidence”, he said instead. “Like London omnibuses; you wait for ages, then two come along at once.”

“Probably”, Castiel smiled.
“Can you pack my things as well as yours?” Dean asked, wanting to change the subject. “I have to attend some meetings today, to cover my absence.”

“What if I pack the wrong clothes?” his mate asked.

Dean grinned at him.

“I don’t think clothes will be a problem!” he smirked.

He loved it when Castiel blushed.

+~+~+

July 1820

His father and papa had left four days ago, and Scaden was quite enjoying being the (temporary) master of Pemberley. On this particular day he rode out to Scarrick Fell, where he could sit in the summer sun and look down on the great house. The skies were blue, there was a gentle breeze, and everything in his world was perfect.

“Hullo, Scay.”

Well, it was perfect now.

“Hullo, Alfie”, he said, without turning round.

The other alpha dismounted, and came to sit alongside his cousin.

“Long time no see.”

Scaden grinned.

“Yes, I haven’t seen you since at least… yesterday!”

His cousin punched him lightly, and Scaden flinched in mock agony.

“How long are your parents away for again?” Samandriel asked.

“Another ten days”, Scaden smiled, knowing full well what was coming next. Sure enough, his cousin somehow managed to slide himself over until he was seated between Scaden’s long legs.

“Ten days. What will you find to do in all that time?”

Scaden kissed him gently on the back on the neck, and his cousin turned round to make it a full kiss. The younger man grinned.

“I’m sure I can think of something!”

+~+~+

“A… a…. a…. atishooooo!”
Castiel placed another blanket on his shivering mate, and sighed.

“It’s all your own fault”, he said unsympathetically. “I told you the lake was colder than it looked. And diving in with no clothes on was just asking for trouble!”

Dean glared at his mate.

“I’m c…c…cold!” he shivered. “I command you to warm me up right now!”

“I’ll go and make you some hot soup”, Castiel offered.

The alpha pouted.

“I was thinking of warming me up another way!”

Castiel looked at him thoughtfully.

“You eat all the soup, and then I might consider it.”

“But I want to be warmed up now!”

“Soup first. Other things later.”

“You’d better make it worth my wait!” Dean sulked.

Castiel walked by him to get to the kitchen, and reached down to whisper in his ear.

“Believe me, I will!”

The alpha suddenly felt quite a bit warmer already.

+++

Dean had arranged to travel back to Pemberley on the tenth, but two days before this, the weather suddenly turned cold, and a thin layer of snow fell. He had recovered from his dive into the lake, but was reluctant to suggest they leave early, in case his mate felt short-changed. However, when Castiel returned from the village that evening, he suggested himself that they might leave the next day, before the roads became even worse. So they quickly packed up their things, summoned the servants back from the village, and set off for home.

Home, Dean thought curiously. He had always thought of Pemberley as his home, but the past two weeks had made him realize that this was not quite true. Home was wherever Castiel was, be it a magnificent mansion in Derbyshire, a stately townhouse in London, or a small cottage in Cumberland. He cuddled the omega closer to him in the carriage, thinking how lucky he was to have him, and how perfect his life was at that moment.

In hindsight, he really should have known that things would start to head south soon after.

+++

They went to the house first, and Dean immediately rode out to the East Lodge to see if there was any mail for him. He had arranged for Victor to write there rather than the house, just in case his husband intercepted any of their correspondence. When he pulled up, he was surprised to see the
gate left open; surprised because not only was his estate manager the ultimate neatness freak, but because he always had a small Union Jack flying at the front door, which he lowered every time he was out. The flag was down, yet apparently someone was in. Dean felt concerned.

He carefully pushed open the door, but no-one seemed to be about. There was indeed a letter from Vic, which he pocketed. Moving quietly through the small cottage, he emerged into the garden, his eyes blinking in the rays of the setting sun.

It could be truly said that Dean Winchester had only been surprised three times in his life. The first time was when he had proposed to his now mate, and been very firmly rejected. The second was seeing that same mate at Pemberley whilst he himself was soaking wet through. And the third was when Castiel had told him a second proposal might be accepted (and he still owed the sneaky little omega for making him suffer over that). Three times in all.

Seeing his son and heir with his tongue down the throat of some total stranger was definitely the fourth time. Nothing could have been worse for the master of Pemberley.

He must have made a noise of some sort, because his son suddenly spun round to look at him in complete horror. Almost as much horror as Dean felt when he saw who he had been kissing.

It was Samandriel Bingley.

“What the Hell…?”
July 1820

Dean glared furiously at his mate. Their eldest son stood motionless by the fireplace, hanging his head.

“You knew!” Dean said accusingly. “And you didn’t think to tell me?”

Castiel sighed.

“I thought you might react badly to what might or might not develop into something”, he said patiently. “I can’t think why.”

“Scaden is my son, and the heir to this estate. He has to marry and produce heirs.”

“Why?” Castiel asked.

Dean stared at him in astonishment. His mate might as well have asked him why the sky was blue, or why fish swam.

“It’s… the way things are!” he said lamely. “Hell, he’s my son….”

“Our son”, his mate corrected him. “I distinctly recall you saying I was to have an equal say in his upbringing. Or is that particular arrangement being terminated?”

“But this is different!”

“How?”

“It’s Pemberley. My grandfather bought this place, and it has to stay within the family!”

“In case you have forgotten, husband, we do have two other sons”, Castiel said pointedly. “Assuming Scay wants to pursue this…”

“Whoa! No way is my son marrying his own cousin!”

“And that is your final word on the matter?”

“Yes!”

Castiel stared at him. Dean suddenly (if a little belatedly) had a very bad feeling about where this conversation was heading.
“I see”, his mate said slowly. “In that case I shall retire to my room. Scay, I shall talk to you tomorrow morning – if I am allowed.”

Dean winced. His bad feeling was fast approaching a certainty.

+++

He told his son all three of them would discuss the matter in the morning, and went up to his room. Castiel was in bed, curled up and facing away from him.

The master of Pemberley knew he was in deep trouble.

He slipped out of his clothes and climbed slowly into bed. Castiel didn’t react to him at all. Moving slowly over, Dean didn’t know whether to touch him or not.

“I am sorry I talked to you like that”, he whispered. “It’s just the estate means so much to me…..”

“You hurt me, Dean”, Castiel said softly. “Not just in front of the servants, but in front of the son I gave you. I… just want to sleep, if that is all right.”

“Cas….”

“If you wish me to perform my duties as your omega, I will.”

Dean winced. His mate had not spoken to him like that for as far back as he could remember.

“I could never ask of you anything you would not willingly give me”, he whispered. “You gave me three fine sons, and I love you more than life itself. You did not deserve to be treated like that, and I am truly sorry.”

Castiel sniffed.

“May I sleep now, please?” he asked in a small voice that sounded perilously close to tears.

“Yes, beloved”, Dean said sadly.

And to think that earlier that same day, he had thought he would never be happier.

+++)

Dean felt as if his jaw was about to hit the carpet. He stared at his son.

“Are you telling me that Sammy and Gabe knew about this as well?” he demanded angrily. “Ye Gods! Was I the only person not to know?”

“They both suspected”, Scaden admitted, blushing. He was actually several inches taller than his father, but he was currently sat in one of the chairs, fighting the urge to curl himself up even smaller. “Like papa, they were not sure if anything would come of it.”

“You had your tongue down his throat! Something seems to have come of it all right!”
“Dean, please stop shouting.”

His mate looked pleadingly at him, but Dean noticed he did not approach as he normally would. The unpleasant thought that Castiel might actually be afraid of him crossed his mind. He tried not to think about it, and turned back to his son.

“I absolutely forbid you from seeing that boy ever again!”

Scaden suddenly rose to his full height, and walked over to face his father.

“And if I do not?” he asked, his voice trembling only slightly.

Dean drew breath.

“I shall have no choice but to disinherit you!” he said flatly.

There was a terrible silence in the room, as his mate and his son both took in the threat. Scaden then turned and crossed to his papa, before kneeling before him.

“I trust I shall be allowed to see you some time”, he said stiffly. “I am clearly no longer welcome in this house.”

Castiel stared angrily at his husband, then placed his hand in his son’s curly hair.

“Go with my blessing, my beautiful son”, he said quietly.

Scaden strode from the room, and both parents could hear his heavy tread as he went upstairs. Castiel turned slowly to his husband.

“Am I to presume this is what you meant by allowing me an ‘equal’ role in my son’s upbringing?” he asked coldly.

“This is different!” Dean protested. “This is the future of the estate, for Heaven’s sake!”

“Very well. Then perhaps you had better compile a list of all those ‘important’ occasions when my input is no longer required. I think I have a headache coming on. I shall retire to my room. Good day, alpha!”

Dean stared after him, trying to get a grip on how his life was suddenly falling apart. His eldest son leaving, his mate not talking to him…. what was going wrong?

+++~++++

Samuel Bingley had taken his eldest son for a long ride to discuss the events of the previous day, though not before a long discussion with his mate as to what they were to do next. Thus Gabriel was the only one home when he caught sight of a tired figure approached the door of Lynton Grange. He rushed into the hall to intercept the maid.

“That’s all right, Rachel, I’ll get it”, he smiled. He pulled open the door to find his nephew halfway up the long steps, dragging a heavy bag. He hurried over to help him.

“Hullo, Scaden”, he said quietly. “You are welcome here. I am only sorry it could not be under
happier circumstances.

“My father….”

“We know. There is a room ready for you. I am sure I do not have to tell you about how we expect you and Alfie to behave during your time here.”

Scaden hung his head.

“I understand”, he said quietly.

“Did you tell them where you were going?”

“There was no time. Father threw me out. But he must know I am here.”

“You should write your papa a letter, to reassure him”, Gabriel told him. “I will write him too. Go upstairs and get changed first, and I will have one of the maids draw you a bath. You look like you need it.”

Scaden managed something perilously approaching a half-smile.

“Thank you, Uncle Gabe.”

+~+~+
Gabriel spent the rest of the morning pulling his other sons together, and making clear to them just why their cousin was staying in the house for a while. Sam and his eldest son arrived back just before noon. This was fortunate in that, not ten minutes later, Dean’s carriage pulled up outside and he leapt out almost before it had rolled to a halt.

“Where is he?” he demanded as soon as he entered the lounge.

Sam looked at his friend coolly.

“Your son has made it clear he does not wish to talk to you at present”, he said flatly. “As he is also my nephew, I have to respect those wishes.”

“He cannot sulk here forever!” Dean insisted. “I need him home.”

“Why?” demanded Gabriel. “So you can shout at him some more?”

“I am his father. I have the right….”

“…to behave like a responsible parent”, Gabriel finished for him. “We are sorry our son is not good enough for yours, but…”

“He’s a bloody alpha, Gabe!” Dean shouted. “Alphas don’t breed alphas, or didn’t they teach you that in school?”

“You will not talk to my mate like that!”

Sam slid himself between the two men, glaring down at his friend. Dean took a step back. His friend could be scary when roused.
“I want my son back!” he protested.

“And when he wants to go back to you, he will go”, Sam said firmly. “You have upset him badly, Dean. He needs some time to himself now, away from Pemberley. He can stay here for as long as he needs.”

“Under the same roof as his lover!”

Sam suddenly grabbed his friend by the shoulders and pushed him back against the wall, causing a vase on a nearby table to teeter precariously for a moment.

“You will not disrespect my good name the way you have disrespected your son!” he almost snarled. “Your presence in our house is no longer welcome. You will leave.”

“Sammy!”

“Leave, before I throw you out!”

Dean stared at his friend in astonishment, before moving swiftly from the room. He could not believe what had just happened. His life could not get any worse.

+~+~+

Apparently Dean's life could get worse.

Dinner at Pemberley that evening was horrible. Not just the visibly empty seat next to his own, but that fact that his two younger sons sat as far away from him as they could get, both clearly worried that they might be next to feel their father's wrath. Worst of all, Castiel remained silent, making only minimal responses to Dean's remarks. Eventually the alpha gave up, and the meal was finished in silence, the two boys excusing themselves as soon as they could.

“I am going to read my book”, Castiel announced after they had retired to the living room. He paused, before adding warily, “I would like to go over and see my son tomorrow, if that is acceptable.”

“He's still your son, Cas”, Dean said gruffly. “Of course you can go.”

“Thank you.”

The omega left the room. Dean stared after him, wondering how he could fix this unholy mess.

+~+~+

Breakfast the following morning was about as bad as dinner had been. An uneasy silence hung over the whole table. Dean had always thought it faintly ridiculous that tradition meant rich people dined at a table where your fellow diners were some distance away. Now he was half glad of that distance, and half wished he had his mate right next to him.

The night before had been truly awful. Castiel had again made it clear he would perform all the duties an obedient omega could be expected to, and had made it equally clear that he desperately wished to be left alone. Dean had almost wanted to leave their room and sleep somewhere else, but the servants had more than enough ammunition for their gossip already.
He had never thought his bed would feel cold with his mate in it.

He was about to sit down with some paperwork for the day when he heard voices coming from downstairs. He frowned; he recognized his youngest son’s voice, but could not quite place the other one. Coming out onto the landing, he recognized the Reverend Green, talking to Ryazan. Despite the fact that the cleric was nearly twice his son’s age, Dean was immediately suspicious.

He must have made a noise, because the two men below both looked up. His son immediately tensed, and even at this distance Dean could sense his fear. The vicar quickly said his goodbyes, and headed to the door. Dean was suddenly overcome with the urge to talk to somebody about this dreadful situation, and reckoned that the Church was better than no-one. He hurried downstairs after the cleric.

“Reverend Green?”

Hell’s bells, even the vicar was looking at him warily! Dean felt annoyed, but suppressed it.

“Lord Winchester.”

“To what do we owe the pleasure of your company?” Dean asked.

“I promised your son I would loan him a rare Bible I own”, he explained. “I had a call in the area today, so I thought I would bring it over rather than entrust it to a servant.”

“I see”, Dean said. “I suppose Ry has filled you in on events here.”

The vicar blushed.

“He did mention there had been an... altercation.”

“That's one way of putting it! My son and heir moved out on me!”

“Apparently you did not give him a great deal of choice in the matter.”

The vicar flinched as he said that, as if he felt he may have gone too far with the man responsible for getting him his position. Dean motioned him into the living room.

“I'll take any advice going”, he said brusquely. “What would you do?”

“I do not have children of my own, Lord Winchester, so it is difficult”, the vicar said thoughtfully. “But it seems you basically have very little choice. You either accept your son's decision and trust that Diniel or Ryazan can produce heirs, or you lose him forever. It really depends on how much you value family, doesn't it?”

Dean stared at him.

“I suppose it does”, he admitted. “And I know I hurt Cas. He won't forgive me in a hurry.”

The vicar smiled.

“It is common knowledge that your mate loves you”, he said. “You just have to prove yourself
worthy of that love again.”

He bowed, and left. Dean stared after him thoughtfully.

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“Cas?”

“Yes?”

“Would you..... do something for me?”

The omega tensed, and Dean could have sworn he moved further away from him in the large bed.

“Of course, alpha.”


“Would you bring Scaden back with you for a talk tomorrow?” he asked gently. “I promise not to lose my temper or say anything foolish.”

“I shall ask him if he will come”, his mate said. “But I cannot make him.”

“Thank you, beloved.”

He cuddled closer to his mate, who tensed visibly. Dean buried his face in the omega's neck.

“I am so sorry”, he whispered.
July 1820

As a rule, Dean was normally awake before his mate, often using the time just to watch Castiel sleep (he did not usually try to wake him, because the omega in the morning was incredibly grouchy until his first cup of coffee or tea). This particular morning he woke up with a start, remembering immediately what was going to happen today. He had stayed awake long into the night planning what he needed to do in order to put things right. He only hoped his mate, now whispering those heart-breakingly cute little snores of his, would forgive him.

He decided to leave the warmth of the bed, and headed downstairs. He was certain that the two maids he passed were giving his disapproving looks, and when he caught sight of Mrs. Barnes crossing the hall, her face was some distance the other side of frosty. It figured that the servants who owed him their livings to him would side with his mate, whom they had taken to their hearts.

Castiel came down fifteen minutes later, and they ate in silence. It was probably the first time since he could remember that Dean found himself hiding behind the London paper. Finally he spoke.

“Would you prefer to ride over to Lynton, or would you like me to order the carriage?” he asked tentatively. “If… Scay does come back…..”

“I would prefer to take the carriage”, Castiel said quietly. “Mrs. Moseley told me it looks like rain.”

Dean raised an eyebrow.

“She made a pie for Scay, and asked me to take it and a few other things over for him”, his mate explained.

No pie for me, Dean thought bitterly. I really am in the doghouse.

“I asked her if she might bake another one for dessert this evening”, Castiel said, sipping his tea. “She said she would.”

The master of Pemberley recognized this for the olive branch it was, and smiled at his mate.

“I love you so much!” he suddenly blurted out, trying to hold back the tears that were suddenly forming in his eyes. “If anything happened…. I couldn’t…..”

He seemed to run out of words. Castiel looked at him from across the table for a moment, then sighed, rose to his feet, and came to stand beside him, rubbing his hand affectionately against his husband’s cheek.

“I know you do”, he said, sounding almost sad. “And I will try my best to persuade Scay to come back, if only for a visit. I promise.”
Dean reached up slowly and took his mate’s hand, as if he was afraid it would be snatched away from him.

“Thank you, beloved.”

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Castiel was gone for precisely two hours and forty-seven minutes. Not that Dean was counting. And not that he got precious little – make that nothing – done during that time except to significantly increase the wear on the carpet in his study. Finally he heard the sound of the carriage returning, and almost knocked over the maid in his eagerness to reach the front door. He opened it to see his mate stepping down from the carriage.

Alone.

Dean’s heart sank. Then Castiel looked up at him and smiled reassuringly.

“He will come for a visit on Friday”, he said.

The master of Pemberley almost fell down the stairs in his eagerness to reach his mate, pulling him into a fierce body-hug. Four days. He could wait four days.

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August 1820

The last ninety-three hours had been amongst the longest in Dean Winchester’s life, and definitely up there amongst the most painful. Although Castiel seemed to have forgiven him on the surface, there was a distance between them that had not been there before, even when they were holding each other in bed. It pained the alpha, and he could only hope that the meeting with his eldest son would make things better between them.

Though when he came into the lounge to find Scaden standing there with the man who he had last seen being orally assaulted by his son, he could not help bristling with anger. Then he realized his mate was right behind him, and forced himself to relax.

“Would the two of you like some time together?” Castiel suggested.

Scaden Winchester drew himself up to his full height.

“I am sure there is nothing my father cannot say to me in front of my future mate”, he said stiffly.

Castiel could see so much of his husband in their eldest son. He winced, and braced himself for the explosion.

“Welcome back, son”, Dean said quietly.

The omega wondered briefly if all those scientists who talked about alternate universes were right after all, and he had been unknowingly sent to the one where his husband was inexplicably calm and reasonable. Dean walked over to his son, who moved instinctively in front of his cousin.

“I am sorry for what I said to you, and the way I said it”, Dean said, his voice far quieter than normal. “And the way I disrespected your papa was totally and completely unforgivable. How long have you two… been together?”

The two young alphas looked at each other nervously. They had obviously both come prepared for a
raging argument, and this was more than disconcerting.

“Four months, sir”, Samandriel said eventually.

“That is not long.”

“Long enough”, Scaden said defensively. “I just know Alfie is the one.”

“I just want you to be sure, son. People… don’t always act rationally when they think they are in love.”

“I am in love!” Scaden said firmly. “I would rather have Alfie than Pemberley any day!”

His cousin looked at him in shock. Dean smiled.

“In that case, I have a couple of propositions to put to you… both.”

The young alphas looked at him uncertainly.

“Go on”, Scaden said.

“If you are sure, then… hold off for now. See each other as much as you like, make your relationship official in all but name, whatever you wish. If you are still together come the Christmas ball, I…. I will grant you my formal blessing. In public, at the ball.”

Both young men gasped.

“Father!” Scaden cried. “Do you mean that?”

Dean smiled at him.

“I promise on my honour”, he said. “And… there is something else.”

He crossed to his desk, and took out a rolled parchment, which he handed to his son.

“I don’t want there to be any doubt that I accept you fully as my son”, he said. “Because people will talk about alphas being with alphas, and you will not find it easy. I was going to wait until you turned twenty-one for this, but I think now is a more fitting time. That is the official title proclaiming you Lord Rowsley, the title born by the adult heir to Pemberley.”

There was a stunned silence in the room. Scaden finally broke it by moving forward and kneeling before his father.

“I am proud to be your son, father”, he said, his eyes bright with what looked suspiciously like tears. Dean could feel himself tearing up as well, but he was saved when Castiel moved up behind him to hold him gently.

“And I am proud to be your mate”, he whispered quietly.

Suddenly, Dean’s world was not so bad after all.

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He still had one more bridge to repair, though, and it involved accompanying his son and nephew back to Lynton one more time. Sam questioned Scaden closely, as if suspecting his father might have somehow pressured him into returning, but eventually allowed the young men to go upstairs and
pack. Then he looked hard at his former guardian.

“You really shouldn’t be let within a hundred miles of any relationship!” he growled.

“I am sorry, Sammy”, Dean said, hanging his head. “I have tried to make it up to them both. I just…
he’s my eldest son.”

“Alfie is my eldest too, in case you had forgotten.”

“Yes, but you have five more to carry on the line”, Dean pointed out. “And extra alphas. But I am
truly sorry I spoke to you and Gabriel in the way I did. It was uncalled for.”

“It was.”

“If those two do… make it, I wanted to talk to you about them getting a place of their own”, Dean
said. “They will need to learn how to run a house before they can start running places like here and
Pemberley.”

“Go on”, Sam said warily.

“Alfie told me how much time they spent at Tom’s place. Now he’s married to Mrs. Barnes, they
both want to move into Lambton, so she can be near her sister. I was going to give them a lifetime
lease on one of the estate properties, but now I plan to buy them a small cottage instead. Perhaps
Scay and Alfie could have East Lodge?”

Sam stared at him.

“That’s really generous of you, Dean, but we can’t…”

“You and Gabriel could pay for the place to be repainted and furnished the way the boys want”,
Dean said quickly. “The Lodge would be my present, and everything in it yours.”

“That would be very generous of you, Dean.”

“It would be the least I could do”, Dean said firmly. “Please, would you accept?”

Sam suddenly stood up and hurried over to the older man, embracing him fiercely.

“Of course, you jerk!” he said, his voice hoarse with emotion. “Hell, you screw up sometimes, but
you usually manage to fix it, don’t you?”

They were still hugging when Gabriel entered the room.

“Should I be jealous?” he remarked lightly.

Both alphas laughed, and Dean’s world was almost back to normal.

+~+~+

Almost. There was still a sense of distance between Dean and his mate, something that had not been
there before. It saddened him, but he could only hope that time would make Castiel forgive him.
Matters were not helped when Castiel suddenly went into an unexpected heat early that month,
causing Doctor St. John to have to rush to Pemberley. He prescribed a different course of tablets,
reckoning that the ones Castiel had been using hitherto were no longer effective (which happened
naturally as omegas aged), and this seemed to work, although it meant Dean had to spend a horribly
long week without his mate at the worst possible time.
Castiel had been hurt more than he had let on at Dean’s reaction to their son’s affair. Not perhaps so much the reaction, but the way his husband had suddenly gone back on his promise to allow the omega an equal say in their son’s upbringing. Though he appreciated what his alpha had done to put things right, he still felt a faint pang of unease, as if he might never be able to fully trust Dean again. Particularly as he knew what (or rather, who) his second son, now the heir to the estate, was pursuing, even if that object was currently several thousand miles away.

His sudden heat had scrambled his emotions further, and the isolation that followed left him feeling emotionally drained. Though that isolation was temporarily lifted on the penultimate day by a visit from his brother Michael. Fortunately blood relatives were unaffected by heats, and Castiel welcomed the company.

“How is the library project going?” he asked.

Michael winced.

“Difficult”, he admitted. “I suggested to Adam that they could donate a load of the unread books to the library in Lambton, and when he passed it onto his brother, Lord William went berserk! He would have sacked me, except Adam pointed out the room would then be left half-done and unusable, so they might as well keep me on.”

Castiel noticed how his brother used Major Fitzwilliam’s first name.

“Do you and he still argue over things like 'Queen' Caroline?” he asked.

“Not since she died”, Michael said. “He let me borrow a book on her family history, which is fascinating. Did you know, for example…?”

Castiel smiled and sat back, allowing the genealogy of the Brunswick-Beverns to wash over him.

A few days later, Castiel was fully recovered, much to his and everyone else’s relief. Mrs. Moseley even made him his favourite strawberry-and-lemon ice-cream, which he said was definitely worth going through a heat for.

The next day Scaden left at the end of breakfast to ride over to see Samandriel. Before anyone else could leave the table, Dean spoke.

“I wish to see all three of you in the study on a private matter.”

Castiel looked at him in surprise, but smiled in agreement. As his husband headed off to the study, he noticed that both their younger sons looked nervous. Diniel he could understand, but Ryazan? He filed the observation away for further study.

Once they were all sat down, Dean went over to Castiel’s chair and draped his arms round his husband.

“You both understand I love your papa very much”, he said softly.

The boys both nodded, clearly unsure as to where this was heading.

“And you know that if Scay marries his cousin, there will be no children?”
They nodded again.

“I love your papa more than life itself, but the law of this land does not always treat omegas fairly”, Dean explained. “Ever since I knew about Scay, I have been reading the rules of inheritance for the estate, and they are very vague. Diniel, you should inherit, but as an omega your title may be challenged. I do not want that. So I am summoning my lawyer here next week, and I am going to specifically name you in my will as the next lord of Pemberley after Scaden. That way, your position will be assured.”

“Thank you, father”, Diniel said, blushing.

“And you, Ry, should look around the estate before Mr. Thompson arrives, and let me know if there is any specific item or building you would want for your own”, Dean said. “If there is, tell me, and I will make sure to leave it to you.”

“That is very kind of you, father.”

“That is all. Go to your studies now.”

The two boys bowed, and left the room. Castiel smiled up at his husband.

“That was very good of you, Dean”.

“Goodness had nothing to do with it”, Dean said firmly. “I want the best for all my sons. They are the second-most important thing in my life.”

“After Pemberley?”

Dean came round to stand in front of his mate.

“After you”, he said softly.

Castiel didn’t cry. Much.
September 1820

There was a particular tree on the long drive up to Pemberley that Dean always noticed when he arrived, possibly because it had been planted slightly out of alignment with the others around it. He did not know what type it was – his arboreal knowledge extended to the fact that the bit without leaves went in the ground – but he had noted it was always the first tree to start turning its leaves brown, and as such, a sure sign that summer was drawing to a close. Not that Dean had anything against autumn, particularly as it was when his beloved would start wearing those awful sweaters of his that were several sizes too large, but always looked so cute on him.

His beloved. Dean sighed as he rode up the drive. Ever since that awful business with his eldest son, there had been a definite change in his relationship with the omega. Castiel seemed to be trying, but even when they made love at night, there was still that definite sense of distance that had not been there before, as if his omega could not completely trust him. Castiel had never said anything, but Dean knew what he felt. Hopefully the package he was bringing, which he had had to pull several strings to get, might start to convince his mate to fully forgive him.

He found his mate in the writing room.

“Who are you writing to?” Dean asked.

Castiel looked up, and smiled. Dean's stomach did that thing with the butterflies again. After nearly two decades, the same reaction as ever.

“My mother”, the omega said. “I wanted to ask if she had heard any more about those people making inquiries about her.”

“Surely she would have told you if they had?” Dean hedged, not wanting to pursue the subject. His mate knew him too well, and would soon realize that Dean knew more than he was admitting.

“That is what was so odd”, the omega mused, turning back to his letter. “It was exactly the sort of thing she would normally talk about for months. But she did not mention it at all in her last letter.”

“Maybe there was nothing to mention?”

“Hmm. Maybe.”

“Are you coming on the hunt tomorrow?” Dean asked, changing the subject. “I know that horse of yours is still lame. I could easily get you another one, though.”

Castiel smiled again, and Dean's heart leapt. Again.

“I would rather prefer to wait for Angel to be better”, he said. “I shall go and see him this evening.”

“Rather you than me!” the alpha grinned. The horse was intolerant of anyone except Castiel, and
seemed to have a particular hatred of Dean.

“He’s just overly possessive”, Castiel smiled. “Rather like someone else I know!”

Dean came up and wrapped his arms round his mate.

“I have something worth possessing!” he growled.

“Later, beloved!” Castiel said. “I have to finish this so I can send it today.”

“Promise?”

“As always, beloved.”

Dean sighed, and reluctantly took himself off to his study.

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Dean carried his son into the lounge, and placed him gently on the sofa.

“How am I, dad”, Scaden grumbled.

“You fell off your horse at speed, and collided with a tree, Scay” his father said sharply. “You are not fine until Doctor St. John says you are.”

“You're an idiot!” Samandriel snapped. “Just because you had to be first to the brook...”

“Hey, you didn't have to race me...”

“I didn't! You bolted off and dared me to come after you!”

“Well, you shouldn't have done so!”

“And you shouldn't have tried to cut your way over that high hedge! You could have been killed, you moron!”

Samandriel glared at his cousin, and stalked away to the fireplace. Scaden stared at him. There was an awkward silence.

“It's only an injury, Alfie”, he said at last.

His cousin rounded on him.

“I could have lost you, you bloody idiot! Four months to keep it together, and you go and damn near kill yourself! How I am I expected to cope with that?”

“I'm sorry...”

Samandriel stormed from the room. Scaden stared after his cousin, and sniffed mournfully. Dean looked thoughtfully at his son, then left too.

He found his nephew sitting in the alcove just outside the door.

“Now you know why I wanted you to wait”, he said gently. “You and Scay can expect these sorts of blow-outs from time to time. Running away isn't the answer.”

“I could have lost him!” the young alpha sniffed.
“But you didn't. You can't expect to go through life with your mate wrapped in cotton wool.” He sat down opposite the young alpha. “I'll let you into a secret. I actually hate it when Cas goes hunting. I'm scared something will happen to him, but I can't force him to stay home just because I love him too much. Love is about compromises, Alfie. You should go back in there and apologize.”

His nephew sighed, then smiled weakly at him, before standing and moving slowly back into the room. Dean went off down the corridor, thinking the two would need some space.

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Half an hour later he was sat in the library with his mate, both reading, when there was a loud thump from upstairs, followed by a startled yelp. Castiel looked up in alarm.

“What was that?” he asked.

Dean smiled.

“I think my nephew is learning the art of compromise!” he said, grinning at his mate's confusion.

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Castiel would turn forty-three on the eighteenth of that month, an event he was not particularly looking forward to. Dean normally treated him by taking him out somewhere, but he always told him in advance, and when they went to bed the day before without his husband saying anything, the omega was a little surprised.

He woke the following morning to find his husband looking down at him. His favourite tea and crumpets were on tray by the bedside.

“I am sort of taking you somewhere today”, Dean admitted, “but not that far. I got you something else first, though.”

He reached back and grabbed something from the bedside table, then handed it to his mate. It was clearly a book, but Castiel immediately realized this was something special. This was the book all London was talking about, the book he had mentioned that he really wanted to read.

“I pulled a few strings, and Mr. Shelley agreed to send me a copy”, Dean smiled. ‘Prometheus Unbound’. The story of a powerful man who does the right thing, gets punished, but is eventually released. It's unedited, and he promises to send you the final copy when it is ready.”

“Dean”, Castiel gasped, his eyes shining. “This... is wonderful.”

“This is only the first part”, his husband promised. “Enjoy your meal, read your book, and this afternoon... I have another surprise for you!”

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Castiel looked up from his book, feeling increasingly perplexed. He was really grateful his mate had gone to so much trouble to get him Shelley’s latest masterpiece, but his behaviour so far today had been... odd.

They had breakfasted together as normal, then Dean had turned to him and asked if he would not mind spending a few hours in his room, as the ‘surprise’ he was planning needed a little preparation. Obviously the servants were in on whatever it was, as Rachel brought him frequent cups of tea and biscuits (and thank the heavens he had had the foresight to insist on a flush toilet in the en suite
bathroom!). Plus the fact that there was always a maid at the end of the corridor watching him every time he came out of the room. It was all very strange.

Unusually Mrs. Barnes herself brought him lunch, telling him that he might come down at two o’clock, and that someone would come to fetch him. He found this unusual, but devoured a delicious steak pie and potatoes before returning to his book. At ten to two the housekeeper returned, with a set of clothes for him to wear. They looked surprisingly formal.

“Is someone getting married?” he asked her, as George the valet followed her in.

She giggled, which was totally unlike her.

“Not exactly!” she said, and hurriedly left the room. Castiel stared after her in confusion, but changed anyway.

At two o’clock exactly there was a knock at the door.

“Enter!” Castiel called, trying to get his blue tie straight.

To his surprise it was Gabriel, also dressed formally.

“Gabe? What’s going on?”

His brother grinned.

“Not time for the big reveal yet, Cassie!” he smiled. “You ready?”

“I don’t know what I’m ready for!”

“You soon will, brother! Shoes on, and let’s go!”

“My tie isn’t right!”

“If we waited for that to happen, you’d still be…. never mind, let’s just go.”

Castiel stared at him curiously, but followed him out of the room, down the corridor, and onto the long staircase.

Where he stopped in his tracks. He could not believe what he was seeing.

The hall had been decorated to look like the inside of a church, and was full of people. Castiel recognized so many of them, from his mother, Balthazar – even Father Joshua, greyer now but still proud and upright. And standing on the bottom stair was his husband, holding out his hand, looking up at him almost nervously. What on earth was happening?

Almost pushed by his brother, Castiel started down the stairs. And then the small orchestra, whom he had barely noticed in a corner, started to play He Who Would Valiant Be. The song that had been played at their wedding….

Suddenly it all came together, and Castiel was grateful for his brother’s firm grip guiding him down those last few stairs, otherwise he would definitely have fallen. His eyes watering, he was about to place his hand in his husband’s when Dean gently took it, then to his surprise knelt before him. The band fell quiet.

“My beloved mate”, Dean said, his voice thick with emotion, “nearly twenty years ago you made me the happiest alpha alive by agreeing to take my hand in marriage. You have given me three wonderful sons, and you have always been there for me. I know I am not good with feelings and
things like that, and I sometimes say and do stupid things, but I love you more than life itself.”

“I love you too, Dean”, Castiel said in a small voice.

“I have asked Father Joshua to come out of retirement to perform this special service”, Dean said, and Castiel could see his husband was now shaking with emotion. “Would you do me the great honour of allowing us both to renew our vows in front of our friends, so they can truly understand just how much I love you, and that I could never live without you?”

“Dean!”

“Is that a yes?”

“Yes! Yes! A thousand times, yes!”

He leapt into his husband’s arms, and Dean spun him round once before gently placing him on the ground.

“This time, we go together”, he whispered, leading his omega slowly up the aisle, as the band played on.

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Castiel felt he had never been happier, not even when he had (belatedly) accepted Dean’s proposal all those years ago. That his husband would go to such lengths just to show how much he loved him was… well, it was humbling. He looked across at Dean dancing with Anna, and smiled lovingly at him. His husband smiled back, and promptly missed a step, much to the amusement of his fellow dancers. The master of Pemberley blushed as he picked himself up.

“I’m young and in love!” he groused in mock annoyance, as those around him laughed. “It’s allowed!”

Ryazan took his place, and Dean came over to where his mate was sitting.

“I really am sorry for the way I behaved these last few months, you know”, he whispered, nuzzling his mate’s dark hair.

“I know”, Castiel whispered back. “How can I not forgive you when you do something like this for me?”

“Thank you, beloved.”

“You do know all the local gossips will be tattling as to how whipped you are?”

“Let them!” Dean growled. “I do not care! As long as I have you, people can say what they like!”

Castiel melted into his embrace.

“Beloved, you know I have to go to London for three weeks on business soon”, the alpha said, holding his omega as tight as he could. “I thought when I am finished, you could take your mother and brother home in the carriage and meet me in Hertfordshire, and we could spend some time with them there.”

Castiel looked at him in surprise.

“What?” Dean asked, confused.
“You would travel to Hertfordshire and willingly spend time with my family?” Castiel smiled, pretending to be shocked. “Alpha, you must truly be in love!”

Dean looked at him, and smiled.

“I am!”

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Dean planned to set out for London two days after the ceremony, having bidden a tearful farewell to his mate (on both sides, though Dean would never admit it). All seemed settled at Pemberley, although the day of his departure brought a letter from Mr. Fitzgerald, who had arrived safely in the West Indies some time before, and was far from impressed at the way Dean’s estate there was being run. Acting on the authority given him, he had sacked the manager, and was now assisting the under-manager in putting the place back on its feet again. He enclosed a whole set of figures for Dean to read, but the summary sheet was reassuring enough. The estate there was set to start turning a good profit, and once Mr. Fitzgerald had spent six months making sure of the place, he could install a replacement and return home. All in all, as Dean rode out towards the capital, his world finally seemed all right again.
Mr Crowley Collins exhibits a surprising side to his character, whilst back in Derbyshire, there are fireworks between Dean and Castiel.

October 1820

Castiel was due to accompany his family down to meet Dean in Hertfordshire on the fourteenth (Dean would be there the day before, but Mrs. Bennet was too superstitious to travel on a Friday the thirteenth). He enjoyed having his family in Pemberley, although his mother was as garrulous as ever, and Balthazar still chased after anything with a pulse (the Reverend Green had been conspicuous by his absences of late). Castiel took them to Lambton a couple of times, to Matlock and Bakewell, and once even to Manchester.

He was also a little concerned about his youngest. He had not forgotten the hunted look Ryazan had briefly exhibited when Dean had mentioned he knew about a relationship concerning his son, and the subsequent relief when it emerged his father had been talking about Scaden. The beta was up to something, and Castiel was determined to figure out what, in case there was a repeat of the recent troubles with his eldest. As he had expected, Ryazan had relaxed a little after recent events, and was being less careful than before, so it did not take his papa long to work out what he was up to.

“Have you thought about taking a job yet?” Castiel asked him at the breakfast table one morning. Diniel had finished and gone to work on some estate figures, and neither Castiel’s mother nor brother were known for being early risers (or in Balthazar’s case, a before noon riser).

“Not really”, Ryazan asked. “I know I cannot expect you and father to support me indefinitely, but I am not eighteen yet. Why do you ask, papa?”

“Only I wondered if you were thinking of a career in the Church”, Castiel said innocently. “I see that you’ve been spending a lot of time with the Reverend Green lately.”

The boy’s blush was probably visible from the next room, Castiel thought pityingly. But he rallied well.

“Bre…. Mr Green is very kind”, he said, trying to sound indifferent and failing miserably.

His papa looked at him knowingly.

“He is thirty-one years old, and nearly twice your age, Ry”, he said pointedly. “I don’t say your father would disapprove, but in light of recent events, perhaps you would do well to be a little more discreet? At least until you reach eighteen?”

“That’s a year and a half away!”

“Good things come to those who wait”, Castiel observed. “I had to wait for your father some considerable time. And he was definitely worth the wait.”

“Papa! I’m eating!”
“Cheer up, son. One day you can do this with your own children at the breakfast table. A family of little vicars….”

“That's it! I am going!”

Ryazan stormed out, trying to ignore his papa’s gentle chuckles.

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Since he had arrived one day before his mate and his mate’s family, Dean had arranged to spend the night at Lucas Lodge. He had to admit that the former cleric had become much more tolerable since his marriage to Inias Lucas, a union that had given Dean a very bad moment all those years ago when a vague letter from his aunt had implied Mr. Collins had actually married Castiel. He could still remember the terrible relief he had felt on discovering the truth, tempered only by his then future mate’s smug look at his discomfiture.

Dean smiled fondly at his past memories, and brought himself back to the present, where the Collinses were talking about their problems with their eldest son.

“An unusual name”, Dean observed. “Though I believe biblical names may be coming back into fashion.”

“Lady Naomi chose it”, Inias smiled. “It was effectively a condition of her being his godmother, that our eldest bear her name. I think she was quite disappointed when it turned out to be a boy, so Nehemiah was as close as she could get.”

“Her Ladyship did leave the boy a substantial sum for when he reaches twenty-one”, Mr. Collins said, smiling at his mate.

“I am still worried about Nehemiah, though”, Inias said, frowning.

“Why?” Dean asked, sipping his wine.

“He is spending too much time with my brother, off in London”, the omega said. “I do not know what they get up to there, but I do not like it.”

“Would you like me to find out for you?” Dean offered.

Both men looked surprised.

“Can you do that?” Mr Collins asked. “We would be exceedingly grateful.”

“I have a…. friend in London who specializes in finding out things”, Dean said, smiling as he thought of Victor. “I am sure if I ask him to make a few careful inquiries, he would do so. I could get him to send his findings direct to you, or to me and I could forward them on. Whichever you prefer.”

“That would be reassuring”, Mr Collins said with a sigh. “The boy is eighteen next year, and I too am starting to worry about him.”

“Children are all about worry”, Dean admitted, thinking of his own recent familial problems.

“But they are generally worth it in the end”, Inias said.

“Generally!” Dean and Mr Collins spoke together, and they all laughed.

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Castiel and his family were not due to arrive at Longbourn until late the following day, so the Collinses offered to take Dean on a walk around the bustling metropolis that Meryton most definitely was not. Inias Collins wanted to visit the book store, so Mr. Collins and Dean decided to sample the small coffee-house next door, and wait for him there. They were sat outside when Inias came out of the shop and was almost knocked over by a burly alpha trying to push his way in.

"Out of the way, omega!" he snapped.

To Dean’s surprise, Inias stood his ground.

“I think I might wait for you to acquire some manners, sir”, he said sharply.

The alpha grabbed him by the shoulders and shoved him against the door frame.

“You worthless, pitiable, little….”

Someone tapped him on the shoulder. The alpha turned round just in time to find a fist connecting with his face, followed swiftly by a knee connecting somewhere slightly further down. He fell to the ground, moaning loudly.

“You will not insult my mate like that!” Mr Collins growled. To emphasize his point, he kicked the man again, making him cry out, before quietly escorting his mate to his table.

“Did he hurt you, my love?” he asked him tenderly.

“No”, Inias smiled. “And thank you for coming to my rescue.”

“Always, my love.” He turned to Dean and smiled, as if he had not just felled a man twice his size. “If we set out for home now, we shall be able to have dinner and show you round the Lodge properly.”

Dean blinked in amazement. Quiet, meek little Mr. Collins, defending his mate like that. Amazing!

Dean had planned for the two of them to spend a week in Hertfordshire, but after only one day it became clear Castiel would need longer to catch up with all his old acquaintances (not including all the sudden extra ‘friends’ he had mysteriously acquired since his marriage). It pained Dean a little that he overheard his mate admitting this to his mother first, and that he did not bring it up with his husband. In the end he asked casually if Castiel would find it easier to stay another week, as he seemed to be trying to fit too much into just the first few days. The look on his mate’s face was worth even another week of Mrs Bennet’s atrocious cooking and Balthazar… well, being Balthazar.

A few days later, Castiel rode out to see an old school friend who lived in Berkhamsted, which enabled Dean to slip down to the village and talk with Mrs. Wilkinson, whose report had alerted Victor to whatever was happening around the Bennets. There had been no further communications from his London friend, so Dean hoped the danger was passed. Still, he felt he could not pass up the opportunity to meet the woman herself.

Mrs. Wilkinson was tall, gaunt and severe-looking, and attired in a black dress that had clearly seen better days. She immediately remembered the man in question.

“Very nosy man, trying to ask all casual about Longbourn”, she said dismissively. “Certainly no gentleman! Never seen him before or since, and wouldn’t want to, either. He gave me the creeps!”

“Not a local man, then?” Dean asked.
“Good Lord, sir, definitely not!” she said firmly. “Not a Hertfordshire man at all, by his accent. He sounded a little like my cousin, who lives in the East End of London. A rough area, I believe. And not the last stranger we’ve had in these parts, either.”

Dean was alert at once.

“Someone else asking about the Bennets?” he inquired. “That’s an amazing coincidence…..”

“No, sir”, she interrupted him. “You mistake my meaning. He was asking about the first man. Very tall man, very solid, unlike the first one. This one was built like an ice-house! Blue eyes, and odd spiky hair. And wore a monocle, would you believe?”

Dean relaxed. That was unmistakably Victor, visiting the scene of the…. well, whatever had or had not happened, to check things for himself.

“There was something odd about the first man, though, and I didn’t tell the other man this”, she said thoughtfully. “But your Lordship, of course…”

“Go on”, Dean said, leaning forward conspiratorially.

“He had a walking stick hidden under his coat, sir. Just like my late husband.”

“I don’t see anything odd about that…. ” Dean began.

He stopped. She was shaking her head vigorously.

“You misunderstand me, sir”, she said, lowering her voice, as if afraid of being overheard. “It was a windy day, and his coat blew back as he left the shop. That was when I saw it, fitted in alongside his stick. He carried a gun!”

Dean stared at her in shock.

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The remainder of their stay in Hertfordshire was mercifully uneventful, save for a meeting with Uriel Lucas, just arrived back from London. Having met him, Dean felt the Collinses’ concerns regarding his influence over their eldest son were probably more than justified, and that same evening wrote Victor a letter asking him to look into this and to write to Mr. Collins personally with his findings. He also included his discovery about the gun-owning man.

Dean also found time to visit Mrs. Wilkinson’s shop at a time he knew she would be busy, and to make a few purchases. Just to give the locals a little something to gossip over, and to show his appreciation for her help. A little lordly patronage could go a long way.

They started for home on the twenty-ninth, having said their goodbyes to a tearful Mrs. Bennet, though not before Dean promised to facilitate a visit for them to Pemberley sometime in the following year. He bit back a thought about the things he did for his omega, but from the look on his face, Castiel knew exactly what he was thinking, and once they were safely in the carriage, whispered his thanks. They were taking two days to make the journey, as Dean wanted to divert to a property he owned in the town of Dudley, Staffordshire, which he was thinking of selling.

They were spending the night at the George Hotel in the town, not the most luxurious of places, but the best a rural town had to offer. They both wanted to be home, but as they lay in bed that night, Dean thought once more that ‘home’ for him now was wherever his mate was, and that he was more blessed than he deserved in having him.
“I’ve been thinking”, Castiel said quietly, tracing his small hand up his alpha’s chest.

“What is it, beloved?” Dean asked.

“The Larnes, up at Clover Cottage.”

Dean looked down at him, surprised.

“What about them?” he asked, wondering where this was leading.

Castiel looked at him uncertainly.

“I would like to invite them to Parson’s Field”, he said quietly.

Dean looked at him uncertainly.

“Beloved, they are Catholics, and Guy Fawkes’ Day is a celebration of the country being saved from their religion, even if it didn’t start out like that”, he explained gently. “I doubt they would want to come.”

“They may not”, Castiel said, his voice sounding small in the large bedroom, “but I would like them to know that at least we invited them. I am sure Catholics will have the vote one day, and I don’t see why we can’t live in peace with our Christian neighbours.”

“Remember that both ours and Sam’s staff will all be there”, Dean said. “Some of them can be very narrow-minded.”

“I understand, beloved.”

Dean kissed him tenderly.

“I will tell you what”, he said. “I shall invite them to the bonfire, but I shall also say that if they do not wish to attend, we would like to have them over to a private dinner, just us and them. How does that sound?”

Castiel beamed up at him.

“I do love you!”

“How much?” Dean teased.

He suddenly realized where the omega’s hand was going.

“Let me show you!” came a familiar growl.

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They were a little late leaving the next morning.

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November 1820

Dean had been right about the Larnes, who politely declined his invitation to the huge annual bonfire, although they did write back to say they would be delighted to come to dinner. A day was duly fixed for later in the month.

Bonfire Night was a success, and Castiel was thrilled that the fireworks display included a giant heart with the letters C and D inside it. They always held it at the field halfway between theirs and Sam’s
estate so they could make it a bigger event than two separate ones. Both alphas always gave their staff a half-day off to help prepare for it.

Dean also received a communication back from Victor sooner than he had expected. The inquiries into Uriel's doings in London were ongoing, though his friend expected to have them completed by the end of the year, and it certainly looked like Inias' brother was several miles the wrong side of the law. Victor also wrote that he now thought it likely (though not certain) that there were two sets of people making inquiries into people in Dean's life. On the plus side, Zachariah Adler had left the country to go to the United Provinces, and was not expected back any time soon. Dean wondered if Victor might even follow the man back to his homeland for a while, as he knew he missed the flatlands of Holland sometimes.
New Beginnings

Chapter Summary

Castiel's brother surprises him, and the year comes to a bumpy end.

December 1820

'Dear Mr Winchester,

I am writing to thank you for your friend's help in providing information about what my brother and son were about in their frequent trips to the capital. Needless to say I was shocked to the core when I found out; I was not even aware there were such things as male brothels. And for my brother-in-law to be running three of them, and training our son up as his assistant in secret – well, words failed me for a moment. Unfortunately Nehemiah took the uncovering of his actions very badly, and has now left Lucas Lodge with his uncle. Poor Inias is deeply upset, though a little comforted by knowing what we do rather than fearing something even worse. Though what could be worse than this, I fail to see.

Mr. Henriksen was kind enough to deliver his findings to me in person, and has promised to keep me informed as to what my son is up to in London. To be frank with you, I found the man quite terrifying. I am glad he is 'on our side', so to speak. Ion and Paul have been towers of strength in our hour of need, and I thank God for having at least two sons I can depend on. I believe Ion still maintains contact with his elder brother, which offers a channel of communication should there be one day the chance of a reconciliation.

You asked me to inform you of anything unusual as regards events here in Hertfordshire. I do not know if this qualifies, but I thought I would mention that Balthazar Bennet is claiming that he is being followed. I was inclined to dismiss this as his normal fantasizing – regretfully he has said things like this before - but after some thought on the matter I checked with Mr. Silas Woodhouse, who works on the mail coach, and he informed me that a man did travel down on the day in question, and returned to London the very next day. He stayed at the Foxhunter, and signed himself in as 'Mr Smith', which may possibly be what I believe they call an alias.

I trust you and Mr. Castiel are well, and we look forward to travelling up with the Bennets to see you when the roads are better.

Yours most respectfully

Crowley Collins (Mr.)'

Dean read Mr. Collins' letter through once more, frowning deeply as he did so. He knew from Victor what the former cleric did not; that another man had stayed at Lambton recently for a couple of days, and showed an unusual interest in the residents of Pemberley and Lynton. Someone was digging around his family and friends, possibly more than one person. But who? And equally importantly, why?

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"Just what is the correct etiquette in these situations?"

Castiel smiled at his eldest son.

“I do not think there really is any”, he said, thoughtfully. “Alphas do not generally propose to alphas, for obvious reasons.”
“I mean, I would like to get him a ring”, Scaden said. “But he might take that the wrong way.”

“The four months is nearly up”, his papa said. “Are you planning to propose immediately?”

“I thought I would do it at the Christmas Eve ball. Father promised he would accept us publicly there.”

“And you’re sure he's going to say yes?”

“Of course!” He paled a little. “At least, I think so....”

“Because a public rejection in front of the entire estate staff is not going to go down well with anyone! And I do not wish to have to scrape your father off the ceiling!”

Scaden blushed.

“I still need to find a ring, though”, he said. “Or something else.”

Castiel thought about it for a moment.

“I have an idea”, he said.

“Go on.”

“For our tenth anniversary, your father bought me a bracelet.”

“That doesn't sound very exciting.”

“I haven't finished”, Castiel said patiently. “He had it make quite thick, with a quote on it – 'I will love you more and more each day as long as I live' – then had a jeweller cut it into two halves. We each wear our own half on special occasions. You could do your own quote, or have little letter S's or alphas running all the way round.”

“That's a wonderful idea, papa!” Scaden beamed. “I shall start thinking of a design right away.”

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The second week of December saw the estate grind to a virtual halt, as three-quarters of the staff came down with an unpleasant sickness. It was not life-threatening, but rendered the victim virtually immobile. Fortunately there was little that needed doing at this time of year, and the only person upstairs to contract it was, predictably, Anna. Doctor St. John travelled out to see her, and was unlucky enough to get caught in a late autumn downpour for his troubles. Despite wearing an overcoat, he was still dripping when he went to see his patient.

“How are you, Anna?” he asked, squelching across the floor despite having shed his coat.

She looked at him in surprise. Normally the young alpha was immaculately dressed, but today he looked like he had taken a bath in his clothes.

“Dry, unlike some”, she remarked. “The sore throat is the worst. I can hardly swallow.”

“I can prescribe some pastilles to help with that”, he said, coming over to the couch and feeling her forehead.

“Ew! You are dripping all over me!”
The doctor sighed.

“Sorry”, he said apologetically. “That old raincoat of mine doesn’t really keep out the rain anymore.”

“Why not get a new one?” she asked.

“You have a slight temperature”, he said, frowning. “I think some honeyed tea would make you feel better, plus a pastille every six hours.”

She looked at him expectantly.

“What?” he asked, confused.

“Why do you not get a new coat?” she asked again.

He laughed, and it suddenly occurred to Anna that this was the first time she had ever heard him do so. It seemed unusually loud for such a slight man.

“Contrary to popular belief, doctors are not paid massive amounts of money”, he told her. “And your uncle is one of too few patients who actually pays his bills on time, or for that matter, at all. No, my old coat will have to serve for a few years yet, I’m afraid. I shall go and tell Mrs. Barnes – yes, Mrs. Barroclough now, but I know she prefers her old name whilst she works here - to bring you up some honeyed tea, and I shall send a boy up with those pastilles tomorrow, all right?”

It was stupid, but seeing him sodden and unkempt like this made Anna realize for the first time in her life that Doctor Peter St. John was actually an attractive alpha. And only a few years older than she was. She swallowed involuntarily, and winced in pain.

“Thank you for coming, doctor”, she said politely.

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Castiel had received another letter from his mother, full of the usual skein of information about various happenings in Hertfordshire. She had even, somewhat unusually, included a small note for Michael, so he decided to take it over to his brother's cottage during his ride that day. It was unusually fine for the middle of December, but the locals foretold some bad weather to come before Christmas. Unfortunately they tended to be right in such things.

The Laird of Pemberley walked up the pathway to Chesil Cottage, and was about to knock at the door when he heard a sudden thump from inside. Concerned, he looked through the small glass side-panel, and could clearly make out his brother with his back to the wall, being held there by someone. Michael was being attacked! Not even thinking of the danger to himself, Castiel flung the door open and burst in.

What happened next took only a few seconds, but to Castiel the whole thing had a horrible feeling of slow motion. Too late, he realized his brother was far from being attacked, but was instead being very fervently kissed by the man who was pinning him to the wall. This was so embarrassing...

Then his brother's 'assailant' fell back from him, and turned to look at Castiel in shock. It was Dean's cousin, Lord Adam Fitzwilliam.

Oh.

There was a truly horrible silence in the room, and as all three men struggled to find something to say. Castiel spoke first.
“I... um... brought you a letter from mother, Michael. Yes, a letter. I... will leave it here.”

He backed away, wondering if his face was as red as theirs (it certainly felt like it), and had reached the door before Michael spoke.

“We love each other, Castiel.”

Adam moved round to stand behind Michael, wrapping his arms protectively around the omega.

“We really do”, he said, echoing the omega.

“Does Lord William know?” Castiel asked tentatively.

The horrified looks on the two men’s faces told him the answer to that before Adam spoke.

“No! Please don't tell him!”

“He can't disinherit you, can he?” Castiel asked.

“I would marry him if he owned just this cottage”, Michael said defiantly.

Adam pulled him closer, and looked at Castiel.

“Not as things are, but he could pretty much wreck the estate if he put his mind to it”, he said wryly.

“Please, Castiel. Promise not to tell him!”

Castiel sighed.

“All right, I promise”, he said. “But you two need to take care. Starting with learning how to keep away from front windows!”

Both men blushed.

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It said something about modern society that, whilst Scaden's romance with Samandriel was common knowledge amongst the servants, it was totally unknown to his own class except their immediate families. The heir to Pemberley had talked with his father before the Christmas Eve ball, and he could see he was still slightly uncomfortable with the relationship. The ball would be an excellent place to announce it, as only the estate staff and a few close friends would be there.

“Your brother Michael is a bit like I used to be”, Dean observed, as he brought his mate a drink.

Castiel tensed inwardly.

“In what way?” he asked, trying to keep his voice level.

“He won't dance with anyone, either”, Dean smiled. “Though in my case, I was the one who got slapped down in no uncertain terms.”

“I was not that bad!” his mate smiled, remembering.

“You were, and I deserved it!” Dean said firmly. “I had half hoped your brother might find someone in the area and settle down, but I suppose he prefers to be married to his books, like dear old Asher is married to those infernal contraptions of his!”
Castiel laughed, and watched as the dance came to an end. Dean kissed him, then moved away to where a small platform had been set down. Standing on it, he called for attention.

“I know you all want to get back to the food and drink”, he smiled, “but my eldest son has something he wishes to say, and we have decided that this time, when we are amongst friends and family, would be the best time to do it. Scay?”

Scaden had moved to stand beside him, and he had only a few paces to go to reach his cousin, who had been manoeuvred over to the podium by his father. He looked up in surprise, as Scaden knelt before him.

“Alfie, I love you. We have known each other all our lives, but only lately have we seen those feelings blossom into true love. Please, will you marry me?”

There was a stunned silence in the hall, and Samandriel seemed momentarily lost for words. A slight nudge from his father seemed to shake him out of his daze, however, and he suddenly lurched forward into his cousin’s arms.

“Yes! Of course, yes!”

There was a burst of applause from those watching. Scaden eventually let go of his cousin and led him onto the platform, before turning to him and pulling a large box out of his coat pocket.

“I had these made, just in case you did make me the happiest alpha in the kingdom”, he smiled. “Two bracelets, cut so they fit together. The words 'True Love' are written all the way round. May I?”

He reached for his cousin’s hand, and gently took it, sliding one of the bracelets over it. Then he took the other one and fitted it onto his own wrist. He just had time to do so before Samandriel leapt into his arms and kissed him again.

“I hereby bestow my blessing on this union”, Dean said, raising his voice above the renewed applause. “May my son and the son of my closest friend be truly happy together!”

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A week later, Dean and Castiel lay in bed together, waiting for the traditional striking of the old bell in the courtyard to indicate the New Year had arrived.

“1820 has been quite a year, my love”, Dean smiled, snuggling closer to his mate.

“Indeed”, Castiel smiled, feeling wonderfully warm as his alpha embraced him. “Our eldest son getting engaged, and the country getting a new king.”

“Unfortunately, for the latter part.” Dean nuzzled his mate's neck.

“You truly have forgiven me for that awful mess I made of things in summer?” he asked, sounding a little unsure.

“Of course, my love”, Castiel smiled, slowly turning until he was facing his alpha. “I love you. But.....”

Dean looked at him quizzically.
“But what?” he asked.

“You can always try to persuade me to forgive you a little more, you know.”

Dean grinned. And as 1820 gave way to 1821, he did try. Very hard.
January 1820

Dean stared at his visitor. All sorts of people came to Pemberley, but few looked so totally out of place as this one.

“Mr. Victor said it had to be delivered to you personally, guv’nor”, the man said, shuffling his feet. “He told me to wait for a reply, if you wanted to send one.”

“Oh, thanks”, Dean said. “Where shall I find you?”

“Send a message to Sid at the Grapes in Lambton, guv’nor, and I’ll come and pick it up. If there's nothing, let me know and I'll head back to the smoke.”

“Right. I had better be reading this, then.”

His visitor nodded, and slunk out of the room. Dean waited until he was sure he had gone before breaking the seal, to see what news his friend had for him.

Victor had been busy, not much limited by being shot in the leg (an altercation over some questionable warehouse items, and the other guy had fared worse, apparently). He was keeping tabs on Zachariah Adler, who had still not returned from the United Provinces, and he had some interesting news as well:

'I am now sure that there are two people sniffing around your family, though I do not yet know for certain if Mr. Adler is one of them', Victor wrote. 'But I do know the identity of one of the two, and I think it may surprise you. It is none other than your best friend's sister, Margaret Bingley. She has had an argument with her sister, Mrs. Ruby Walker, and has moved out to an insalubrious area of Glasgow, where she struggles to get by on the allowance her brother still pays her. Would you like me to inquire as to whether the Bingleys possess any family secrets that she might be after?'

Dean frowned. He had never been particularly fond of Margaret Bingley – the woman had long ago fancied herself as his future mate, and she had been instrumental in helping him to break up Sam and Gabriel back in 1800, after Dean had been inadvisable enough to express admiration for Castiel. But she was not the sort to do anything without a reason. He would definitely ask his friend to make some inquiries.

He wondered if he should tell Sam about his findings. To do so would make him worry, but if he later found out Dean had been keeping things from him again, it would be very difficult. He rubbed his jaw, remembering his friend’s reaction the last time he had kept things from him. But in the end he decided not to say anything for now, and if in some way Sam found out, he would just plead there was not enough information to merit mentioning to him yet.

The sound of his son and his son’s mate talking excitedly in the corridor outside brought Dean out of his reverie, and he locked the letter away in his desk drawer. He would tell Castiel about it later, but
for now he knew his mate was busy planning their eldest son's wedding, and his focus was all on that. Sighing, Dean went out to meet his son.

"Are you in love with me?"

The recipient of this question pulled his knees up to his chin, and looked thoughtfully at the questioner.

"Most people think I am not old enough to know what love is", he said evasively.

The Reverend Brenton Green looked pointedly at his visitor.

"This is serious, Ryazan", he said firmly. "Particularly with your eldest brother about to effectively marry himself out of the succession to Pemberley. Until Diniel marries and has children of his own, you are effectively the next but one heir."

"Oh, I think Dino will marry quite soon", Ryazan said knowingly. "Once he gets his future mate back."

The vicar stared at him in confusion.

"Back to the point", he said heavily. "You are sixteen and I am thirty-one, nearly double your age. Not to mention the fact you are under-age."

"I know", Ryazan said simply. "But that doesn't stop me from loving you."

The vicar could feel himself starting to sweat.

"And second, I am a country vicar, who owes his preferment totally to your father", he said. "If he disapproves, he could ruin me!"

Ryazan smiled at him.

"What?" asked the vicar.

"You said, if he disapproves", the boy grinned. "That means you do feel something for me."

"What? No! Well, I mean.... look, you're still a child!"

"Only for another fifteen months", Ryazan pointed out. "You feel something for me, and I feel something for you. I have to wait. I just want to know if you will wait too."

"Your father will still kill me!"

"My papa already suspects..."

"What?" the vicar almost yelled.

"He will support me in my choice". Ryazan said calmly. "But you – you are an attractive alpha who no longer had any need not to mate. In fact, you have been here a year, and you haven't...."

He stopped, and looked searchingly at the alpha, who was blushing.

"I see."
The vicar groaned, and held his head in his hands. Ryazan continued to stare at him.

“You've felt something for me all along”, the beta said smugly. “That's why you haven't seen anyone else, isn't it?”

There was a muffled whimper from the seated figure.

“Then all we have to do is be discrete for the next fifteen months, and all will be fine.”

“Your father won't allow the match, even when you are of age”, the vicar pointed out.

“Let me worry about that. You just carry on vicar-ing.”

“That's not even a word!”

“And I'll carry on loving you from a distance, safe in the knowledge you fell in love with me at first sight!”

Brenton glared at him.

“I hate you!” he said, knowing as he spoke that he didn’t mean it at all.

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Samandriel was sweating.

“I can't go through with this!” he muttered.

Joscelyn Bingley patted down his suit, and stood back to look at his brother. The big day was barely a week away, and the alpha's suit had arrived, and needed to be tried on to see if alterations were needed. It was black, with a white shirt and green-gold waistcoat. His future mate would wear almost the opposite, white with a black shirt and the same colour waistcoat.

“The gold brings out your eye colour”, Joscelyn said approvingly. “You were lucky, the only one of us six to inherit papa's eyes.”

“He's going to realize he's made a huge mistake!”

“He's had nearly a year to do that, Alfie. What is he going to do; wait until you're halfway down the aisle before turning round and saying, 'actually, old friend...’”

“People will talk.”

“Mostly garbage. And since when did you two, with your heads up in the clouds, care what people say about you? I mean, look at what our parents had to go through before they tied the knot, and now they’ve got us six.”

“That's not going to happen with us, at least!”

“You could always adopt”, Joscelyn suggested, pulling at the handkerchief to get it straight before standing back. “I don’t believe it; you've gone and grown another inch, Alfie. Any further and I'll fit a duster to your head, and we can save the maids a job! We'll have to call the tailor back in and get the trousers let down.”
He took his elder brother gently by the shoulders. Samandriel looked at him and smiled.

“I'm being silly, aren't I?” he said.

“Pre-wedding nerves”, Joscelyn said. “Quite understandable. But having clothes that fit is one of the two most important parts of the wedding day.”

“What's the other?”

Joscelyn walked away and made sure he was at the door when he spoke.

“Having clothes that come off easily!” he quipped, and fled, narrowly avoiding the book his brother threw at him.

Dean's eldest son might have caused him a few problems of late, but one of the things he was truly thankful for was the latter's decision to go for a small wedding, to be held in the small church in the grounds of Pemberley. Particularly as his beloved seemed to be on the point of tearing his hair out trying to organize everything. How he would have coped with a larger service... Dean shuddered at the thought.

Castiel had taken to carrying a notepad with him everywhere, which meant of course the omega ended up with ink-stains on his hands on an almost permanent basis. Last night had been typical. Dean had just wanted to turn in and sleep or something (preferably the 'or something'), but Castiel kept running through potential issues for the great day.

“How are we going to get Father Brian over from Lynton?” he mused, making another note on his pad. Since the service itself was to be at Pemberley, Scaden had suggested having Alfie's parish priest conduct the service, as Pemberley's services were usually conducted by the vicar of Lambton.

“He can come over in Sam's carriage”, Dean said idly, scooting his way over a little closer to his mate.

“And what are we going to do about flowers?” Castiel asked, sounding almost panicky now. “You know Alfie is allergic.”

“Order some fake ones”, Dean said, smiling at his mate reassuringly. “There's no bride, so we won't need many.”

“Do you think having them both go up the aisle together at the same time will work?”

Dean reached over and gently took his mate's pen and notepad away, placing them on his side of the bed.

“Beloved”, he said, taking Castiel's hands in his, “this is meant to be one of the most joyous days in our lives. If Napoleon had organized his Hundred Days with the same thoroughness that you've planned this wedding, we would all be speaking French right now. Relax, my love, and enjoy it.”

“But Dean...”

Dean silenced him with a kiss. Castiel seemed to sag into the bed.

“I like it when you calm me down”, he smiled happily. “Calm me some more, please.”

Dean did.
Dean was right. The wedding, held on the 23rd, went off without a hitch, and theirs and the Bingley bloodlines were united in the sight of God. His only concern had been that Reverend Martinson might be opposed to an alpha-alpha union, but the elderly cleric carried off the service with aplomb.

The service was held in the morning, and there was a reception luncheon immediately afterwards. The happy couple would then leave around midday for London, and Dean had told them they could enjoy the sights and sounds of the capital for two weeks. Finally Alfie helped Scaden into their carriage, and the two prepared to leave. They were just about to go when Dean told the driver to wait a minute.

“I have a small surprise for you both!” he grinned, handing his son a large envelope.

Scaden opened it, and looked at the contents. Then he gasped, and showed them to his mate.

“Dad! Thank you so much!”

Dean smiled.

I did say you were visiting the capital for two weeks”, he laughed. “I just didn't say which capital! Tickets for the ferry to France, and an onwards coach journey to Paris, plus ten days at one of the best hotels in the city of lovers. Enjoy!”

He stepped back and bade the coach driver to move off, as his son and son-in-law waved madly until they were out of sight. Then he turned to go into the house, only to see his own mate watching him.

“That was very kind, Dean”, he smiled.

“Yes, well, you gave me the idea”, he smiled back.

“Did I?”

“That costume shop we passed in Buxton two weeks ago. Do you remember the French maid outfit, and your saying how romantic Paris was?”

“I remember what you said about the outfit, and how you would have simply loved to...”

“Back to our guests, beloved”, Dean said, blushing fiercely.

++++

It was nearly midnight when they finally made it to their room. Dean was a little surprised when he entered to find Castiel undressing behind the screen.

“Your forty-eighth birthday in a minutes’ time”, Dean heard him say.

“Don't remind me!” the alpha groaned. “Just two more years till the big five-o.”

The clock on the mantle-piece began to chime midnight.

“I got you an early birthday present, by the way.”

Dean sat up in bed suddenly no longer sleepy.

“Will I like it?” he asked.
Castiel came out from behind the screen. And Dean nearly threw a fit! His mate was wearing the French maid's uniform from Buxton, complete with a long feather duster.

“You do know you're going to kill me one of these days!” he gasped.

Castiel walked lightly over to the bed, and dusted his husband's head lightly.

“I know”, he grinned. “But what a way to go! Happy birthday, my love!”
The Anvil And The Dagger

Chapter Summary

Dean makes yet another romantic gesture – oh, and by the way, someone gets stabbed.

February 1821

Castiel stared at his husband in surprise.

“But my beloved”, he objected, “the roads will still be bad. And if we have more heavy snow, we could be trapped up there.”

His husband smiled at him.

“Trapped in an isolated cottage in the middle of winter, with only you to keep me warm. Hmm, I can think of worse things. Few better, though.”

“You really want to go there in the middle of winter?”

Dean blushed slightly.

“There is somewhere I need to visit, and we will have to take three days coming back”, he admitted sheepishly, coming across to wrap his hands around the chair his mate was sitting on. “Though that will allow us to visit your aunt and uncle in their new home.”

Castiel sighed and leant back into his arms.

“Very well”, he said. “I suppose at least if the lake is frozen over, it would stop some dumb alpha from diving into it naked again, and freezing his…..”

“Hey!”

Their trip very nearly got called off before it started, as in the first week of that month, Diniel, Ryazan and Anna all came down with fevers. Worse, Doctor St. John was away for a week attending a conference in Liverpool, which meant they had to be treated by his replacement, a decidedly handsy beta called Doctor Azazel. When he spent far too long feeling Anna’s throat, she went and complained to her uncle, who immediately went to 'have a word'.

Diniel swatted the doctor’s hands away from him.

“You’ve felt my glands for long enough!” he snapped. “Either prescribe me some medicine, or get the hell out of here!”

“I prescribe a throat massage”, the beta said silkily. “And for a lovely little omega like you, I’ll even
do it myself at no extra charge…..

His face suddenly started to go very red, possibly due to the fact that the master of Pemberley had two hands around his neck, and was squeezing hard.

“I prescribe a severe case of a doctor who wants to lose certain parts of his anatomy!” he snarled. “Or perhaps I think I’d better ‘massage’ your throat a bit. At no extra charge!”

“Let me go!” the beta squeaked.

Dean squeezed the man’s throat for a few seconds more, then threw him to the floor.

“You have one minute to get out of this house!” he snarled. “After, that, I am fetching my shotgun and coming after you.”

“My bill….”

Dean looked pointedly at his watch. “Fifty-seven seconds, and counting!”

The doctor belatedly seemed to realize that the alpha was deadly serious, and made a scrambled exit from the room.

“Thank you, father”, Diniel smiled. “The next time any of us is ill when Doctor St. John is away, I think we should just suffer until his return.”

“I shall ask Mrs. Moseley to brew up some honeyed tea for you all”, his father said, moving to the window to watch the doctor scrambling hastily into his carriage before racing away down the drive, hopefully never to return. “I believe Doctor St. John is back on Monday, so I shall make sure there is a note asking him to call round before we leave.”

“You are leaving Tuesday, still?”

“Yes, weather permitting. We shall be back on Thursday the fifteenth. I hope you will all behave yourselves whilst we are gone.”

“Unlike Scay!” Diniel muttered.

Dean glared at him.

+~+~+

Their time at the cottage passed far too quickly for Dean’s liking, but at least they were lucky with the weather, which was surprisingly mild for early February. And although the lake was not frozen over, it was so cold that even a short paddle convinced Dean that diving into it this time might be the last mistake he ever made.

Apart from the times in bed (which occupied the majority of the holiday, one way or another), they sometimes just sat together on the open porch, or in front of a roaring fire. Dean loved to hear his mate read in that gravelled tone of his, and relaxing with him miles away from the cares of the world made him feel he was the luckiest alpha ever. He just hoped this feeling of bliss wasn’t another precursor to some disaster or other.
They started for home on the thirteenth, and Castiel wondered why his husband, usually so informative, had not told him where this extra call they had to make was. He was pleased that they were also due to stop at his Uncle Bobby’s new house in Cheshire, about twenty-five miles from Pemberley. His uncle had recently sold most of his London interests, and he and Aunt Ellen had decided to retire to a village not far from Manchester, so that they could be close to their son whilst he continued to follow his technological interests at the workshop there.

Castiel was even more surprised when they took a different road to the one they had arrived from, and he realized from the sun’s position that they were actually heading north, not south.

“Where are we going, beloved?” he asked curiously.

“It’s a surprise!” the alpha grinned.

“Not another wedding!” Castiel laughed.

“Not exactly”, Dean whispered mysteriously.

They reached the town of Carlisle where they stopped for refreshments, before continuing ever further north. Soon afterwards Castiel saw a sign telling them they were now entering Scotland, and he looked at his mate in confusion.

“We are stopping soon, and all will be revealed”, his mate promised.

When they reached the next town, the carriage came to a halt outside a small inn. Dean immediately leapt out, and guided his mate down from the carriage.

“Where are we?” Castiel asked.

Dean smiled at him.

“Gretna Green!”

Castiel stared at him in amazement. And suddenly, it all made sense.”

“You didn’t…."

“First thing tomorrow morning, on St. Valentine’s Day itself, we will be wed according to Scottish law over the anvil, as young couples have done for the past century!” Dean grinned. “The most romantic place in the British Isles, so I just had to bring you here.”

Castiel stared at him in amazement. He could feel himself tearing up, and he leapt into his alpha’s arms, trying to burrow as close into him as possible.

“You are so amazing!” he sobbed. “I love you, Dean Winchester!”

“I love you, Castiel Winchester. And we have one more thing to do before we turn in for the night.”

“What?”

Dean gestured to a small clothiers shop across the road.
“I ordered full Scottish outfits for us, kilts included”, he grinned. “Let’s see how we both look in a dress!”

++++

The marriage service was short and to the point, and Castiel loved it. He and Dean stood there in their blue and green Campbell tartan (Dean was one-quarter Scottish through his grandmother), and the blacksmith joined them together once more. Even the weather seemed to be on their side; a miserable start to the day suddenly cleared up, the only problem being a strong wind blowing off the Solway Firth which meant both men had to grasp their kilts firmly to maintain their dignity.

They changed out of their kilts before boarding the carriage for the long journey south again, although Castiel promised to wear his again ‘on special occasions’. If the road had not been so bad, Dean would have had him there and then in the carriage, but they had tried that once before, and the bruises that resulted had taken two weeks to go down. Worse, Sam and Gabriel had chanced to come over during that time, and made several uncalled for remarks. The fact they had been right had been neither here nor there.

Once back in England, the road (which was for most of the distance the main road to London) improved considerably, and they made the village of Disley, where Mr and Mrs Singer now lived, by nightfall. The couple welcomed their nephew and his husband, and they talked about various things in both their lives and the news.

“I have a piece of news that will amaze you!” Mr. Singer grinned. “Asher has actually met someone!”

Dean almost choked on his pie.

“What?” he exclaimed. “I always thought he was waiting for someone to design a human machine, so he could marry that!”

The Singers both laughed.

“He went into the offices of the local shipping company in Liverpool to see about buying a ticket to the Isle of Man, for some mechanical show or other”, Mrs Singer explained. “Anyway, he had forgotten that he’d spent all day in the workshop, and his face was as black as soot! He met this native who had come over from British India, and was now managing things at this end of operations. So the first thing Asher says is how dark the man’s skin was, and the man of course promptly handed him a mirror. Poor Asher fled the building, but he went back the next day to apologize, and now they’re going out together.”

“That sounds so like my cousin!” Castiel laughed. “What’s the man’s name?”

“Kevin Tran. His mother is Indian, and his father’s a colonel in the British army.”

“Well done Asher!” Dean smiled. “Miracles do happen, after all!”

The talk moved onto their recent trip north, and Dean blushed when Castiel told his aunt and uncle about his ‘third wedding’.

“You’re so romantic for an alpha!” Mrs Singer teased.
“Well, it’s Cas”, Dean huffed, as if that explained everything. “I love the guy, and I know I don’t tell him often enough, but….. I do try.”

Castiel reached over and took him by the hand.

“And you do succeed!” he smiled warmly.

Dean blushed even more.

+++

The two of them had enjoyed their time in the north, but both were glad to see Pemberley when they drove in past the gatehouse the following day. It had rained most of the way back from Cheshire, but the sun came out ten minutes from home, and a beautiful rainbow now hung in the sky above the golden stones of the old house. They held each other’s hands as they drove up to the front door, and Dean guided his mate gently into the house.

“Home at last!” Castiel smiled.

Dean kissed him chastely on the hand.

“Home is wherever you are, beloved”, he smiled back.

Castiel went upstairs to change, whilst his husband went into his study to read the two letters that had come in his absence (Diniel had been told to open all non-personal correspondence, and deal with bills and such like). One was a letter from a friend over in Shropshire, but the other had an unusual mark on it, and seemed decidedly dog-eared. Dean opened it first, and read the contents, frowning as he did so. He was still thinking about it when Castiel came down and knocked at the door.

“Come in, Cas”, he called out.

“How did you know it was me?” his mate asked, smiling as he entered.

“Your knock is always so apologetic”, Dean grinned back. Then his smile faded. “There has been some rather bad news in my absence, I’m afraid.”

“What is it?” Castiel asked anxiously.

“Mr Fitzgerald has been stabbed.”
Castiel gasped in horror.

“What?”

“Do you remember he took on the running of the estate after sacking the former manager there?”

“Yes?”

“It seems that man he sacked did not take well to his decision. He stabbed poor Mr. Fitzgerald at the New Year’s Eve party on the estate. From this letter, it sounds serious.”

“Did they catch the man?”
“What? Oh, yes. He’ll be tried, if he hasn’t already been hung by now, but it will be months before Mr. Fitzgerald is capable of travelling home.”

Castiel thought quickly. His mate did not know how their middle son – now effectively the heir to Pemberley – felt about the former soldier. Diniel would not react well to the news.

“The boys are quite fond of Mr. Fitzgerald”, he said casually. “Perhaps you would like me to break the news to them?”

Dean smiled lovingly at him.

“That would be good of you”, he said. “I shall write him back straight away, of course.”

+~+~+

His middle son took the news even worse than he had feared, and Castiel was thankful he had taken the precaution of telling him whilst his mate was elsewhere on the estate. Diniel crumpled into a heap on the sofa, his body shaking as he tried to hold back the tears.

“It’s all right to cry, son”, Castiel said gently. “It’s just us two here.”

He gently pulled his son into his arms – no mean feat, as even though Diniel was the shortest of their three sons, he was still slightly taller than his papa - and comforted him as he sobbed. Eventually the tears stopped, and the younger Winchester pulled himself up.

“I’m two months shy of my eighteenth birthday!” he sniffed ruefully. “I shouldn’t be falling apart like this!”

“If it’s someone you love, then it’s understandable”, his papa said gently. “The letter did say the doctor expected him to make a full recovery, given time.”

“Not in that climate!”

Castiel fondled his son’s unruly hair.

“I could suggest to Dean that we get him transported to somewhere out of the Tropics, once he is well enough to travel”, he suggested. “Perhaps he could be moved to a hospital in the United States or Canada?”

Diniel smiled at him.

“That would be good. I only wish I could write him myself, but dad might suspect.”

“I shall write him a letter from all of us, saying how we wish him a speedy recovery”, Castiel reassured him. “And I shall mention you by name, just so as he gets the message.”

“That’ll probably scare him!”

“You could include a personal note, if you’d rather”, Castiel offered. “After all, you are effectively the heir to the estate, or your children will be. I could seal it in my letter before giving it to Dean?”

“That would be good.”
His papa smiled affectionately at him.

++++

Castiel was in the kitchen again, watching as Mrs. Moseley prepared an apple pie. His mate’s favourite, though the omega did wonder how their cook had access to apples this far out of season. Possibly the new ice-house they had had installed.

The dark-skinned cook looked up suddenly from her baking.

“Did you enjoy your trip to Scotland, Mr. Castiel?” she asked.

“We went to Gretna Green, to be married ‘over the anvil’”, Castiel smiled. “Dean can be so romantic at times.”

“That alpha of yours hates girly moments, but he sure produces enough of them when you are around”, she observed. “I’m glad you enjoyed it, though.”

Something in her tone worried Castiel slightly.

“Is something wrong, Mrs. Moseley?” he ventured, because he knew that even if their gifted cook did see what the future held, she would never fully reveal it to anyone else. She looked at him thoughtfully.

“Last year you and Mr Dean had all that blether over Scaden, did you not?” she said frankly.

A servant speaking so frankly to her employer’s mate would not have been tolerated in many a great house, but Castiel had always thought such conventions were old-fashioned. Besides, he liked it when people spoke their minds.

“Yes?” he said.

“More storms are coming your way, Mr. Castiel”, she said, rolling out the pastry. “One soon, one later this year, and a mighty third one next spring, probably in two parts. You’ll weather the first one all right, but the others… will be tough. It will be a lot for both of you.”

“There won’t be…. I mean….”

“We all have to make the best of what life throws at us”, she said. “But you will come through it all, both of you. And now I’d better be getting on, or the master won’t get his pie, and we both know how that will make him!”

Castiel knew when he was being dismissed, so he thanked her and left, thinking hard.

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Mrs. Moseley was to be proven all too right....
March 1821

‘March comes in like a lion, and goes out like a lamb’. That was the old saying, certainly, but it was over a week into the third month, and the weather remained calm, with just the occasional shower to dampen the golden stones of Pemberley. Castiel was still feeling on a high from his wonderful trip to Scotland the previous month, although his second son’s unhappiness at Mr Fitzgerald’s health concerned him somewhat.

The second week of the month brought Scaden’s birthday, which fell on a Monday. Because he wished to spend the day with his mate, it was decided that the two of them would come over to Pemberley the day before, and spend some time with the family.

“Our boys are growing up”, Castiel said wistfully, as he watched his three sons and Samandriel playing cricket out on the lawn. “Soon Dino and Ry will get married, and Anna, then the house will be empty.”

Dean came over to the study window and nuzzled into his neck.

“I can think of a few things we can do once they are all gone!” he whispered, smiling slightly.

Castiel blushed.

“It just makes me feel old, seeing them all grown up”, he said, sighing.

Dean pulled him closer.

“You are only forty-three years young”, he said, nuzzling his mate again, “and tonight I shall prove it to you. Unless you would like me to do it now….”

Castiel pulled away from him sharply.

“Dean! The children are watching!”

“They know what we get up to anyway”, the alpha said, pouting in mock annoyance. “Just one little kiss, beloved?”

Castiel sighed and returned to his husband’s arms, feeling wonderfully safe and secure. Dean kissed him, and would probably have turned it into something more, had not the door opened at that point.

“Oh”, said Anna. “Um, you sent for me? If it’s a bad time….”
“No”, Dean said firmly. “I did want to talk with you, Anna. Stay, beloved”, he added, as Castiel made to move away. “This concerns all of us.”

She looked at them both uncertainly.

“Is something wrong?” she asked.

“Not at all”, Castiel smiled reassuringly. “It is about the conversation we had after your dear mama passed away.”

“Oh”, she said, remembering. “That.”

When her mother had died, Anna had after the funeral gone to spend a few weeks with her paternal grandparents, returning to Pemberley to be with her mother when it was clear that the latter's health was irrevocably failing. Two weeks after her mother's funeral, her uncles had sat her down and told her they would like to adopt her if she so wished, but that the decision was hers, and should not be made until her eighteenth birthday, which Anna now realized meant at the end of this month. She knew that Dean had been managing her estate well for her, selling off the house and investing the money carefully, because he gave her a report at the end of each month showing her how things were going, and discussed all major decisions with her before taking them.

“Your birthday is in three weeks’ time, Anna”, Dean reminded her gently. “If you wish to make the decision then, that is fine. Or you may wish to wait until you are twenty-one, if you do not feel ready. Of course you are already provided for under the new will I drew up over Scaden’s marriage, but if you wish it, Cas and I will adopt you formally.

“I really… I think…..”

Castiel moved to stand beside her.

“Perhaps you feel you may be dishonouring your parents' memory by saying yes”, he suggested.

Anna blushed.

“I do a little”, she admitted. “I’m so grateful for everything you’ve done, Uncle Dean, but it’s… it’s….”

“A step too far for now?” suggested the alpha.

She blushed again, and nodded.

“I fully understand, and we both respect your decision”, he said, smiling. “We love you as a daughter, and will continue to do so. You have my word on that.”

“Mine too”, Castiel smiled. “Now I’d better go outside and get those boys of ours to move away from the house a little, otherwise my beloved is going to have to pay for a new pane of glass or two!”

Dean was frowning as he came into breakfast a few days later.

“Is something the matter, beloved?” Castiel asked, concerned.
“I'm afraid it is bad news”, Dean said grimly. “You remember Doctor Kruschnic, who delivered Ryazan for us?”

“Yes?” Castiel asked anxiously.

“He has been killed. He had to return to Russia to clear up some financial matters over an inheritance, and he was shot by a Russian army officer. I have no details as to why.”

Castiel gasped.

“That's horrible!” he said. “What about his family?”

“His wife died some years back, and there's just a teenage son, Sasha”, Dean said. “He's fled to his uncle in St. Petersburg, but the uncle – Fedor, I think his name is – is worried that the authorities will try to make the boy disappear so they can seize his lands. The inheritance was quite large, apparently.”

“Is there anything we can do?” Castiel asked.

“I can use my contacts and see if we can help”, Dean said. “After all he did for us, helping his son is the least we can offer to do. I shall write at once.

++~+++

“I have received some good news”, Dean announced at the breakfast table a few days later. “Mr. Fitzgerald is out of danger, and is being moved to a hospital in New York so he can recover away from the Tropics. The doctors say three to six months, and he will be well enough to return home.”

“That is indeed good news”, Castiel smiled, covertly eying his middle son. Diniel caught his eye, and looked away. “Hopefully he will be well enough to take over as our new manager when Tom retires.”

“Indeed”, Dean smiled. “It will be good to have him back.”

The talk turned to other things, but after the meal was over, Castiel gently steered his middle son to his room.

“What's wrong, Dino?” he asked softly. “This is good news.”

The omega sighed.

“He doesn't want me, papa”, he said sadly. “I mean, he went halfway round the world just to get away from me. And even if he does come back, he would never accept me.”

Castiel thought for a while.

“Dino”, he said gently, “you know how your father is always so confident?”

His son stared at him, puzzled.

“Yes, papa?”

“Well, Mr. Fitzgerald is probably the exact opposite”, Castiel said gently. “He knows he is disfigured, and that every time he meets someone new, their first reaction is to his wounds. And he was a soldier, someone whose life often depended on their ability to react fast and confidently. I suspect that that confidence is now broken, which is why he thinks he could never marry, let alone
someone who is effectively heir to a great estate.”

“But I love him, papa!”

“Do you really?”

“Yes!”

“Then you have to rebuild that confidence, son”, Castiel said. “You have to persuade him that he is worthy, and that the two of you can have a future together. It will not be easy. He may never be fully what he once was, but if you love him enough, and make sure he knows that, then maybe one day he will accept you.”

“A omega pursuing an alpha!” Diniel huffed. “How times change!”

“If he does accept you, tell me first, and I will break it to your father. It won't be easy, but after Scay, I think he will accept your decision. Mr. Fitzgerald is a good man. I like him.”

“Thank you, papa.”

++++

Adam had ridden over to Michael's cottage to discuss a new book he had ordered for the omega. They were lying in bed together upstairs (it had been a mostly horizontal discussion) when they both heard the sound of a horse pulling up outside. Adam got out of bed and went over to the window.

“Holy cow!”

Michael looked up at him in confusion.

“What is it?” he asked.

“My brother! He must have been out riding, and recognized old Copenhagen standing outside.” He frantically began to throw on some clothes, whilst the omega watched him amusedly.

“You still haven't told him about us?” he asked lightly, as Adam pulled on his trousers.

“No, and you know damned well why!” Adam retorted. “He can't disinherit me, but he could pretty much wreck the estate if he wanted.” He bolted for the door, hissing 'keep quiet' as he bowled through it. He was at the bottom of the stairs when he realized.

“Damnation!”

Michael had scented him during their lovemaking. There was no way his brother wouldn't know he'd had an omega in the house. The only saving grace was that Lord William probably didn't know this was Michael's cottage. He opened the door and met his brother in the garden.

“Adam, you old dog!” Earl William grinned. “Hell's bells, I could smell the omega on you with the door shut! Good in bed, is he?”

Adam flushed a bright red.

“Very good”, he said shortly. “What brings you here, brother?”

“Visiting Lord Winchester”, his brother said. “We've exchanged ownership of a couple of farms, so don't worry, I'm not selling off the family silver.”
“Thanks. If you don't mind, brother....”

The earl laughed at him.

“Want to get back to that willing omega of yours, no doubt!” he smirked. “Who am I to stand in the way of true lust? Just remember to bathe before you come home. Oh, and Adam....”

“Yes?”

“If you see that idiot Michael Bennet in your travels, tell him Lord Selkirk asked if he could reorganize his library as well. He was impressed with what he did with ours.”

“If I see him, I will of course tell him.”

“Have fun!”

And he was gone. Adam sighed in relief.

+~+~+

The first days of spring were very much like the last ones of winter, sunny and cool, with just the occasional shower. But on the last day of the month, the skies darkened ominously, and just after sunset, the rain began to fall heavily.

Castiel had had a particularly tiring day. His husband had asked him to attend a civic function in Lambton (“boring aldermen and such, Cas, but the local lord has to show his support”), and the whole thing had gone on far too long for the omega’s liking. He was also on yet another type of heat suppressants, the last ones having stopped working, and his body was finding it hard to adjust. So when he and Dean got home late that evening and dripped their way into the hall, he was just about ready for bed. Fortunately his husband was equally tired, so they fell into bed together and were asleep in minutes.

One thing Castiel shared with Dean was that both of them were heavy sleepers. So the omega was somewhat surprised when he woke up in the darkened room, and saw the hands of the clock at just short of midnight. For a moment he was puzzled as to what had woken him... but suddenly he knew.

He stared in complete and utter astonishment....
The Storm Breaks

Chapter Summary

Castiel 'loses' his memory, and Dean assumes the worst about his niece. Diniel gets a new title, and Scaden ends up in a ditch (again).

March 1821

His husband was actually crying. Dean Winchester, the supreme alpha, was crying!

For a moment, the omega was unsure as what to do. He had read somewhere that waking people from nightmares was a bad thing, but on the other hand he could hardly let the man he loved continue to suffer. Moving slowly, he edged closer, until he held his husband in his arms.

Dean was still asleep, and shaking even harder now. Castiel held him gently, lightly scenting his husband to try to reassure him. The shaking seemed to subside a little but suddenly a loud roll of thunder from outside caused the alpha to jerk violently, and he sat up and yelled. Castiel was almost thrown off the bed, but he managed to hold on and moved back to reassert his hold, trying to calm his husband down.

“I… I… I wasn’t scared of the storm, Cas.”

The omega suppressed a laugh. Typical Dean! His first thought would be to try to cover up any perceived emotional weakness.

“You were just having a nightmare”, he soothed. “We all have them from time to time, me included. You’re awake now.”

Dean stared at him, and Castiel could see the terror in his husband’s eyes. He looked like he wanted to confide in him, but was holding back for some reason. The omega took his hand.

“Tell me about it”, he said softly.

“It was awful!” Dean said, almost panting. “The storm, the house… you, Cas!”

“What about me?” the omega asked.

Dean looked at him, and suddenly pulled him into a tight embrace.

“You weren’t there”, he muttered. “I’d lost you. I love you so much, Cas, and you… you weren’t there!”

“Where was I? Do you know?”

“No!” Dean almost yelled, and he was becoming almost hysterical now, and he grabbed onto his mate’s arms so tightly that it hurt. “I can’t lose you, Cas!”
“Hold me, Dean”, the omega whispered. “Hold me close. You will never lose me. I could no more leave you than stop breathing.”

The alpha was almost suffocating him in his embrace, but Castiel said nothing. He felt he had to let his mate hold him like this, to let him know everything was all right. He knew he would have to reassure him again come the morning that no-one else would ever know about this side of his mate’s character, because Dean would think it would make him less of an alpha as a result. Finally his beloved’s breathing calmed down, and shortly after he fell asleep, still holding Castiel tight to his chest.

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April 1821

Normally the first one of them to wake in the morning would ring the bell for coffee, but the day after the storm, Castiel woke and found his husband still wrapped protectively around him. Smiling, he gently eased his way round to face him, and whispered his lover’s name until he awoke. Dean yawned, looked at him, then went very pale.

“Last night…..”

“I find I have a terrible memory as I get older”, Castiel interrupted him. “The things I ‘forget’ you would not believe. I trust you slept well, my love?”

Dean looked at him lovingly, and kissed him lightly on the nose.

“I can’t believe I once thought I was too good for you!” he whispered at last. “I so don’t deserve you, beloved.”

“Yes, but good things do happen, even to alphas who insult potential dancing partners”, Castiel whispered back, smiling as his mate flushed bright red. “I love you, Dean Winchester. Now let’s get some caffeine inside of us, and you can set about seeing what damage that storm did to the estate.”

Dean kissed him on the lips, then reached over and rang the bell.

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The next few days were very busy, as the storm had brought down a number of trees as well as damaging several houses on the estate. Pemberley itself had escaped with minor damage to the roof and a single broken window, caused by a falling roof tile. Michael’s house was much more badly affected, losing nearly half its roof to a fallen tree, and Dean invited him to move into Pemberley whilst it was being repaired. To his surprise, his brother seemed strangely reluctant; Dean suspected he might resent giving up his freedom.

All the extra work meant Dean’s schedule became very irregular for the first two weeks of April, and Castiel took to asking Mrs. Moseley to pack him sandwiches (and, of course, pie!) so he could make sure his mate had something to eat whilst he was out. The extra work also meant Dean returned to Pemberley at odd hours, which led to problems one Thursday afternoon when he came in unannounced, and decided to catch up on some letters in the writing room.

He was a lot edgier since his nightmare, wanting to be with Castiel as often as possible, and his long absences on the estate prevented this. Thus he was tenser than usual when he heard his niece’s voice
coming from the reading room next door. This was odd, he thought, as Anna normally only went there to read in silence. Then he heard what was unmistakably a man’s voice, and his hackles rose. He could not make out what the man was saying, as his voice was too low, but he could just hear his niece’s reply.

“Well, at least I do not have to take my clothes off this time.”

Dean froze. He moved closer to the connecting door, but could still not quite make out what the man was saying.

“Oh! You do know your hands are cold when you touch me there!”

Dean blinked. What on earth....?

“A bit lower down, please. Yes, just there.”

The man laughed, and Dean swallowed a growl. Someone was in for some serious bodily harm.

“My uncle won’t be back for hours yet.”

That’s what you think, Dean thought angrily. He thrust open the door and burst into the room....

.... to find his niece lying on the couch, and Doctor St John writing out something on his notepad. They both looked up in surprise at his dramatic entrance.

Oh.

“Hullo, Lord Winchester”, the doctor smiled. “I did not expect to see you here.”

“Um, no”, Dean muttered, trying not to blush at what he had been thinking. “I’m in and out a lot at the moment, you know. Still sorting out all the storm damage, and, um, things. Hullo, Anna.”

“Hullo, uncle. Is everything all right?”

“Of course”, Dean lied. “Why do you ask?”

“Only you came through that door like a pack of wolves was after you!”

“Oh. Um, it’s a bit stiff, that’s all. Has the doctor found what’s wrong with you?”

“Just another throat infection”, she said. “He wanted to make sure it was nothing more serious.”

“The usual pastilles and some of Mrs. Moseley’s honeyed tea, and your niece will be fine”, the doctor smiled.

“Right. Great. Wonderful.” Dean’s ability to form coherent sentences seemed to have been left back in the writing-room. “Well, in that case, I’ll get back to my letters. Sorry to have disturbed you all.”

He exited the room rather more quietly than he had entered, and shut the door gently behind him. His niece smiled after him.

“He’s so protective over me.”
The doctor grinned at her.

“Yes”, he whispered. “But you might want to keep your voice down next time, my lady.”

Anna blushed.

+++

The Winchester ball for Diniel and Ryazan’s birthdays was to be held on Easter Monday, the twenty-third. As this was also St. George’s Day, everyone invited was asked to wear red and white. This meant Ryazan’s birthday fell on Easter Sunday, which was one of the few times of the year that the vicar of Lambton preached at the small church in the grounds.

Or at least, that was the original plan.

“Poor Reverend Terry”, Castiel sighed, as they made their way over to Kympton church on Easter Sunday morning. “His last year in the Church, a quiet country parish, and now this. He was so looking forward to his retirement.”

Lambton’s vicar had died suddenly and unexpectedly of a seizure, two weeks after the great storm. Nominally the Church had the right to choose anyone it wanted to replace him, but that choice was always made with regard to the master of Pemberley’s wishes. Dean had agreed to a young vicar from Galloway, a Mr Benjamin Stephens, but the man could not start for another four months yet.

“I wonder if Reverend Green would mind filling in for the time”, Castiel suggested. “It is only four months, after all. And I am sure he would welcome the extra money.”

“A good suggestion”, his husband smiled. “I shall ask him after church today.”

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“It is only four months; that is guaranteed”, Dean said reassuringly. “And the vicar of Lambton gets the usual stipend, plus an extra allowance from the estate as vicar of Pemberley.”

“I will admit it is tempting”, the vicar said. “I feel quite guilty extracting tithes from people who have so little after the storm.”

Dean looked at him, surprised.

“You could always have come to me, reverend”, he pointed out. “I keep a small fund for contingencies such as this, and if you think it appropriate for people to pay less for a while, it would make up any shortfall in your own income.”

“Thank you. That would be very agreeable. And as it is only for a short time, I would be delighted to stand in at Lambton.”

“Excellent!” Dean beamed. “I have noticed my youngest son is very interested in the Church right now, even to the detriment of his other studies. You really must stop giving him all those books!”

“Yes, Ryazan really wants to get into the Church”, Castiel said, looking hard at the vicar.
The churchman blushed. He knew full well what the Laird of Pemberley was implying.

“It is his birthday today, I believe?” he said, trying to shift the conversation.

“Yes”, Castiel said. “We hope to see you at the ball tomorrow evening, reverend.”

“Oh, I was not invited.”

“Then we shall send you round an invitation at once”, Castiel said smoothly. “As our resident vicar, you are most welcome. I shall ask Ryazan to drop it off to you this week.”

The vicar gave him a long look which quite clearly said ‘stop it’, but Castiel just smiled innocently at him, before moving away.

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Unusually, neither Scaden nor Samandriel turned up at Kympton, which annoyed Dean somewhat, until he discovered the reason why. When the two arrived in Sam and Gabriel’s carriage at Pemberley, Scaden was on crutches, whilst his mate fussed around him.

“What on earth happened, son?” Dean asked anxiously.

“The idiot twisted his ankle out walking last week, then decided to go riding without telling anyone”, Samandriel said before his mate could speak. “Of course he fell off, and spent an hour in a ditch before anyone found him.”

“Forty-seven minutes!” Scaden growled, swatting his crutch at his mate, who dodged him with ease.

“And he tried to insist on riding back, so they had to literally drag him into a cart.”

“A nobleman rides, Alfie!”

“He’s been unbearable ever since; want, want, want….”

“Dad! You let me marry this person!”

Dean laughed.

“Son, my life would not have been worth living if I had not!” he smiled, tugging his mate closer to him. “You made your own bed, and now you must lie in it.”

“Doctor St John says I have to have my bed at a weird angle, on top of everything”, Scaden grumbled. “It makes me feel seasick!”

“Unfortunately the good doctor couldn’t find a pill for his eternal grumpiness!” Samandriel said, dodging as his mate swiped a crutch at him again.

“Come over here and let me hit you!”

“The doctor said no exertion of any sort until he checks you up next week.”

“Oh, that’s why he’s grumpy!” Castiel laughed. “An alpha denied his pleasures. I know how
intolerable they can be…”

Dean slapped a hand over his mate’s mouth and silenced him.

“I will make you pay for that remark tonight!” he hissed playfully.

Castiel looked at him innocently, and pulled Dean's hand away.

“Promise?”

Their sons groaned in unison, and headed off into the house, Scaden still trying to swipe his mate with his crutch. Dean and Castiel both laughed, and followed them in.

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It was the evening of the ball, and the floor of the ball room was an essay in red and white. The family had already given their presents that morning, and Dean had formally created his second son Lord Hughenden, to give him some practice in running a small part of the estate down towards the town of Derby. There would be no title for Ryazan as a third son, but his father had promised to grant him a part of the estate on his eighteenth birthday in a year’s time.

Ryazan just felt relieved. He was seventeen now, and almost a man. And there was one person here who he particularly wanted to see.

He found the Reverend Green standing on the balcony, talking to Tom, the estate manager. He waited out of sight for a while until the conversation had finished, then moved forward.

“Good evening, reverend”, he smiled.

The vicar looked warily at him.

“Good evening, Ryazan”, he said carefully. “It is good to see you.”
“I saw you in church earlier.”
“Yes.” The vicar hesitated, before adding, “you were staring at me.”
“You're worth staring at!”
“Mr. Winchester!”
“You still think you’re not good enough for me!” Ryazan said, sounding angry. “I’m almost a man now!”
“And I will always be fourteen years older than you, a social inferior and a man of the cloth”, Brenton said heavily. “I really like you, Ryazan, but it would never work.”
“I am not going to give up, you know”, the beta retorted. “I shall pursue you until you say yes.”
“You can have any alpha or beta in the county”, Brenton pointed out.
“I don’t want them. I want you!”
“Let’s not have this conversation on your birthday, Ryazan. Please?”
Fine!” snapped the omega. “We shall not speak of this again for another six months.”
Brenton smiled in relief.
“But during that time, I shall pursue you with every weapon at my command”, Ryazan said, suddenly moving in closer to the vicar. “I know you want me, Bren, and one day you will want me enough to ignore who and what I am. I can wait. We Winchesters are good at waiting. And we always get what we want in the end, if we want it badly enough. And I want you badly!”

He almost growled the last few words, as he took the vicar’s hand and pressed a chaste kiss lightly
onto it, before backing away and leaving the balcony swiftly. The vicar stared after him, dumbstruck.

Apart from two of Dean’s Shropshire friends who were staying the night, the visitors all left by midnight. Castiel sighed heavily as he watched the last carriage bowl away down the drive.

“There are times I’m grateful Ry arrived so early, and we get to have one ball rather than two”, he sighed. He leant back into his husband, and smiled up at him. “You’ve been unusually quiet tonight, beloved?”

Dean gently turned his mate round to face him.

“I’ve just been thinking how lucky I am”, he said quietly. “Sometimes I look at you and wonder, just what did I do to deserve you.”

Castiel blushed.

“Perhaps our relationship did not exactly start conventionally”, he said, “but then few people are what they seem. I thought you were just an overly proud alpha who thought himself too good for the likes of country folk.”

“Until you shone those baby blue eyes of yours at me, and I was lost”, Dean said, hugging him closer. “And you not only took my hand, but gave me three wonderful sons as well. I love you, Castiel James Winchester, but it’s cold out here. Let’s go to our room and let me show you just how much.

So Castiel did.
May 1821

Castiel stood between two of the giant stone pillars and stared up in awe at the huge door before him. He rarely accompanied his husband to London; not because Dean didn’t want him there - quite the reverse – but because the master of Pemberley was so busy during these visits that he did not have the time he wanted to be with his omega, and the last time this had happened, it had left both of them feeling miserable. Instead, Dean made specific non-business visits to the capital, where he could devote all his time to his mate. He also wanted Castiel to experience the atmosphere of a city preparing for a coronation, albeit of an unpopular king.

That unpopularity was the reason behind the air of tension in the capital. Everyone knew that the new king’s wife, Caroline of Brunswick, had announced her determination to attend the coronation and be crowned alongside her still-husband, just as they knew from the new king’s frequent pronouncements that he was equally determined to prevent this. The sentiment in the capital was very much for what the people perceived as the wronged wife, and there were far more soldiers around than usual.

Dean had brought his mate to St. Paul’s Cathedral on this particular day because he knew Castiel was far more religious than he would ever be, and it being a Sunday, they could attend the service together before being shown round afterwards. Castiel loved the place, though to Dean it brought back memories of their ill-starred meeting in the winter of 1801, after he had broken up Sam's relationship with Gabriel. Despite this, he was still awed with the sheer size of Sir Christopher Wren’s creation, built after the terrible Great Fire of 1666.

“There are still some people who don’t like it because of the dome”, Castiel told him.

“Why?” Dean asked, curious.

“The story goes that Wren slipped it in at the last minute, because he was a secret Catholic and wanted to emulate St. Peter’s in Rome”, Castiel said, craning his neck to look up at the inside of the dome. “It is only forty years since the Gordon Riots, and some people are angry that parliament is even considering allowing Catholics to vote.”

“I’m thankful we’ve gone past the days when we burnt people because of their religion”, Dean said fervently. “We’re all Christians, after all.”

Castiel moved closer to him.

“The words you were yelling out in the house last night weren’t very Christian, beloved”, he whispered.
Dean blushed.

“Not in here, of all places!” he insisted. “Bad omega!”

Castiel smirked at him, but said no more.

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Castiel wanted to attend an art exhibition later that afternoon, and because he was the best mate in the world, he suggested his alpha wait in a nearby tavern. Dean was a little anxious about an omega on his own in London, but he knew he was close enough to sense any imminent threat, so agreed. He even read his book rather than downing several pints, and was still on only his second when Castiel came up to him.

“Was there anything good?” Dean asked.

“Mr. Constable was showing his latest work”, Castiel said, sitting down and ordering a half. “‘Landscape: Noon’ he calls it. He’ll have to think of a better title, but it’s a lovely picture, a horse and cart resting in a river.”

“Sounds thrilling!”

Castiel glared at him.

“It’s pastoral, beloved. The world is changing, with all these new machines coming in. People will value the countryside much more in the future.”

“Yes, but they won’t want to see the reality”, Dean pointed out. “They’ll just want the idealized version, to make them feel better about life.”

“That’s what art should be”, Castiel said. “That, or as a memento, like all those paintings of your ancestors at Pemberley.”

Dean stared at him for some time.

“What?” Castiel asked, puzzled.

“I’m such an idiot!”

Castiel looked at him.

“That was an opening for a timely denial, beloved!”

“Oh. But what makes you think you’re more of an idiot that usual?”

Dean swatted at him from across the table.

“Because I don’t have a picture of you!” he said. “I had our sons done a couple of years back, and I’ve been done a few times, but never you.”

Castiel blushed.

“I don’t like being painted”, he muttered.

“Why not?” Dean asked.
“Because I’m nothing special. All our sons are handsome, but that’s because of you….”

He stopped, because Dean had leant across the table and placed a finger against his lips.

“To me, you are the most beautiful creature that has ever walked God’s earth!” he said firmly. “And any painter who can’t show that doesn’t deserve to be paid!”

“Dean…”

“You. Are. Beautiful. And before we leave London, we are sorting out someone who can paint the two of us together. That is an end to it.”

Castiel blushed, but smiled.

Dean had sent a message to Victor prior to his departure from Derbyshire, but on his arrival in their London home, he received a reply from his offices that said his friend was back in the United Provinces ‘monitoring a situation’. Dean wondered if the situation in question was called Zachariah Adler, but knew he would have to wait until his friend communicated with him to find out. He knew from experience that Victor did not like to be rushed.

The one thing London had that Derbyshire did not (at least as far as Dean was concerned) was an excellent fencing club, which he liked to attend every time he came down, if only to stop his skills getting rusty. As it was, he was caught out several times by his instructor, an elderly man known simply as Mr. Jacob.

“You need more practice, my lord”, Mr. Jacob told him, when they were showering afterwards.

“Well, unless you are planning to move to Derbyshire any time in the future, that would be difficult”, Dean observed. “Pemberley is in the middle of the countryside, and the nearest places that might support a school are either Manchester or Derby. And I do not have time to trek all that way just for some swordplay.”

“You never know when being good with a weapon is going to be useful, my lord.”

“True”, Dean said. “Particularly with London so riled over the coronation as it is right now.”

“It’s not just the coronation.”

Dean looked at his instructor with surprise.

“What else is there?” he asked.

“It’s this census thing. Have you read about it?”

Dean had. Twenty years earlier, at the tail-end of the French Revolutionary Wars and just after the union with Ireland, the then-government had decided to launch a census, a head-count of everyone in the newly united kingdom. It had been largely accepted because of the situation at the time, but the current government’s decision to launch a second one just two decades on had been far less well received.

“All sorts of personal questions”, Mr. Jacob observed. “If the government knows where these people are to send them letters, why does it need to ask so many stupid questions as well? Popular opinion is that they’re using it to weed out opposition to the king before the coronation.”
Dean was surprised.

“I know our new monarch isn’t exactly popular, but is it that bad?”

“He’s not even speaking to his sister now”, Mr. Jacob said gloomily. “Their mutual hatred is the talk of society.”

“I suppose she is still angry over the name thing, then?”

The new king had several younger brothers, none of whom he liked, but both his next two siblings – Frederick Duke of York and William Duke of Clarence – had had either only illegitimate children or legitimate ones who had died young. This meant his heir would eventually be the only daughter of the next brother, Edward Duke of Kent, who had died shortly before their father. He and his wife, Victoire, had had a huge argument with the then Prince Regent over what to name the child, the latter vetoing several names before the child ended up being named Alexandrina Victoria. Monarch and duke’s widow were not on speaking terms as a result.

“She is living in that barn of a Kensington Palace now, whining constantly about not having enough money”, Mr. Jacob said. “True, her late husband left her nothing but debts, and I am sure she would far rather be back in Coburg, but she feels she has to stay here to safeguard her daughter’s place in the succession.”

“I see”, Dean said thoughtfully. “Because if anything happens to young Alexandrina, we all know who is next!”

Both men shuddered, thinking of the next brother in line, Ernest Duke of Cumberland, the eldest brother to have a legitimate son. He was possibly one of the few people more unpopular than the new king, especially after the suspicious death of his valet eleven years earlier, a death many people suspected the duke of having had a hand in.

“Away from matters royal, I do have a proposal for you, my lord”, his instructor said.

“Go on.”

“Hitherto I have been holidaying every year on the Isle of Wight, where my niece has a cottage”, he said. “But she has just remarried, and, well, I am not overly fond of her choice. I think I might choose to spend my vacation in your part of the world in future, and if so, I may be free to give you some extra lessons whilst I am there.”

Dean beamed.

“That would be wonderful, Mr. Jacob”, he said. “You have my card. If you do come, please let me know, and we shall invite you to the estate.”

“That would be wonderful”, the older man smiled. “I am looking forward to meeting your mate, my lord. Anyone who can make you as happy as you obviously are must be quite a character.”

“He is!” grinned the alpha.

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Normally Dean would have left his eldest son in charge or running Pemberley in his absence, but Scaden had taken Samandriel down to visit some friends of theirs in the West Country. So it was upon Diniel’s shoulders that the weight of dealing with the day-to-day affairs of managing the greatest estate in Derbyshire fell, and by the day before his father and papa were due to return, he
was definitely feeling the strain.

“Father will not be pleased”, he said to his younger brother at the breakfast table that morning. “I haven’t been round the estate to check up on things for nearly a week. Someone is bound to tell him.”

“If you don’t mind me missing my studying today, I’ll do it”, his brother offered.

Diniel looked at him narrowly.

“You’ve been looking at the schedule, haven’t you?” he asked.

“Why?”

“Because several of the calls are over Kympton way, and I know full well why you want to go there!”

“I don’t know what you mean”, Ryazan said, though he blushed as he said it.

“Oh, please! You were obsessed when he came to dinner last night, when he was talking about having to run two parishes at once. The way you stared at him, undressing him with those bedroom eyes of yours!”

“Well, at least my future husband is on the right side of the Atlantic!”

“It was Diniel’s turn to blush.

“What do you mean?” he hedged.

“You think I am blind, Dino? I know all about you and Mr. Fitzgerald. He went halfway round the world because you were pushing things too far!”

The brothers glared at each other for a few moments, and there was a tense silence in the room. Then Diniel chuckled.

“We’re both a couple of idiots, aren’t we?” he said.

“I suppose”, his brother admitted. “Father’s going to flip either way. Perhaps we should spring both our marriage plans on him at one and the same time?”

“The shock might kill him!”

“That would be one way of solving our problems.”

“Ry!”

“I mean that if it did, papa would certainly kill us!”

“Would you mind if I said something, Mr. Castiel sir?”

Castiel looked up in surprise. He had come down to the kitchen because the merchant in Lambton had totally messed up their weekly food order, and it was the second time this had happened. Mrs. Moseley was cooking something in three separate saucepans on the huge stove, and even from outside the kitchen it had smelled delicious.
“You were right about the storm, Mrs. Moseley”, he smiled. “I only hope the next two don’t do as much damage. Of course, please speak.”

For just a moment he thought a strange look flickered across the cook’s face.

“The servants have been gossiping, sir.”

“It is a free country, Mrs. Moseley”, Castiel observed. “Relatively so, at least. Unless there is something specific they are talking about?”

“There is, sir. Mr. Michael and Lord Adam.”

“Yes. Thankfully they are good friends now, after that rocky start.”

“The gossip is that they are rather more, sir.” She looked at him meaningfully. Castiel hesitated

“How.... widespread is this gossip, Mrs. Moseley?” he said at last.

“That is what is concerning, sir”, she said, stirring one of the saucepans. “Of course the servants here are all loyal, but if one of them gossips about this in town, news of it may filter back to Earl William. I doubt that Lord Adam would welcome such a development.”

“You are right. But what can we do?”

“Possibly advise them to be a little more discreet, sir”, she suggested. “Mr. Beddowes caught them kissing in the library yesterday. I hope you don’t mind, but I took the liberty of allowing him a small whisky to recover. He’s not as young as he was.”

“That’s quite all right, Mrs. Moseley”, Castiel smiled. “And thank you for telling me. I shall definitely speak to my brother about this.”

It turned out to be a busy day for Castiel, and servants continued to play a key part in it. Dean had gone over to Matlock for the day, and after lunch his mate rang for the housekeeper.

“You sent for me, Mr. Castiel, sir”, she said. She had actually curtseyed to him the first few times they had met after he had been installed as laird, something Castiel had found made him uneasy. They had eventually settled on a compromise of a slight nod of the head, something for which Castiel secretly suspected Mrs. Barnes, with her increasingly bad back, was sorely grateful.

Castiel smiled at her, and went straight to the point.

“Yes. You and Tom. What is happening, Mrs. Barnes?”

“Sir?”

“Tom was even more curt than usual this morning. And you were sniffing to yourself when you went down the corridor. Have you quarrelled?”

She blushed

“It’s that dog of his, Achilles”, she admitted. “He’s too old for the hunt, so Tom wants to bring him into the house. But I always get a rash any time I am near him. We…. may have argued about it a
“Why does he not put him in with the other retired hunters?” Castiel asked curiously. “I know my husband has a special area of the kennels for dogs that are too old.”

“His lordship kindly gave the dog to Tom last year”, she explained. “It’s his, now. He couldn’t give it back…”

“Mrs. Barnes, I do not think Pemberley will grind to a halt because we have one more dog spending a few years in the retirement pen”, Castiel smiled. “I shall put it to my husband when he comes back later today, but I am sure he will be fine about it.”

She positively beamed.

“Thank you, sir!”

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Three days later, Castiel suddenly remembered that he had not had a response to the letter he had sent his brother. Michael had moved back into his cottage the day after he and Dean had returned from London, the repairs finally complete. For his brother not to reply to any missive was unusual, and it made Castiel feel slightly concerned. He decided to ride over to his brother’s cottage to investigate.

It was a lovely spring day, the skies washed clear by an early morning shower. Looking back to the great house, Castiel was reminded of the time he had first come there with his aunt and uncle, and how Dean’s unexpected return – prompted, irony of ironies, by the overzealous attentions of Margaret Bingley! – had led to a thaw in relations between them. Of course it had all then nearly come apart thanks to his brother Balthazar’s elopement with the ghastly Metatron Wickham, but everything had come right in the end.

When he reached his brother’s cottage, he saw immediately that there was a red flag fluttering from the porch. That must mean Michael was in heat again, a warning to all to keep away. Fortunately blood relations were immune to heats, so Castiel went confidently up the path and knocked at the door.

There was silence from within. For some reason, Castiel began to feel uneasy, a feeling which only deepened when he pushed open the door and stepped inside. The main room looked a wreck, and he could hear the sound of his brother moving about in the bedroom at the back.

“What's wrong?” Castiel asked anxiously.

His brother shuffled out into the room. He looked as if he hadn’t slept or washed in days, and there was the beginning of a beard on his chin. He looked awful.

“What's wrong?” Castiel asked anxiously.

His brother looked at him. There was almost four years in age between them, but for all that the studious omega now looked the older of the two.

“Castiel?” he said weakly.

Castiel stared at him in shock.

“What on earth happened?” he asked.
His brother looked mournfully at him, and even before he spoke, Castiel could guess the answer. And he was right.

“I think I’m pregnant!”

Chapter End Notes

Landscape: Noon is one of the most famous English paintings ever done, better known today as 'The Hay Wain'. 
Dean sorts out his brother's pregnancy problem - for the time being, at least - whilst poor Diniel receives more bad news. Doctor St. John joins the family, and makes an immediate impact.

May 1820

Castiel stared at his brother incredulously.

“You are what?”

Michael sniffed, and slumped into one of the two chairs by the cold fire. Castiel pulled himself together. First things first.

“Have you eaten?” he asked, though he half-knew the answer before his brother silently shook his head.

“We need to get you cleaned up, then you’re coming to the house”, Castiel said firmly. “Then we can all sit down, and….”

His brother almost shot out of his chair.

“You can’t tell Dean!” he yelled.

“Why not?” Castiel asked.

“Because then he’ll go and tell….”

He stopped, and almost collapsed back into the chair sobbing. Castiel went over to him and held him, gently rubbing his overly long blond hair.

“I presume Adam is the father?” he asked quietly.

Michael nodded. Castiel sighed and went over to start laying a fire.

“Tell me how it happened”, he said.

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“It was my own fault”, Michael sniffed wiping away his tears with his brother’s handkerchief. “I knew the system about hanging a red flag out for my heat, but I kept putting it off, then the heat came, and I was just so out of it…”

“Adam came round?”
“I tried to tell him! I did, but he was in the cottage and almost on me before I could say anything! We both knew, but….”

Castiel understood. The instinct to mate was strong for a reason, which was why omegas in heat had to take such care. His poor brother had probably been so involved in his latest book that he had delayed putting out the warning signs, and his lover’s untimely visit had had the inevitable result.

“Please don’t tell Dean!”

“I have to, Michael. But you can trust him not to tell anyone else. Adam included, until you are ready.”

Michael looked at him mournfully.

“Don’t you see?” he said glumly. “If Earl William finds out, he’ll wreck the estate out of sheer malice. But if Adam doesn’t marry me, the child can never inherit.”

“It could be a girl. Or you might not even get pregnant.”

“With my luck?”

Castiel sighed.

“Come on”, he said. “Let’s get you cleaned up, and get some food inside you. Once your heat is over, the three of us will sit down and decide what to do.”

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June 1821

“I must be blunt with you, brother”, Dean said. “Certain things have to be ascertained. First, you do wish to keep the child?”

It was almost a week later. Michael looked much more his normal bookish self, except his skin was paler than usual. He glared at his brother’s mate.

“I do”, he said firmly.

“And when are you going to tell Adam? Because given the circumstances, he must be well aware that what you did usually results in an addition to the population, ninety-nine times out of a hundred.”

“He wrote, asking to see me when my heat was over”, Michael said. “He must know that would be today, or tomorrow at the latest.”

Dean thought about it for a while.

“Is there any reason Earl William could be encouraged to send Adam away for a while?” he asked. Seeing the omega’s angry look, he hurried on; “I meant with you, so you can have the child undetected.”
“No. All the Fitzwilliam interests are in the county, now. The earl does not like to travel.”

“What about our vineyard in Sussex?” Castiel suggested. “Bluebell Farm; I know it needs a new manager. You could ask Lord William if you could borrow Adam to oversee it for a year. I am sure he would not mind, especially as the two do not really get on.”

“And Sussex is about two hundred miles away, with no servants around to spread gossip”, Dean smiled. “An excellent idea, beloved.” He turned back to Michael. “The two of you could go down there as soon as it’s agreed.”

Castiel was relieved to see his brother actually look hopeful for the first time in the past week. He knew that an omega’s scent changed markedly once the pregnancy got under way, so if Michael stayed in Derbyshire, news of his state would be almost certain to filter back to Lord William.

“I shall go over and see Earl William this afternoon”, Dean promised. “It does mean I will be late back, though.”

“Why?” Michael asked, puzzled. “Standford is not that far.”

Castiel laughed.

“I suspect my husband is considering a slight deviation on the way there to take in a certain pie shop in the aptly-named Bakewell!” he grinned.

Dean blushed.

“You know me too well!” he grumbled.

++++

“About time the young idiot did something useful with his life”, Earl William groused. “Yes, take him by all means. It will do him good to get away from here, probably.”

“Why?” Dean asked, sipping wine that was several degrees past indifferent.

“I came across him when I visited you the other week, and he practically stank of omega!” the lord said, downing his wine in one go and immediately pouring himself another. “Wouldn't let me in to see the bitch, though.”

Dean winced.

“It will be a whole year”, he said. “I need him to see how the vineyard does throughout all the seasons. And I've told him I shall be checking he doesn't spend too much time sampling the produce.”

“Our family has never been into heavy drinking”, Lord William remarked firmly, pouring himself a third glass.

Dean refrained from comment. But it took an effort.

++++

His journey to Standford having been via the pie-shop, he returned to Pemberley later that evening. Normally he would not have allowed anyone else's cooking into the house, but Mrs. Moseley was
taking a week off to visit a friend in Lincolnshire, and Dean felt it was unreasonable to expect him to
do without quality pies for all that time. An alpha had needs, after all.

He drew up to see that Doctor St John's carriage was standing outside the house. Fortunately Castiel
had seen him riding up the drive, and hurried out to greet him.

“Don't worry, beloved, no-one is ill”, he reassured him.

“Then why is the doctor here?” Dean demanded.

Castiel looked at him knowingly. It took a few moments, but Dean finally got it.

“Oh. Then we'd better see him, hadn't we?”

He took the omega's hand and led him back into the house, and into his study. A few moments later,
Beddowes announced their visitor. The doctor entered the room, looking unusually flustered.

“Doctor”, Dean said gravely.

Castiel shot him a warning look which said quite clearly, 'do not tease the poor man'.

“Lord Winchester. Thank you for seeing me.”

“You are always welcome here, doctor. We see you so often, you are practically family.”

The man blushed.

“Sir, I wish to tell you that your niece and I have come to.... an understanding.”

“An understanding about what?” Dean asked, apparently perplexed. Castiel prodded him.

“I have told her I wish to approach you to obtain your permission for us to be wed, sir.”

“You. And my niece.”

“Yes, sir.”

Dean looked at him coolly. There was a prolonged silence.

“Well, it took you long enough.”

“Pardon?”

“Tell me one thing, doctor.”

“Of course, sir.”

“That time I burst in on the two of you – did my niece really have a throat infection?”

The doctor blushed.

“A mild sore throat, sir, nothing more.”

“I see.”

There was another silence, before Castiel elbowed his husband sharply.
“Ow!”

“Stop being cruel, Dean!”

The alpha raised an eyebrow at him, and sighed.

“Very well. I did tell Anna that I would accept her choice of husband when she made one. And I think she could hardly have done better.” He smiled at the doctor's evident relief. “Welcome to the family, Peter.”

“Thank you, sir!”

+++++

Two weeks later, Castiel pulled Diniel into a side-room before breakfast.

“Is something wrong, papa?” the young man asked anxiously.

Castiel made sure the door was shut before replying.

“Your father received a letter this morning”, he said. “From Halifax.”

“But we do not have any holdings in Yorkshire”, Diniel said, surprised.

“Halifax. Nova Scotia”, Castiel corrected. “One of our few remaining American colonies. A ship put in there recently, and a man on board was seriously ill. He has been admitted to the hospital there, and they found your father's card on him.”

Diniel paled.

“Mr. Fitzgerald?” he whispered.

“Yes”, Castiel said. “I expect your father will tell the family over breakfast, so I thought you would like to be prepared.”

“Thank you, papa. That was very considerate of you. Does the letter say how he is, exactly?”

“Your father opened it in bed this morning, and only told me the bare facts”, his papa told him. “Fortunately he then went out to the stables to check up on his horse, so I thought I would take the chance to warn you. If he sees any reaction on your part, he may become suspicious.”

“I will make sure there is none.”

“Good. Now we had better go down. Your father never delays long if food is on the table!”

+++++

Unusually, Dean brought a letter to the dinner-table that evening.

“I bring good news”, he smiled, noticing his mate's raised eyebrow at the breach of etiquette. “Mr. Fedor Kruschnic accepted our offer, and had already dispatched his nephew Sasha to England. Fortunately he was able to sell the estate, so the young man will be well provided for. He is arriving at Hull next month on the fourteenth.”

“That is good news”, Castiel smiled. Then he frowned suddenly.
“What's wrong?” Dean asked, surprised. “You do not wish him to come?”

“Of course I want him here”, Castiel said. “It's just that week is when I am next due to go into heat, and if the tablets don't work properly, it could be... awkward.”

“Perhaps I could ask Sammy if he can put the boy up for five days or so, then”, Dean mused.

“That would be a good idea”, Castiel said. “Oh, and I saw Doctor St John trying on a riding-coat earlier. I didn't know our future nephew hunted?”

“His first job was in East Anglia, a very rural area”, his husband told him, piling his plate high with bacon. “Once he told me that, I thought inviting him along to the local hunt would be a good idea.”

“That was very thoughtful”, Castiel smiled.

Dean looked at him over his mound of food.

“I know you don't like me going to the hunt, beloved, but I am always careful. If only you hadn’t sprained your ankle, you could come too.”

Castiel sighed.

“I know you are careful”, he smiled, “but not all the other riders are. And it only takes one foolish move by an idiot who isn't looking where they are going, and someone gets hurt.”

The Laird of Pemberley's words would turn out to be remarkably prescient.

++~++

The hunt normally took several hours, so Castiel was surprised, barely an hour after his mate and Doctor St. John had ridden off together, to hear the former's voice outside his window. He hurried out, and gasped in horror. His mate was all right, but the doctor looked awful. He had a huge gash running right across his chest, and his white shirt was stained red with blood.

“What happened?” Castiel asked anxiously.

“You were right!” Dean almost snarled. “That stupid Lady Felicity turned up on her husband's horse, and lost control of it, swerving into poor Peter. Unfortunately that sent him under a tree where a branch was sticking out. All but impaled the poor man.”

“We must get help at once!”

“I've sent Tom to Matlock, and he'll bring Doctor Gallagher. He's the best there is, according to Peter. And I'll make some inquiries to see if we can find an expert for him if needed.”

“I'll go and make sure the ground floor bedroom is ready”, Castiel said, hurrying off.

The doctor groaned.

“Mrs. Barnes is going to kill me, dripping blood all over her nice clean floor!”

She won't have to, if you keep losing blood like this, Dean thought but didn't say. He looked up as Diniel came through a side-door, staring in amazement at the scene before him.

“You have to stop the loss of blood”, he said firmly. “Cleanse and seal the wounds. And not move him at all.”
“How come you know about wounds all of a sudden?” Dean asked, surprised.

“Mr. Fitzgerald once told me about Waterloo”, his son told him. “Apparently we lost almost as many men to treatable wounds afterwards as in the battle itself. Let me help you get him to bed, father, then we can patch him up before it's too late.”

Dean nodded, and the two of them managed to get the doctor to the back room. He was thankful his niece was away visiting a friend in Cheshire, and would not be back for a couple of days. By which time, hopefully, her fiancé would be on the mend.

Or was Anna going to prove as luckless as her late mother?
Diniel receives better news from British North America, and new arrivals make definite impacts at both Pemberley and Lynton.

July 1821

“He really was incredibly lucky”, Doctor Gallagher said, closing his bag with a snap. “A couple of inches lower, and that would have been an end to him.”

Dean winced. He had not been at all impressed when his future nephew’s friend had shown up, with several days’ beard growth and hair that was somehow worse even than his mate's (and that was saying something!). But from the way the man had greatly improved his patient’s dressings and advised on what to do to make him better, especially as regarded his diet, he had been forced to change his mind.

“Will he make a full recovery?” he asked anxiously.

“Physically, yes”, the doctor said, frowning. “But mentally – I doubt he will want to ride much in the near future. And he seems a lot less confident than I’ve known him. In our profession, you need confidence. A doctor can be wrong as many times as he likes, but he can never be uncertain.”

“You mean he may have to quit?” Castiel asked, aghast.

“I don’t know”, the doctor admitted. “Diagnosing the physical side of the body is hard enough, and we’re only just beginning to come to grasp the mental side.” He turned to Dean. “I understand he has recently become engaged to your niece?”

Dean sighed.

“Yes. She is away visiting friends in Cheshire. I dread to think how she will take the news when she gets back.”

Anna Winchester actually took things quite well, although this was mainly due to Castiel, who intercepted her on her way into Pemberley, and drew her away to break the news gently, explaining that it was vitally important to boost her future husband’s confidence, and that she had one of the most important roles to play in that process. She was with him for over two hours before emerging, tearful but looking determined. As she came into the living room, Dean was reminded briefly of his late sister, whom she resembled in so much more than her name.

“I have told him he is not riding again until we are certain he is well enough”, she declared. “The fool man was worried about his patients, but I’ve spoken to Andrew, and he says he can arrange cover from two of the nearby doctors for a few weeks.”
“Andrew?” Dean questioned.

“Doctor Gallagher. He’s not as bad as he looks, uncle.”

Castile had explained his husband’s reservations about the new doctor to her.

“He looked the sort that might try it on!” Dean growled.

Anna laughed.

“Hardly! He’s married with eight children, and a ninth on the way. Mrs Gallagher does a lot of good works in the valley.”

“I’m surprised she finds the time!” Castiel said cattily.

Anna reached over and punched Dean on the arm.

“Hey!” her uncle protested, pointing at his mate. “He made the catty remark!”

“I know”, she grinned. “But you two are joined at the hip, and you were nearer!” Castiel chuckled at his husband’s pout.

++++

The day after Anna’s return, Adam and Michael left for Sussex.

“You will write and let us know when it happens?” Castiel asked.

His brother nodded. Adam wrapped a protective arm around him and he flinched slightly, but did not pull away.

“I know this is far from ideal”, the former soldier said apologetically, “but it’s the best thing for now. And I want to raise our child with you, even if it does have to be in secret for a few years.”

“I feel like you are ashamed of me!” Michael muttered.

“Never that!” Adam said firmly. “I am leaving my home and going halfway across the country, because I love you, Mike. Please, tell me you understand that?”

The omega blushed, and looked away.

“I’m sorry”, he said eventually.

“Let’s get on the road”, Adam said firmly. “I know we’re taking two days, but we don’t want to still be out there when it starts getting dark. I’ve a mate and son – or daughter – to protect now!”

Michael smiled weakly, and turned to his brother.

“I promise I’ll write as soon as we get there”, he said.

“Thank you”, Castiel smiled.
His brother sank back into his seat in the carriage. Even though there was of course no outward sign of it, Castiel could almost feel how different the most studious of all the Bennet omegas was, now he was almost certainly with child.

“Take care of him”, he told Adam.

“I’ll guard him with my life!” the lord promised, before sitting in his own seat and smiling across at his fellow passenger.

The driver clicked his reins, and the carriage rolled away down the drive.

“I hope they’ll be all right”, Castiel said, worriedly.

“Provided they avoid all the dramas we had with Ry, they’ll be fine”, his husband reassured him.

The two held each other for a moment, then went inside to escape the strong summer sun.

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Mr. and Mrs. Singer had called in at Pemberley again, on their way back to Disley. This time they had brought Asher and Kevin with them, though the two immediately dragged Diniel and Ryazan away to enthuse about their latest technological adventures.

“Kevin seems a nice lad”, Dean observed, before adding quietly, “for an omega.”

He didn’t move fast enough to escape his mate’s punch.

“You see what I have to put up with?” he demanded of the visitors, faking a scowl. “Physical abuse on a regular basis!”

“Then don’t demean my type!” Castiel snapped back, though it was clear there was no venom in his remarks. “We get enough of that from society at large, thank you very much!”

His aunt and uncle laughed at the mock battle.

“Did you attend the coronation?” Dean asked, changing the subject. “I heard some gossip that it was…. interesting.”

“That’s putting it mildly!” his uncle observed, taking a small cake. “Soldiers everywhere, and I was glad we were outside, rather than in.”

“Why?” Castiel asked.

“Because that was where all the action was!” his uncle grinned. “The would-be queen turned up as promised, but give the new king his due, he was prepared. He had prize fighters as his pages, and they refused to let her in. She banged on the door throughout the service, but judging from the noise inside, our new His Majesty must have instructed the band to play louder to try to cover it up.”

“So what next for her?” Dean asked. “There’s no way she can be crowned now, and he’s bound to push for a divorce, to make it all official.”
“I think she’s finished”, Mrs. Singer remarked. “Nowhere left for her to go, really. Unless she moves into Kensington Palace with Princess Victoire, but the king would have to sanction that, and I can’t see it happening.”

“Back to Germany, most likely, and no real loss”, Mr. Singer said. “She was an idiot if she thought she ever had a chance of becoming Queen of England!”

+++ 

It was three hours after they had arrived. ‘They’ being Doctor St. John’s parents. And both Dean and Castiel, along with virtually their entire staff, were all wondering if the death penalty might actually be worth it.

Mrs. St. John was a large woman – she actually had to turn slightly sideways to get through some of the doors at Pemberley – and her size was matched by her volume. Everything she said came out in a high-pitched shriek, the sort that made the sound of nails dragging against a blackboard seem relatively pleasant. She also shared with Castiel’s mother the utterly un-endearing ability to talk without any apparent need to draw breath.

Mr. St. John, on the other hand, was physically the opposite; short, thin and dark, and had an unpleasant aura of ‘salesman’ about him. His hair was dark and oily, and smelt of far too much lavender. He talked in short barks which reminded both Dean and Castiel of a small annoying dog, the sort you put outside in a kennel. A long way from the house. Preferably in the next county.

And they both blamed Dean for the accident, which annoyed the alpha (partly because he did feel some way responsible, but didn’t need reminding of it) and annoyed his mate even more. After one hundred and eighty minutes of the St. Johns in the house, it was fast becoming a question of which Winchester would snap first.

“Those horrid horses!” Mrs. St John panted (she had just made the marathon trek from the lounge to the dining-room). “I am sure Peter should never be allowed to ride one again!”

“He is a grown man”, Castiel objected quietly. “I am sure he is quite capable of making that decision on his own when the time comes.”

Both St. Johns gave him a look that said quite clearly that ‘omegas should be seen and not heard’. Castiel bristled, but said nothing. Dean had gone to talk to Doctor Gallagher, though the omega suspected this was partly because he wished to be away from his terrible future relations as much as possible.

“We should take him back home with us at the first opportunity!” Mrs. St. John said firmly. “A mother’s love is what my darling boy needs right now, and I intend to make absolutely certain that he gets it.”

I’m sure he’s thrilled at the prospect, Castiel thought cattily.

“Doctor Gallagher had strongly advised against moving him in any way, at least until his injuries have healed”, he said instead. “He must stay here for the time being, at least.”

She stared at him in shock, before drawing herself up to her full height.

“I am his mother, and I know what is best for him.”
“But I am his doctor, and my word is final!”

All three turned to see Dean and Doctor Gallagher standing in the doorway.

“I am going to see my son”, Mrs. St. John announced firmly. “I assume at least that is allowed?”

“You may see him, certainly”, the doctor said, “but I have just given him a sleeping draught to help dull the pain, so I doubt you will get much out of him. He needs as much rest as possible. And as for moving him, that is quite out of the question. Bringing him here after the hunt did enough damage, necessary though it was. I will not allow him to be moved again. And I am his doctor, and I am medically qualified to know what is best for him.”

“But doctor….” Mr. St. John began.

“No. It is quite a simple word, sir, madam. It comprises two consecutive letters, both from the English alphabet. Which one of them is causing you difficulty, the 'N' or the 'O'?”

Castiel smirked at the doctor’s sarcasm, and he could see his husband was amused too. Mrs. St. John flounced out of the room, narrowly avoiding getting herself stuck in the doorway again, whilst her husband scuttled after her.

“I wonder if Anna might change her mind”, Dean said wryly.

His mate laughed.

“If she still loves him despite his having relations like that, then it must be true love!” he declared.

Dean smiled.

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Castiel woke up the following morning to find, as usual, a smiling alpha wrapped around him. What was not usual was the sound of raised voices coming from down the corridor. He slipped out of his mate’s grasp, pulled on a dressing-gown and his fluffy slippers, and headed off to investigate.

The noise was coming from the doctor’s room, much to Castiel’s surprise, and it sounded like an argument. He could make out the angry voices of the St. Johns, and after a moment, their son’s much weakened voice arguing back. Castiel did not hesitate, but burst into the room at once. Both parents’ eyes snapped up to him, and they both glared at him, before Mrs. St. John stood up.

“Rupert and I have decided we will not allow this marriage to go ahead!” she said firmly. “This family is quite irregular. I have heard dreadful things from the servants, especially about your son and heir, my laird.”

Castiel could feel his hackles rising, but he tried to keep calm.

“I rather think your son is of an age when he is legally entitled to decide such things for himself”, he said firmly. “And I do not think you are helping his recovery in any way by your actions here. I must request that you leave.”

“I shall certainly not leave my own son, especially on the say-so of a mere omega!” Mrs. St. John snorted derisively. “We are taking Peter home with us today, and he will stay with us until he has
“come to his senses.”

“Mother!” her son protested.

She ignored him.

“I think you should leave”, Castiel said again, trying to remain polite.

“Or what?” she sneered. “Do you think I, the granddaughter of a baronet, would be ordered about by the likes of you? A humble little omega from Hertfordshire whose brother eloped with a common soldier? You are nothing, sir!”

Castiel was about to reply when he noticed that the expressions on the two elder St. John’s faces had suddenly changed, from anger to something approaching fear. Then he realized why. Dean was standing in the doorway directly behind him, and the alpha's face was as black as thunder.

“You have precisely one hour to pack and be out of this house!” he growled. “No-one insults my mate, absolutely no-one! Sixty minutes, and you will be gone. Or I will order the servants to throw you and your baggage down the steps!”

“My lord!” Mr. St. John gasped.

“Fifty-nine minutes and forty-five seconds”, Dean snarled, crossing the room to reach the patient. “I am sorry, Peter, but your parents are no longer welcome in this house. If they wish to visit you during your convalescence, they will have to make an appointment….”

“An appointment!” Mrs. St. John gasped.

“… they will have to make an appointment beforehand, and I may allow a short visit, under Doctor Gallagher’s supervision. Otherwise they will not be allowed to set foot in Pemberley!”

He took a menacing step towards the couple, and they both instinctively backed away, before hurrying out of the (thankfully wide) other door. The patient smiled at his hosts.

“Thank you for coming to my rescue, my laird”, he smiled, taking Castiel's hand. “My mother thought to bully me into submission before anyone else was awake.”

“We shall do everything we can to hasten your recovery, Peter”, Dean assured him. “Would you accept a visit from them if they ask? I would not force you to?”

“If Andrew is here, then yes. Though I would be grateful if one of you could be here as well.”

“We shall arrange something”, Dean promised.

+~+~+

The departure of the St. Johns (or the Blessed Relief, as everyone started calling it) happened the day before Sasha Kruschnic was due to transfer from Lynton, with Castiel's heat safely over. To Dean's surprise however, Sam arrived at Pemberley alone.

“Is the boy unwell?” Dean asked, concerned.
“No, he's fine”, Sam said. “It's just... there's been a complication. You know Lance went to pick him up from the ship for you?”

“Yes?”

“It seems the distance from Yorkshire to Derbyshire was enough for my effective heir to decide he was in love”, Sam said ruefully. “Weird thing is, the boy is almost the spitting image of Castiel, which is kind of creepy. Seeing your son date someone who looks exactly like your mate's brother!”

“Is Lance serious?” Dean asked anxiously. “I don't mean to be rude, Sammy, but he’s a bit of a joker.”

“He was on his knees begging the boy not to leave this morning, and that in front of the whole breakfast table!”

Dean winced.

“He is serious!”

“Deadly. Perhaps you and Castiel could come over and see him at our place, since he's suddenly reluctant to leave?”

“Of course. Love, eh? The workings are beyond us all!”

+++~+++

Castiel was drawing in his study when his middle son entered the room.

“You wished to see me, papa?” he said.

“Yes, son. I have some good news for you. About Mr. Fitzgerald.”

His son stared hopefully at him.

“Your father received a letter from him today, saying he was well enough to make the crossing”, Castiel smiled. “Bearing in mind the time the letter must have taken to reach us, he must be on his way home by now.”

“That is wonderful news!” Diniel smiled. “It will be good to have him back.”

Castiel looked warningly at his son.

“Don’t rush things this time”, he cautioned. “We don’t need to scare him halfway round the world again!”

“Papa!”

“Just take care, son. And try to be a little less obvious than Adam and my brother.”

“I shall be discretion itself!” Diniel said firmly.

+++~+++

Unfortunately, as things turned out, he wasn’t quite discrete enough....
Chapter Summary

Dean sees his niece safely married off, and discovers something new about his second son and effective heir.

August 1821
After seeing his closest friends gunned down in cold blood outside that blazing barn in the Austrian Netherlands, Garth Fitzgerald IV had been pretty sure life had nothing left which could really scare him. Except perhaps a small piece of folded paper placed neatly on his kitchen table, with just twelve letters on it:
"Welcome back D'.

It wasn't that he didn't want Diniel Winchester. The same selective urges which drove the omega had made the former soldier think frequently of the young man – he was a man now, Garth realized, having just turned eighteen – and he wanted him badly. But he also knew, from his conversation with the cart driver who had brought him from Manchester, that the situation had changed since he had been away. Diniel's children would in all likelihood one day inherit Pemberley, which meant he would be expected to make a prestigious marriage, not a union with a broken old soldier.

Garth sighed, and went to start unpacking. The next few months were going to be difficult.

The subject of the former soldier's musings was sat on a window ledge in the house, looking down towards the Lodge where he knew the man he wanted had returned. It was a surprisingly cold day for August, and a drizzly rain had accompanied his morning trip to leave the man his note.

There was a sudden thump from somewhere nearby, and Diniel looked up in surprise. It sounded like it had come from the doctor's room. Getting up, he went to investigate.

He found the doctor lying on the floor, swearing.

“What happened?” the omega asked.

“I was trying to walk to the bathroom”, the doctor grumbled. “It seems my legs had other ideas.”

Diniel helped him up, and back onto the bed.

“I believe Doctor Gallagher did tell you not to overdo it”, he reminded the patient.

“I need to walk!” the doctor insisted. “I'm getting married in three weeks' time, and I'll be damned if I'm going to be wed sat down!”

“Then you need to work up to it gradually”, Diniel said. “You're a doctor. You should know that better than anyone.”

The doctor scowled at him. The omega laughed.
“It is true”, he grinned. “Doctors do make the worst patients! But I'd like to see you walk if it makes Anna happy. I'll talk to Doctor Gallagher about an exercise regime for you, so we can get your legs working again. It's probably just lack of use.”

The doctor said nothing, but just looked sad.

“What is it?” Diniel asked.

“Can I really ask your cousin to marry me like this?” he burst out. “Hell, Diniel, I'm a cripple, and I'm not sure if I've even got the nerve to go out and start treating people again! She'd be better off.... ow!”

He yelped because the omega was suddenly grasping his arm tightly.

“Listen to me, Peter St. John!” he said urgently. “My cousin loves you regardless, and she would marry you whatever 'state' you were in. Appearances don't matter; it's what's on the inside that counts.” A brief image of Mr. Fitzgerald's scarred features crossed his mind, but he shook it off.

“Three weeks from now you will walk her down the aisle as your mate, and until then, you and I are going to practice walking every day until you can do it perfectly normally. And no-one seriously expects you to go out doctoring until you're fully recovered.”

The doctor smiled at the omega's vehemence.

“You sound very sure”, he said.

“I am sure. For now I'll walk you to the bathroom, then I'll wait for you and bring you back, and after that I'll talk to father about taking time to get you out and about every day. Now put your arm around me and let's go.”

+++++

Garth fully expected Diniel Winchester to turn up at the house either the day he returned from his travels or the day after. When the second day was drawing to a close and there was still no sign of the omega, he was somewhat surprised, and (if he was being truthful with himself) just a little disappointed. He decided to go up to the house himself, as he had to take his reports from his travels to Lord Winchester.

Rather than walk straight up the drive, he decided to divert through the gardens, which were lovely at this time of year. This, as it turned out, proved to be a bad decision. Walking past a high hedge, he heard what was unmistakably Diniel's voice from the other side, talking to someone. Curious, he took advantage of an empty stone pedestal to hoist himself up so he could just peer over the top of the hedge.

And he froze. There was Diniel sat on a bench, his back to Garth, with an attractive young man leaning all over him. The two were laughing together, and seemed not to have a care in the world.

Garth felt betrayed, though he knew there was no justification for such feelings. Apart from the selective bond, he and Diniel had never had anything between them, and when the omega had made his interest clear, the soldier had gone to the other side of the world to get away from him. Hardly romance novel material. But the note had made him think that at least the omega wanted to pursue the relationship now he was back, instead of which he was laughing and joking with an attractive alpha. He flinched, then scrambled down from the pedestal and hurried towards the house.

+++++
“Is something wrong, Diniel?”

The young man thought for a moment.

“I just had the strangest feeling – like someone I knew was coming to see me”, he said thoughtfully.

“How did you know?”

Diniel blushed.

“Only a selected mate can bring on such a reaction”, the doctor explained. “So it is someone on the estate, then?”

“I'd rather not say.”

The doctor smiled at him.

“Let's be getting back to the house”, he said. “I think I have had enough exercise for today.”

Diniel supported the man all the way back to his room, where the doctor decided he needed a short rest after all his exertions. The omega went back downstairs, meeting his father in the hall.

“Hullo, Diniel”, Castiel said. “Mr. Fitzgerald has just come to see your father.”

The omega gasped.

“So it was him!”

“What was?” Castiel asked, puzzled.

“I thought I felt something! He must have seen me with Peter... oh no!”

“What?”

“I bet he thought the two of us....”

They were interrupted by the subject of their conversation suddenly coming out of Dean's study, the master's voice from inside rumbling his thanks. Garth looked at Diniel in surprise, then his eyes narrowed.

“My lords. I should be returning home.”

“I shall walk you, then”, Diniel said lightly.

The look on the soldier's face made it quite clear just how unwelcome that idea was, but that he was not in a position to reject the offer. They left the house in silence.

“Did you hear my cousin is getting married?” Diniel said eventually.

“Anna? Yes. I did.”

There was an awkward silence.

“To Doctor St. John. I don't believe you two have actually met?”
“No.”

Another silence. Diniel braced himself.

“But you saw him with me earlier.”

“What?”

The ex-soldier stopped dead and turned to stare at the omega.

“In the garden. You saw us on the bench together.”

“I... that is... you...”

Diniel smirked at him.

“You were jealous!”

“I was not!”

Garth glared at him, then sighed.

“I was told about Scaden”, he said. “You or your children will inherit Pemberley one day. That means you need to make a good marriage.”

Diniel was suddenly so much closer to him.

“What is it going to take to drive it into that thick skull of yours that I have already chosen my mate?” he almost snarled. “You're it for me, Garth. You, and only you!”

“Diniel...”

The omega suddenly closed the little remaining space between them and kissed him passionately. The few remaining fuses in the former soldier's brain promptly blew, and he found himself taking control of the kiss and kissing the omega right back, holding him tightly in his arms. Finally some sense of reality returned, and he pulled away.

“We just did that in full view of the house”, he said, almost ruefully.

Diniel stared at him, his blue eyes boring into Garth's hazel ones.

“I want to do so much more!” he growled. “I love you, Garth Fitzgerald IV. And I intend to prove that to you time and again, until you finally see sense and take me.”

The two held each other for a little while, then resumed their walk down the drive. Behind them, a tall figure that had just emerged from the stables stared in astonishment, then hurried into the house.

+++

The Winchester-St.John wedding took place at the end of the month, and although the doctor's parents had made it clear they would not attend – they had even written him a vitriolic letter disinheriting him – his two brothers and his sister did. And the doctor was able to walk his new bride down the aisle unaided, albeit with the aid of a walking stick and his brother Patrick one step behind just in case he stumbled or fell. Dean had given the couple a honeymoon in Paris, whilst Castiel had bought them two complete artist's sets, as both of them liked to paint in their spare time.
Dean had taken the opportunity to arrange the promised visit of Mrs. Bennet (fortunately Balthazar was visiting a friend in London) and the Collinses, to coincide with the wedding. He quite enjoyed the company of Mr. Collins now, particularly after the little man had shown such determination to defend his mate that time in Meryton. Though it pained him a little to remember how prideful he had once been towards him during their second meeting in Kent all those years ago, when he could not wait to be away from the man. He was a better alpha now, and he owed that all to his mate.

The Reverend Green conducted the service, which took place in Pemberley’s small chapel, before everyone adjourned to the house for refreshments. He was about to slip away when a familiar figure loomed in front of him.

“Leaving so soon, reverend?”

He groaned inwardly.

“I do not really like social occasions such as these, Ryazan”, he told the beta. “I would be much happier at home, curled up with a good book.”

“Or a good beta?”

The vicar spluttered into his drink, but fortunately no-one around seemed to notice.

“Ryazan!” he growled.

“Eight months until I am a man, reverend. Eight short months. I do not want to wait, but it is not that long. Have a pleasant day.”

And he was gone. The vicar sighed heavily.

+++

Castiel found his husband in his study, apparently lost in thought.

“Is something wrong, beloved?” he asked.

Dean looked hard at him.

“Did you know?”

“About what?”

“Diniel and Mr. Fitzgerald. I saw them kissing the other week. And our heir designate has spent most of the wedding trying not to be anywhere near our future estate manager.”

Castiel came up and squeezed into the chair alongside his husband.

“I wondered what was worrying you”, he said. “I knew Diniel was pursuing him. But he doesn't exactly have a lot of choice.”

Dean looked at him confusedly.

“What do you mean?”

“Diniel is a selective, and Mr. Fitzgerald is his true mate. Our son found out last year, and the man decided to take up the opportunity of going halfway round the world rather than face up to romance.”
“But he's back now”, Dean said. “And I saw Diniel kissing him.”

Castiel drew a finger delicately along his husband's jawline.

“Would you be opposed to such a match?” he asked. “Mr. Fitzgerald is a good man. I know he's not rich, but Diniel really loves him.”

“I just wish he had come to me about it.”

Castiel didn't say anything, but Dean could hear him thinking the word 'Scaden'. He kissed the omega lightly.

“I promise I've learnt my lesson”, he said. “I'm sorry you both felt you couldn't approach me. If he comes to us, I shall grant my consent.”

“You could always tell him you know?”

Dean grinned evilly.

“And pass up a chance to make him suffer?” he said. “Oh no! I am really looking forward to his face when he realizes I knew all along!”

“You are a bad person, Dean Winchester!”

The alpha growled.

“If we didn't have a party going on outside, you would find out just how bad, Castiel Winchester!”

Castiel eased himself out of the chair, avoiding his husband's grasp.

“You can show me later!” he promised.

Dean did.
Chapter Summary

Diniel Winchester tries the subtle approach, but fails. Dean finds his mate can read him like a book, so gives him one.

September 1821

Samuel Bingley had many notable qualities as a human being. But hiding his feelings wasn’t one of them.

Which was why, when the master of Pemberley and his mate went over to Lynton Grange for dinner one evening, Dean very quickly knew something was bothering his friend. Knowing that neither of them had any secrets from their mates, he brought this up after the four of them had retired to the lounge for wine (Gabriel was allergic to port).

“Something’s bothering you, Sammy?”

The younger man didn’t even correct the use of his nickname which was another worrying sign. Sam looked nervously at his mate, who had seemed as edgy as he was throughout dinner.

“I went up to Chesterfield last week”, he said, “to see my father’s grave. I chanced to meet the old vicar there, Mr Tyles. He’s long retired, but of course he remembers my dad well.”

Dean and Castiel both looked at him. Clearly there was more.

“Anyway, we fell to talking, and he mentioned some man had visited the town a few weeks ago, and asked to see the grave. He claimed to be my cousin Jonathan.”

“‘The one who emigrated to New South Wales earlier this year?’ Dean asked. “So someone who knew a bit about your family, but wasn’t up with recent developments.”

“Yes”, Sam said. “The old man said he got quite uncomfortable with some of the questions this man was asking. And he knows the man went back after they had talked, and spoke to the current vicar. Definitely not a local man, either.”

Dean felt uncomfortable, remembering what Victor had told him about people sniffing round both the Bennets and Bingleys. He wondered whether this might be the right time to tell his friend about his side of this, but after some quick thinking, decided against it. He would let Victor find out more before he needed to act.

“I wonder”, Gabriel said, “if it might be someone working for… Margaret?”

“Your sister?” Castiel said, surprised. “I thought she was safely in Scotland?”

“Sam received a letter from her last week”, Gabriel told them. “She has met someone, and she thinks they may be getting married in the not too distant future. Of course it came with the inevitable plea for more money…”
“Gabe!” his husband said warily.

“Well, it did!”

“I wouldn’t have expected it otherwise. And I didn’t send her any.”

Gabriel looked at him sharply. The alpha blushed.

“Not that much”, he said. “And if she does get married, then her new husband will support her. He’s quite well off, from what she says.”

“I’ll believe it when I see it!” Gabriel muttered.

“Apart from grasping relatives who we are not sorry to be a couple of hundred miles away, any other news?” Dean asked.

Sam was about to speak when there was a tentative knock at the door, and Lancelot and Sasha entered. The tall young Bingley looked decidedly nervous; he and his future mate had come over to Pemberley the week before, but that had been during the St. John fiasco, so their time there had been short. Sam had been right, Dean thought at once. Sasha Krushnic and his mate, even though they were not related, were strangely similar.

"Oh", Lance said edgily. "Hullo, uncles."

He moved slowly forwards, wrapping his larger figure around his friend’s.

"You proposed, didn't you?" Gabriel said flatly.

"Papa!"

His son flushed bright crimson, but pulled the willing omega even closer.

"I'm very happy for you", Sam said firmly. "Lance needs a steadying influence on him, and I'm sure you will do well together.

"Even if it does mean having Gabe as your mate’s father!" Dean teased.

Gabriel pouted at him.

+++

Dean Winchester had many notable qualities as a human being. Keeping the smallest thing from his mate wasn’t one of them.

““You know something about that man at the grave, don’t you?”

Castiel stared at him from across the carriage, and Dean groaned inwardly. Trust his mate to start a conversation like this at the one time he couldn’t get away.

“I know nothing about the man”, he said confidently.

His mate looked at him sharply, and Dean could almost hear him thinking the word ‘semantics’.

“But you know something about why he was there”, Castiel pressed. “You do that thing when you’re covering up, beloved, and you did it when Sam told you.”
“What thing?” Dean asked at once.

Castiel sat back.

“That’s privileged information”, he said crisply. “What do you know, beloved?”

Dean hesitated.

“The whole truth, please.”

“Damn it, Cas!”

His mate continued to stare at him. It took less than ten seconds for Dean to fold.

“All right, I was told by a friend in London that someone had been digging up information about the Bingleys. That’s it.”

Castiel considered this for a moment.

“Does this have anything to do with those inquiries people were making into my family?” he asked.

“He doesn’t know”, Dean said, glad he was back to the bare honest (sort of) truth. He sometimes thought his mate should be working with the judicial system, interrogating possible criminals. Or perhaps it was just Dean Winchester who turned into a pile of goo under that stare.

“Thank you for telling me, Dean”, his mate smiled.

Dean relaxed.

“Of course, beloved.”

“And give my regards to Victor when you next see him.”

Dean glared at him, but amongst the many qualities Castiel Winchester had as a human being, that look of complete innocence was one of his best.

“+++

“Dino?”

“Yes, father?”

The master of Pemberley was standing behind him, holding a sheaf of documents.

“You are heading to Lambton today. Would you do me a favour?”

“Yes, Father.”

“Would you drop these papers off for Mr. Fitzgerald at the Lodge? It’s his report from the Indies. I’ve read it, and there are one or two things I need clarification on. My questions are on the top sheet. You might even pick his answers up on your way back, if he gets them done in time.”

Castiel looked sharply at his mate, who tried and failed to stare innocently back at him.

“Of course, Father”, Diniel said, blushing slightly.

“Thank you, Dino.”
The younger Winchester left the room. Castiel waited until he had gone, then glared at his husband.

“That was cruel, Dean!”

“Why? I do need those questions answered. And he is going past the Lodge.”

“As are you. And you could ask them and get straight answers, without torturing your own flesh and blood.”

“He could have simply told me.”

“We both know why he did not. Please stop, Dean. It’s not fair on Dino.”

“But Cas…”

The omega gave him a Look.

“Stopping right now”, Dean said hurriedly. He hesitated before adding, “do I get a... reward for stopping right now?”

His mate smirked at him, then sighed heavily.

“How long before you have to leave for town?”

“Half an hour. Why?”

The omega grinned, then suddenly leapt up and walked slowly to the door.

“Long enough if you’re quick!” he called over his shoulder, and was gone.

Dean still beat him to the bedroom door, though.

+

The drive linking the Lodge to Pemberley was approximately a mile long, which gave Diniel some time to ponder (or rather, fret over) his father’s request, and to wonder exactly how he was going to approach things with his military friend. If his father knew or even suspected the truth, then he had to get things moving, and fast. But what would be the best way to approach the reluctant alpha? Perhaps subtlety was his best option?

Mr. Fitzgerald opened the door to him, and Diniel’s subtle approach promptly turned and fled, vaulting the garden fence never to be seen again. The alpha was wearing an old dressing-gown that was far too short, his hair was still damp from what must have been a recent shower, and all that skin….

Something inside Diniel snapped, and he leapt on the startled man, pushing him backwards into the cottage, smothering the alpha’s mouth with his own, instinctively scenting him everywhere he could reach….

“Diniel!” the alpha managed to gasp. “For Christ’s sake, stop!”

“Why?” growled the omega. “I’ve waited over a year for you. I’m tired of waiting. I want you now!”

“Diniel…”

“Now!”
The alpha finally managed to grip his shoulders and hold him at arm’s length, although the omega was still panting with lust. His scent was almost overpowering, and the alpha had to fight hard to concentrate.

“Stop scenting me!”

“No! You’re mine! I want you!”

“Stop it, and I’ll….”

He stopped.

“You’ll what?” Diniel asked, seeming to calm down just a little.

The ex-soldier took a deep breath. This was it.

“When your father and papa come back from London, I will ask them for your hand in marriage.”

The omega froze, staring hard at him.

“Promise?” he said, looking up at the alpha as if he couldn’t quite believe what he was hearing.

“I swear. I won’t even run halfway round the world form you this time.” Diniel huffed. “But once your father has said yes – if he does - then I want that to be our first time. I know it’s old-fashioned, but….”

The omega’s breathing seemed to have evened out.

“All right”, he said, taking a couple of deep breaths. “You’d better get me a drink, though. I can’t go on with my calls looking and smelling like this.”

Garth kissed him lightly on the forehead, and went to fetch him some water.

+++

“So are they engaged?” Dean asked, as the carriage bowled along the road to London.

“I do not spy on our own sons, you know!” Castiel retorted.

“But you met him when he came back from his calls, and he gave you the report rather than me. Well?”

Castiel grinned at him.

“He’d scented someone thoroughly whilst he was out”, he said, smiling. “And he looked really happy. I think we may be in for a military wedding!”

++++

Two hours later, as the two youngest Winchesters sat down alone for dinner, scenting was also a topic of conversation. Ryazan looked hard at his elder brother, but waited for the servants to leave the room.

“You marked him, didn’t you?” he said.

Diniel groaned.
“Damn it! If you can tell, that means papa knows. And he’s bound to tell Father.”

“So did he pop the question?”

“He’s agreed to see Father when they return from London. Ry, what if he says no?”

“I don’t know. What would you do?”

“Garth is my true mate. I have to be with him. Even if it’s a hovel somewhere, I’d still take it over Pemberley, if I had him.”

His brother looked at him sharply.

“We’re not going to have another disinheritance drama here, are we?” he asked pointedly. “I don’t want my future sons to have to worry about all this.”

“Your sons with the Reverend Brenton”, Diniel teased. “How is that going?”

Ryazan blushed.

“‘Not good’, he admitted. “He thinks he's too old for me. And me being so near inheriting Pemberley doesn't help.”

“I still find it hard to believe he's an omega....”

Beddowes re-entered the room at that moment, and they quickly changed the subject.

+++

Dean had hoped Victor might have some news for him during his visit, assuming of course he was back from his homeland. He always sent an invitation to his friend every time he had a party of any sort at his London home, but the alpha rarely attended any of them.

Except tonight, he did. Dean was amazed to make out the Dutchman’s inimitable monocled form across the room at Winchester House. He skillfully disengaged himself from his current guest, and strode across to meet him, narrowly avoiding Lady Philpotts and her pet Pomeranian.

“Welcome, my friend!” he beamed. “What brings you to my humble abode?”

“I’d hardly call this humble”, Victor smiled. Then the smile faded. “I am here on business. Urgent business. May we talk?”

Dean led him away from the hall, and upstairs to his study. Locking the door behind him, he turned to face the visitor.

“I have two pieces of news, and you’re not going to like either of them, I’m afraid”, the Dutchman said curtly. “First, Mr. Zachariah Adler has returned to England. I do not yet know his intentions, but I doubt they are good.”

“You are having him watched?”

“If he belches after his morning three slices of bacon, scrambled egg, one tomato and six mushrooms, you’ll be the second person to be told about it.”

Dean smiled.
“And the other news?”

“You have a new footman.”

Dean stared at the apparent change of subject.

“I suppose so. Taylor deals with the London staff.”

“He needs to be more careful. The man is an Adler plant.”

“What?” Dean exclaimed.

“His name is Graham White. Harmless; his main task is to observe and report back to his master. Fortunately you have a good reason to dispose of him. He lied about his background on his application. His three years of army service were in fact at His Majesty’s pleasure.”

“But how do I tell Taylor to get rid of him? It will look suspicious if I do it?”

“Letter from a jealous girlfriend”, Victor said airily, placing an envelope on the table. “Fortunately there’s more than one in his past. Four, in fact. She heard about his new job from a friend and ratted on him.”

“Thanks, Vic.”

“I had better go, now. Luckily White is off duty tonight, or I wouldn’t have risked coming.”

“What if one of the others…?”

Victor was looking at him coolly.

“You know all about them already, don’t you?” Dean said flatly.

“Indeed. And as you’re eating, I won’t tell you what Lannigan gets up to on his nights off, save to say he is surprisingly flexible for a man of his age. Morris frequents some ‘interesting’ book stores for a man who is so fond of preaching at all and sundry. And sooner or later, one of Wilson’s wives is going to find him out. Goodnight, friend.”

He slipped out of the garden door, and was gone. Dean sighed, and went back to the party.

+++++

Castiel’s forty-fourth birthday occurred on the day before they were due to start back to Derbyshire, although they would call in on his mother and the Collinses on the way. Dean surprised him with a copy of Shelley’s latest work, Adonais.

“I know how much you like Greek myths”, he smiled, pulling the omega into his arms. “Besides, a poem named after the most beautiful man the world had ever seen… it seemed fitting.”

“Except he met a bad end”, Castiel said, placing his treasured book down onto a table. “And all because of love. I hope that’s not an omen, beloved.”

“What happened to him?” Dean asked.

“He was adored by Venus, goddess of love. But she was also having an affair with her brother Mars, god of war, and he didn’t like the competition. So he changed into a wild boar, and when the boy went out hunting, turned on him and killed him. Afterwards she used his blood to create the
anemone, a flower known for beauty that doesn’t last.”

“Lovely!”

“A fairly typical Greek myth, I’m afraid”, Castiel said wryly. “They did not really like happily ever afters.”

“Then they would not have liked us!” Dean said firmly. “Because with you, beloved, my life is always happily ever after!”

By the end of that year, Dean would have cause to remember that particular conversation.
Dean and Castiel visit friends and family in Hertfordshire. Diniel makes a seriously bad mistake.

September 1821

The life of a country vicar was hard enough, and for the Reverend Brenton Green, a young good-looking omega, that life was further complicated by the fair-haired beta who sat in his church most Sundays, watching him intently during his sermons. Not every Sunday; if the chapel at Pemberley was in use, he would go with his family there, the new vicar Mr. Stephens having arrived from Scotland. But Brenton knew when these times were, so when he turned up one Sunday ready to face those penetrating blue eyes only to find them absent, he felt oddly annoyed. All right, he had made it clear that he didn't really think this relationship could go anywhere, given the current circumstances.

He just hadn't expected the handsome young beta to listen to him.

This particular Sunday, however, the front seat usually occupied by Ryazan was instead taken by a man of ample proportions whose clothes simply screamed 'outsider'. The appraising way he looked at the vicar during the sermon reminded Brenton of a lawyer, a profession he had to have more dealings with than he would have liked.

After the sermon, he stood as usual at the church door to say farewell to the locals. The strange man was last to leave.

"An excellent sermon, vicar. Celibacy against enjoying God's earthly creations. Most enlightening."

"Thank you, Mr...."

"Broadribb. Cedric Broadribb."

The look in his eyes made it quite clear he knew his interlocutor was considering how apt his name was, and would appreciate any remarks to that effect being withheld.

"You are not from this area, Mr Broadribb?" the vicar said tactfully.

"No. The perks of owning one's own legal practice; I decided to give myself a late holiday in the Peaks. Plus, there was someone I wished to see in the area, so I was able to combine business with pleasure.

"You are returning south soon, then?"

"Tuesday. Strange how I never seem to like London except when I am away from it. The pull of home, I suspect. Thank you again for the sermon, reverend. Perhaps we may meet again someday?"

He looked consideringly at the vicar, before bowing and heading off down the path. Brenton was not sure why, but he had the distinct impression he had just passed some sort of test.
Castiel sighed as his mother poured out the tea. He was visiting his old home alone, having given his mate permission to visit one of his holdings near Beaconsfield (the omega strongly suspected Dean just wanted to avoid his mother as much as possible, although he would have to put up with her at the Lucas Lodge dinner in a few days' time). The sight of the alpha kneeling to him in their room, begging to avoid having to go to Longbourn, had made Castiel inwardly chuckle, though he had made it clear at the time that he expected some sort of reward for his forbearance.

It was lucky that Inias knew him so well, and had allocated him and Dean a room at the far end of the house. He fingered the tie hanging lopsidedly around his neck and smiled at the memory.

“And how is dear Michael doing?” his mother asked.

Ah.

“He has travelled to Sussex, to help a... friend on a project”, Castiel said, warily eyeing the slice of cake and hoping desperately his mother had not baked it. Fortunately a tentative nibble, followed by the realization that his teeth were still attached, confirmed she had not.

“And he did not stop here on his way down?” she pouted. “We are not that far off the main road.”

“It was a matter of urgency, apparently”, Castiel said, which was in itself quite true. “He was called to be there within a couple of days, and there was no time to write ahead.”

“He knows he is always welcome here, even if it is unannounced”, Mrs Bennet said. “I quite miss his level-headedness at times. Balthazar is particularly trying at the moment.”

“Why?” Castiel asked, wondering if she meant more trying than usual, or just standard Balthazar-level trying.

“He had it in his head that he is being followed again”, she said with a laugh. “Not the first time he has tried that yarn.”

Would make a change from him stalking anything with a pulse, Castiel thought wryly, but didn’t say it.

“Has he any idea who it was?” Castiel asked.

“No. But he did say yesterday that it was the first time in a while he actually felt he wasn’t being followed, which was a relief. Personally I think it was all in his imagination anyway. You know how he loves being the centre of attention.”

Pot, kettle, black..... Castiel bit his tongue.

“Have you heard from Rafe?” he asked instead.

“Not since January!” she said, with more than a trace of bitterness. “And then it was only a short note asking for more money so he could build an extension to his church.”

Castiel sighed. His younger brother had always been a difficult person, and he had hoped that after Balthazar’s removal from Longbourn, he might have sobered up a little. As things turned out he had sobered up rather more than anyone had expected, taking up religion in a major way. He had become a priest, and having married an American lady, had gone over to the United States to preach, settling in the newly-established state of Maine in New England. He had only written to Castiel once since
his departure five years ago, and that too had been a request for funds.

“Gabriel is doing well”, he told his mother. “He made a few furniture pieces for the new school, and he’s had quite a lot of requests for more from all the parents who have seen them.”

“He is a good son”, Mrs. Bennet said proudly. “I just wish he could come down more often.”

“He has six children to bring up, and the youngest is barely into double figures”, Castiel pointed out.

“Travel is difficult for him at this time.”

“And how is your...” his mother made a circular motion with her hand, “...right now?”

Castiel suppressed a smile.

“My heat is back under control, thank you”, he said, noticing how his mother winced when he said the H-word. “The new tablets are working much better.”

“Good. I am surprised your dear husband is not here with you?”

He cried off.

“He had to visit a business acquaintance in Beaconsfield, and today was the only day he could meet him”, Castiel half-lied. “But doubtless you will see him at the party.”

“I am looking forward to it”, she said, smiling.

He isn't, Castiel thought.

Something was wrong, Dean could feel it. Even before young Ion Collins came up to him and whispered quietly into his ear.

“Could you and Castiel please go and see my parents in the billiard-room?” he said, looking worried. “It's very important.”

The two men looked at each other briefly, then moved quickly across the crowded hall, narrowly avoiding Mrs. Bennet who was clearly looking out for them. Dean felt relieved when they made it to the safety of the billiard-room.

That relief lasted until they opened the door, and saw what awaited them inside. Crowley and Inias Collins were standing either side of their eldest son, Nehemiah, who was clearly bleeding in the chest, though the fact he was still upright was a good sign. A short distance away, Uriel Collins was standing with his arms folded, looking decidedly defensive. Ion shut the door behind them, and went back to the party.

“Dad, I'm not a child anymore!” Nehemiah said sulkily, his slurred speech clearly indicating his state of inebriation. “So I was unlucky once. So what?”

“You got drunk and played with a gun I specifically told you not to touch!” Mr Collins said angrily. “I warned you about it, but you let my brother talk you into taking it into the woods and trying to fire it! And barely a week after you came back, too! You are a fool, young man!”

“He's right, he's eighteen years old”, Uriel Collins said with a yawn. “Lighten up, Crowley.”

Mr Collins bristled, and Dean stepped forward to take his arm. The man looked just like he had that day before he floored the man making an unwelcome advance on his mate. Uriel grinned at them
both, then sauntered out of the room.

“I'm sorry, my love, but that man just has to go!” Mr. Collins said. “I know he's your brother, but...”

“I agree.”

All four of them stared at Inias Collins in surprise.

“He has become a bad influence on you, Nehemiah”, Inias said firmly. “I no longer want him in our house.”

“Father! You can't throw him out! And Papa, he's family!”

“He has his own house in London”, Mr Collins said acidly, “for which the rent is paid partly out of our money. It is high time both you and he grew up, Nehemiah. I shall send for the doctor to make sure your wound is clean, and after that I expect you to stay in your room.”

“But father...”

“That is our decision”, Inias said firmly. “Come, son. I shall take you to your room.”

Castiel helped him support the stunned teenager from the room, leaving Dean and Mr. Collins alone. The older man slumped once the door had closed behind his mate.

“Thank you, my lord, for all the information your friend provided us”, he said, sounding suddenly tired. “I think both of us have been put through the wringer when it comes to our eldest sons.”

“I am glad to have helped”, Dean smiled. “Though at least you handed yours a lot better than I did mine.”

“I expect a lot of sulking and slammed doors tomorrow, though.”

“He is a teenager. You should expect nothing less.”

Mr. Collins smiled.

+++

Castiel was fairly flexible when it came to allowing his sons to do things, provided of course they had obtained their father's permission if it was anything major. But he did have one particular rule, and that was he expected his sons to always be truthful with him. Of course, there was the sin of lying by omission – like the fact he'd found a grey hair on Dean's side of the bed the other week, and later told his husband he hadn't changed a bit in all the time he'd known him – but open lying was out. Which was why he was shocked when he caught one of his sons doing exactly that.

The Sunday after they came back, they were due to attend the service at Lambton. Diniel however was late back from his morning walk, and Castiel met him in the corridor hurrying to his room.

“Diniel?” he said, surprised. “Where have you been? We're ready to go.”

“Sorry, papa, I lost track of time.”

“Evidently. Where did you go?”

His son turned at his door, and Castiel saw it – a small bite-mark just above the collar.

“I…. walked over to the sawmill. I will be quick, I promise.”
He disappeared into his room, though not before Castiel had quickly looked up and down the corridor. Not seeing what he had fully expected not to see, he frowned and went downstairs to his husband.

+++*

“He lied to you?” Dean was amazed.

“He’s been with Mr. Fitzgerald, if that mark on his neck is anything to go by.”

Dean smirked.

“I did wonder at the high neck jumper for this time of year.”

“And he told me he was up at the sawmill, though I know he wasn’t.”

Dean was surprised.

“Did you follow him or something?” he asked.

The omega chuckled.

“No. But the last time I went to that place, I was scraping sawdust off my shoes for days afterwards. His shoes were dusty, but not sawdust. He went to see Mr. Fitzgerald, and lost track of the time.”

“And then he lied to you about it”, Dean said. “Boy must have a death wish.”

“Indeed!” Castiel grinned. “Like to help me make him pay?”

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Two days later, Diniel was summonsed to his father's study, to find both his parents waiting for him.

“Come in, Diniel”, his father said gravely. “Please sit down.”

The young man's heart sank. His papa must have told his father after all.

“Do you remember Forston Farm?” Dean asked.

Diniel looked up, surprised.

“Yes. You've been trying to buy it for years, especially as we own all the land around it.”

Dean beamed.

“Well, the owner has finally agreed to sell it to me. But there is a condition. He's a baronet, but a bit old-fashioned, so he suggested I might get one of my sons to marry his daughter, and he'd then settle the farm on her.”

Diniel's heart sank. He had a horrible feeling he knew where this conversation was going.

“You want me to marry her?”

“Tessa Bourne isn't that bad-looking”, his father said. “Well.... plain, perhaps, but not really ugly.”

“Distinctive”, Castiel put in.
“Yes, that's a good word”, Dean said. “Kind of.... interesting features. She's nearly eighteen, so you can get married at the start of next year. Save you going all round looking for a mate yourself, eh?”

“Yes”, Diniel said flatly. “Thank you, Father.”

“Don't mention it. I think the two of you will do well together.”

“Her breath isn't really that bad”, Castiel remarked. “And I always thought people don't need that many teeth, really.”

“May I go now?” Diniel muttered.

“Of course, son. I dare say you want to spread the good news.”

“Yes. Good news, Spread.”

He trudged from the room, looking like a condemned man. Dean waited until he had gone, then let out a long sigh.

“Remind me never to get on the wrong side of you, beloved!” he grinned. “That was far too cruel!”

“But you enjoyed it!” Castiel smiled.

“I did!”

The omega laughed.

“So did I!”

++++

Garth Fitzgerald opened the door to find the master of Pemberley's son standing outside. The young man stared mournfully at him.

“I'm engaged to be married, Garth!”

“Oh!”
Garth proposes, and Diniel discovers his parents can be really horrible. Dean makes yet another romantic gesture, and Castiel's shopping trip ends unexpectedly.

November 1821

All Saints Day. The first day of November.

Diniel Winchester woke up, and as is often the way, immediately recalled the train wreck of the day before, fittingly All Souls' Day, when the forces of darkness were supposed to be at their strongest. He and Garth had talked long into the evening, trying to fathom a way out of this mess, but they had come up with nothing. Sighing, he washed himself in the bowl and pulled on his own clothes rather than ring for the valet. He just did not feel like the company this morning.

Of course, this would be the one morning when everyone was in to breakfast before him, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, all looking horribly cheerful. Even worse, they all stopped talking the minute he appeared, and stared at him.

“So I'm feeling a bit under the weather this morning”, he grumbled. “I can't control my own health, you know.”

Beddowes approached Dean, and whispered something to him before withdrawing. Diniel scowled at the dish of bacon, as if it personally were to blame for the shipwreck that was his life.

“Mr. Fitzgerald, sir”, the butler announced gravely, before withdrawing. The young omega spun round so quickly he could have given himself whiplash. There was the man he loved, standing in the doorway and looking almost terrified.

“Mr. Fitzgerald!” Dean beamed. “Take a seat.”

“I have come to ask for a word in private, sir, if I may?” the man said nervously.

“Oh, I have no secrets from my loved ones”, Dean beamed, and Diniel was sure he glanced quickly in his direction before looking back at their visitor. “Speak freely, man, and tell us what is on your mind.”

“Very well, sir. I wish to be considered as a suitor for....”

“Wonderful!” Dean ground out between several slices of bacon. “Who's the lucky lady? Or omega?”

“Your son, Diniel.”

Dean froze, then turned an icy glare down the table. Diniel silently told himself he had been wrong in his initial assessment of today. Apparently it could get worse. And was in the process of so doing.

“You.” His father’s tone was icy. “And the man who is effectively heir to this estate?”

“Yes, sir.”
“Diniel, come here.”

Reluctantly, the omega went and stood in front of his father. Castiel got up and went to stand behind his husband, placing his hands on his shoulders.

“Am I to understand that you and my future estate manager” - he looked sharply at Garth - “are pursuing.... a relationship?”

Diniel paled.

“Yes, father”, he muttered.

“I see.” There was an ominous pause before he continued. “Then I definitely have something to say to you, son.”

Garth moved in defensively to place his hands on the omega's shoulders. Dean looked briefly up at him, then back down at his son.

“I strongly suggest you do not lie to your papa ever again.”

Diniel blinked, then looked his father straight in the face. His father was actually smiling.

“What?” he asked, confused.

“You lied to Cas about seeing him”, Dean said sternly. “You know how your papa hates that. So he and I drew up this little plot to dissuade you from such inadvisable practices.”

He stopped, smiling even more as realization dawned on the two faces in front of him.

“There is no.... arrangement?” Diniel said disbelievingly.

“We had a lot of fun picturing Tessa for you”, Castiel grinned. “As if we'd ever force you to marry someone you didn't want to, especially someone like that.”

“We formally grant our sanction for your engagement”, Dean smiled. After the two men in front of him continued to stare in shock, he added, “I believe it is usual for a kiss to be exchanged at this point in the proceedings.”

Diniel found himself suddenly being hoisted into the air, and both kissed and spun round at the same time. There was a definite 'ew' from his younger brother, and Castiel moved just in time to rescue a plate of sausages that was in the line of fire.

“Welcome to the family, Garth!” Dean said. “Later we'll talk about things in detail, but for now you two should sit down and get some food inside of you.”

“Thank you, sir!”

“Call me Dean. And I can't wait for my first grandchild!”

Both the men before him blushed.

+-+++-

Breakfast was a joyous occasion, though Ryazan excused himself, claiming things were getting a bit too sugary for his tastes. Both his brothers now happy with their chosen partners, and once Diniel had children of his own, he, Ryazan Winchester, would be out of the line of succession.
Though never completely, a traitorous voice reminded him. Remember how Lord Adam thought there was zero chance of his inheriting Standford? A few days on a Flemish plain had changed all that.

He shook himself, and tried to look on the bright side. If his father was prepared to let his effective heir marry someone with virtually nothing to his name, and come to that, someone several years older than Diniel, then perhaps he had some chance after all.

If only he could persuade his clerical friend of that.

+++

Two days later, Castiel came down with a chesty cough, which left him lying in bed croaking weakly at everyone around him. He was particularly annoyed as he had never missed a Guy Fawkes’ Night yet, and now everyone would be going down to Parson’s Field without him.

On the fifth, he even had to vacate his room for a time, because some workmen were doing some work on the balcony outside, and Dean carried him down to the quiet of the library at the back of the house. Castiel must have dozed off, because he woke to find his husband looking down fondly at him.

“Feeling any better, beloved?” he asked, concerned.

“A little”, Castiel said. “Just wish I hadn't fallen asleep during the day, though. I'm going to find it harder to get to sleep tonight.”

He looked at the drawn curtains, and realized it was dark outside.

“Shouldn't you be down at the field?” he asked.

“I have a surprise for you, first”, his husband smiled, scooping the omega into his arms and gently carrying him out of the room.

“I don't think that's a good idea whilst I'm so infected”, Castiel protested.

“Maybe later, beloved”, Dean grinned. “But first.... this.”

He edged open the door, and took Castiel in.

“It's warmer in here”, Castiel said, surprised.

“Yes”, Dean said, carrying him across the room. “There's a reason for that. Let's go outside.”

“But it's cold, Dean! And I....”

Whatever he was about to say was lost by what he saw as his husband bore him out onto the balcony. The workmen had erected wooden panels along most of the edges, and installed a large glass window in the centre, effectively turning it into an extra room. There was a small brazier, and a large lounger, covered with blankets. Dean gently lowered his mate down onto it, then opened the window and called out.

“We are ready, ladies and gentlemen. Light that fire!”

There was a cheer from down below, and within minutes the flames of the bonfire were lighting up the blue-black November sky. Dean closed the window, turned to his mate and smiled.
“You couldn't come to the bonfire, so I brought the bonfire to you.”

He said it as if it were the simplest thing in the world. Castiel stared at him for a moment, then broke down into tears.

“Beloved?”

He managed to blink back the tears enough to see that his husband was looking anxiously at him.

“Is it not to your liking? Perhaps you are too cold? Or do you need to sleep? I could....”

“Dean, it's perfect!” he managed to gasp out. “You're perfect. Everything is perfect. I... it's just too much! I don't deserve you!”

“Beloved, you have given me nearly twenty years of happiness and three wonderful sons. If I did things like this every day for the rest of our lives, it would not even go halfway to what you 'deserve'. I love you. I know I'm not the most romantic alpha by any stretch of the imagination, and I sometimes say or do stupid things, but I love you with all my heart. Now, let me hold you in my arms, so I can remind myself that I am the luckiest alpha in the whole wide world!”

Castiel snuggled into his mate, uncaring about germs or hygiene any more. He could not think when he had felt happier.

+++

November was a wonderful month, Castiel thought, even more so when you were married to the most romantic alpha ever. He was busy much of the time helping Diniel and Garth plan their wedding, which would take place on New Year's Day, but often he would just drift into daydreaming about his mate and how much he loved him.

“Papa”, Diniel asked one day, “May I ask you a personal question?”

“Of course, son. What is it?”

Diniel hesitated.

“Would you have liked to have had more children, if it hadn't been for what happened with Ry?” he said quickly.

Castiel thought about it for a moment.

“I suppose, yes”, he admitted. After all, two of my own six siblings died young, so I had thought to have five or six with Dean, just to secure the estate. But luckily all three of you turned out healthy, so it wasn't really a problem.”

“Garth has said he doesn't mind how many we have”, Diniel remarked. “Of course he knows we need to secure Pemberley....”

Castiel coughed delicately.

“Have you and he talked about... the name, yet?”

“Yes”, Diniel said flatly.

His papa looked at him anxiously.
“What's wrong, son?”

“His parents sent him a box with his things in, all the way from Ireland. They put in a letter saying that if he married a Protestant, they would disown him. It really hurt him. He wants to take our name as a result.”

“You should name one of your sons Gerald or something, to honour his name. Or at least offer to.”

“I was planning to”, Diniel smiled. “Now let's talk seating plans....”

+-+++++

December 1821

Castiel had gone into Lambton to shop for Christmas presents, and absolutely not because his husband became a complete child the day they put the decorations up at Pemberley.

Well, that may have been a contributory factor. But at least he was buying some extra decorations to make up for it.

He was sat in the restaurant reading a London paper when the waitress brought him his tea.

“Thank you, Betsy”, he said, without looking up.

To his surprise, she didn't immediately leave. He looked up quizzically at her.

“Is something wrong, Betsy?” he asked.

“Begging your pardon, Mr Castiel sir, but I wondered if you noticed the gentleman sat by the aspidistra?”

“No. Why?”

“Just he was looking at you kind of funny, sir”, she said. “And when I caught him doing it, he got up and left, without even finishing his coffee.”

“Strange”, Castiel said. “Thank you for telling me, Betsy.”

“My pleasure, my lord.”

She bobbed and went on her way. Castiel finished his paper, drank his tea and made sure to leave a larger than usual tip on the table when he left.

He had arranged for the carriage to pick him up outside the Foxhunter Inn, but he was fifteen minute early, so walked slowly down the high street, window-shopping. It was a cold day, and he wrapped his coat around him tightly. At least the streets weren't that crowded, the weather presumably having deterred many would-be shoppers.

He was about three buildings away from the inn when it happened. Passing a small side-alley, he barely saw the flash of movement as a figure stepped out behind him, and a rag was held across his mouth. For a few moments he struggled in vain, but then the chloroform took effect, and he slumped into his attacker's grasp.....
Chapter Summary

Castiel's future hangs in the balance, until his journey ends unexpectedly.

December 1821

When he came to, Castiel was quickly aware of several things. First, both his hands and feet had been bound, making movement almost impossible. Second, he was in a stationary carriage, with the blinds down, his body aching from having been bounced around whilst he was unconscious. And thirdly, there were two other people in the coach, a man across from him who looked vaguely familiar, plus a huge muscular man sat next to him.

“Ah, the angel awakes!” the man across from him sneered. “About time!”

Castiel blinked, his head still hurting from the chloroform.

“Who are you?” he demanded.

“I really do not think you are in a position to be asking questions, my laird”, the man said silkily. “But as it happens, I do intend to tell you who I am. It will make what is to come so much sweeter!”

Castiel glared at him.

“Now don't frown too much, my laird”, the man said. “You'll need those pretty looks where you're going. Bruno, can you go and see what's holding us up? That dratted coachman had better not have slipped off for a pint, or I'll have his hide!”

The huge man lumbered silently out of the coach, closing the door behind him.

“Now, introductions”, the man said. “We haven't met, but you did know my father.”

Castiel looked at him, and tried to place his features. The hooked nose, the dark skin....

Oh no!

“I see you got there in the end!” the man chuckled. “Zachariah Adler, son of Lucifer Lucas, although my late father originally named me after himself. I had to change my name several times for... well, various reasons, really. Names are a nuisance when you don't want the authorities to keep track of you.”

“What do you want with me?” Castiel growled.

“Revenge, dear boy”, Zachariah smiled. “If you hadn't chanced to come home and interrupt my father's love-making...”

“He raped my brother, and was trying to kill him! Or didn't he mention that bit?”

“Details, details”, Zachariah yawned. “Anyway, you were responsible for my father getting killed.”
“Hung by the neck. And he deserved it!”

“You're really not doing yourself any favours, you know”, Zachariah smirked. “If I didn't think it would reduce the money I'll get for you, I might just take advantage before handing you over.”

“Handing me over to who?”

Zachariah sat back and smiled evilly.

“They've cut back a lot, but those lovely Mussulman pirates still do some nifty slave-trading along the coast of North Africa”, he said. “They pay really high prices for fertile white omegas, especially ones with such pale, beautiful skin. And a few of the less scrupulous London traders are prepared to help meet that demand.”

Castiel would have kicked him had he been able, but further conversation was stopped by the return of Bruno.

“Did you find out what's keeping us?” Zachariah asked.

“Yes, boss. Coachman was in the pub....”

“I knew it!”

“No, boss, not like that”, Bruno said. “Road's blocked, half a mile ahead. Fallen tree. Locals say it will be a couple of days before it's cleared.”

“Shit! So our driver's just getting drunk whilst we wait, then?”

“No boss. He's found someone who's done him a map of a way round. We have to go back and down a few country roads, but we should hit the London road again where it's clear.”

“Oh. Good.” Castiel thought his captor looked distinctly annoyed at not having a reason to grouse.

“Where are we exactly?”

“Place called Watford, Northamptonshire. Bill had to buy the guy a couple of drinks to get the map; that's why he was late back. He's ready to turn the coach now.”

“Do it. I need some sleep.” He glared at Castiel, as if the fallen tree was somehow his fault. “And you should get your beauty sleep too, my laird. Don't want you looking anything but your best when I sell you. Bruno, watch him.”

He wrapped a blanket around himself, as was soon asleep. Bruno continued to watch Castiel, his huge face expressionless. The omega sank back into his seat, and wondered why his life, recently so gloriously happy, was now ruined. He thought of Dean, back in Pemberley, and a tear tricked out of his blue eyes and rolled down his cheek.

He missed his husband so much.

+++

Dean was frantic. When Castiel hadn't come home as planned, he'd sent servants into town, and one of them had returned with a report that someone had seen a man bundling Castiel into a carriage, which had then left town swiftly. Further inquiries revealed the coachman had talked about their going to Bristol, and Dean had desperately dispatched letters to everyone he knew who could possibly help.
“I should ride out after him”, he said determinedly.

His sons looked at him anxiously. Scaden and Samandriel had come to the house immediately on hearing the news, and Peter and Anna were coming over when he had finished his rounds.

“What if they send news here, and you're gone?” Scaden asked.

“Scay and I will go”, Samandriel said. “Set us up some horses, get Mrs Moseley to pack us some food, and we'll head towards Bristol, and see what we find. That way, at least you're here if needed.”

Dean ran a frantic hand through his hair.

“I need another drink.”

The four men exchanged worried glances.

“Father, what if you have to ride out suddenly?” Diniel suggested.

“Good point”, Ryazan said. “I'll ask Mrs. Barnes to send you up a slice of pie instead.”

“Wherever he is, papa needs you with all your faculties”, Diniel said firmly. “Have you written to anyone in London yet?”

“Why? He was headed to Bristol?”

“It's the same road part of the way”, Diniel pointed out. “It might be a blind. There's no harm in making sure.” And it will keep you busy, he added silently.

Dean nodded, and left the lounge and headed to the writing room. Perhaps Vic might know something. It was better than sitting here doing nothing.

He tried not to think that Bristol was one of the main ports of embarkation for the Americas. If whoever had taken his beloved got him over there, he might never find him.

He pulled himself together with an effort, and started his letter. Though he had to dry the paper from his tears on more than one occasion.

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Dean was just puzzling over whether he had anything else to add when there was a knock at the door. He frowned. He didn't really want to be disturbed right now.

“What is it?” he called out harshly.

To his surprise, it was Mrs. Moseley, the cook, carrying a small tray.

“Mrs Barnes is deeply Upset” (Dean could hear the capital letter) “over Mr Castiel, sir, so I thought I would bring your pie up myself. I hope that is all right?”

It was Mrs. Moseley's apple pie, Dean's absolute favourite dish, steaming hot, and with a small jug of cream. The perfect treat.

He could not have been less interested.

“Thank you, Mrs Moseley”, he said heavily. “Just place it on the table, please.”

She did so, then seemed to hesitate. He looked at her, and suddenly remembered.
“Do you know something?” he demanded. He knew the cook had strong views about not interfering with the workings of Fate, but just now he could not have cared less.

She hesitated.

“You should eat your pie, sir. You need your strength.”

“What for?” he laughed hollowly.

She hesitated again, then seemed to come to a decision.

“I am not supposed to go beyond a certain point, sir”, she said, “but in the circumstances.....”

“Yes?” he said eagerly.

“There are two things I am going to tell you. One good, the other bad.”

Better than nothing, he thought.

“Go on”, he said.

“First, Mr. Castiel is safe, sir. He doesn't know it yet, but he has his own guardian angel watching over him. He will be home sooner than you expect.”

“Are you sure?”

“As sure as I can be, sir.”

“That's great!”

She smiled briefly, then her face darkened.

“But sir, this is a trial. A test of what you are to each other. Next year, there will be a greater test still. Someone he trusts will do Mr. Castiel a terrible wrong, and hurt him far more than he feels right now. He will endure months of suffering, and have no-one to turn to in his hour of need.”

“That's ridiculous!” Dean said flatly. “He'll always have me. Why would he not come to me about this?”

She looked sadly at him, and Dean would always remember her parting words.

“Because you will be the one who wrongs him, sir.”

She left before he could pull together a response.

+++

Bruno slightly lifted one of the window blinds, then let it fall back again.

“Nearly there, boss”, he said.

“Excellent!” Zachariah said. “Oh, and if you were thinking of your noble husband dashing to your rescue, I took measures to make sure that wouldn't happen. Laid a false trail to Bristol, so he would think we were heading across the Atlantic.”

“I hate you! Justice will catch up with you in the end.”
“Not unless they can reach all the way to Brazil!” the man retorted. “It's nice and unstable there just now, excellent opportunities for a man of my inestimable caliber.”

The carriage suddenly came to a stop, and Bruno leapt out to lower the steps for his boss. Unable to stand because of his binds (which he had tested several times and found irritatingly effective), Castiel just had to wait to be manhandled out of the carriage. Sure enough, Bruno reached in and scooped him up one-handedly before depositing him surprisingly gently on the ground.

Castiel looked around him. They were apparently round the back of some tavern, and in the early morning light he could just make out the inn sign swinging in the wind above him. He stared at the picture in confusion.

Then he sniffed. Something else was not right.

He looked at Bruno's broad back, then up at the coachman, then back at Bruno. His eyes widened in shock. Surely not...?

“Bruno, where are we? This isn't the docks.”

Zachariah was pacing around, looking puzzled. Castiel slowly became aware of two things; firstly that the coachman had got down and joined them, and secondly that Bruno had surreptitiously shoved him behind the two of them. His abductor turned to glare at his servant – and stopped dead.

Castiel had never seen someone turn deathly white so fast.

“You! What in Hades are you doing here?”
Rescue And Return

Chapter Summary

Castiel is ‘rescued’ and returns to Pemberley, whilst the Reverend Green has to undertake what promises to be a difficult journey.

December 1821

“You! What in Hades are you doing here?”

Castiel looked on in confusion. Zachariah was staring at his servant and his coachman, both of whom were now providing a physical wall between himself and his captor. What was happening?

“Hullo, Zackie!” the coachman grinned. “Long time no see.”

“Bruno, kill this man!”

Bruno reached out an arm, and Castiel watched, feeling suddenly sure as to what was going to happen next. Sure enough, the huge arm was wrapped gently round the coachman's shoulders.

“I think it is against the law to kill your own mate, Mr. Adler. Sir.”

Zachariah suddenly pulled out a pistol, and pointed it at the three men in front of him.

“I bet I can get both of you before either one gets to me”, he said silkily. “Move away from him, both of you.”

The coachman sighed.

“I rather think you have forgotten something, Zackie”, he said quietly.

“Yeah?” sneered Zachariah. “And what is that, pray?”

“Remember how Bruno volunteered to clean your weapon for you, just before you left Lambton?”

Castiel would not have thought it possible, but his captor's face managed to turn even whiter. He pulled the trigger, but there was only a dull click, repeated several times as he tried again. He glared at the men in front of him, and slowly started to back away, watching them warily.

He managed precisely two steps before he backed into a solid wall of muscle, in the form of two large men who had just emerged round the back of the coach. A smile crossed his face.

“Bill! Ned! Get your weapons out!”

The smile faded quickly, as the two newcomers continued to stare at him.

“We don't point guns at the guy who pays our wages”, one of them said. “That's rude!”

Zachariah looked round frantically, but could clearly see no escape. He whined piteously.
“Oh, now you want mercy!” the coachman said harshly. “Well, don't worry, Zackie. We're going to show you exactly the same sort of mercy you showed our friend here.”

Friend, Castiel wondered?

“What do you mean?” his captor demanded.

The coachman smirked.

“Well, some Mussulman-friendly trader will be at the docks in London for the next few days, waiting for someone to sell him an Englishman. He may be a bit miffed to get a darkish-skinned beta rather than a fair-skinned omega, but I guess he'll settle, particularly when we reduce the price a bit. I hear North Africa is lovely at this time of year.”

“You cannot be serious!” Zachariah almost shrieked.

“I am. Deadly. Boys, take him away.”

Bill and Ned dragged the protesting Zachariah back into the coach, Bill chloroforming him with an old rag until he stopped struggling. The coachman leant up and kissed the giant Bruno.

“Will you be all right getting him back to London?”

Castiel noticed his voice was now totally different, caring and gentle where before it had been harsh and ruthless.

“I'll be fine, my love”, Bruno replied. “Take care of yourself, and I'll see you in a few days' time, all right?”

“Be safe, beautiful.”

They kissed, and Bruno vaulted into the driver's seat with a surprising ease, before driving off. The coachman turned to Castiel, pulling off his hat, and the omega knew who he was before he even spoke.

“Sorry about all that, but introductions had to wait a bit, given the circumstances”, he grinned. “I'm Victor. Victor Henriksen, Dean's friend.”

+++

“You didn't have to hire two horses, you know.”

They were riding slowly back from Lambton, where Castiel had refused the offer of breakfast. He was hungry, but he needed to get home to Dean.

“When you're as close to someone as you are to your husband, riding close to another alpha is uncomfortable”, Victor explained. “Dean speaks so often of you, so I know the effect you have on him. A few extra pennies won't break me, and I have a funny feeling your husband might just be persuaded to foot the bill anyway.”

“I owe you so much. We both do.”

“Your husband saved my life once, Castiel”, Victor said, as they turned in at the gatehouse. “At no small expense to himself, both financially and reputation-wise. The London papers pilloried him for speaking out to save the life of a 'gangster', but he stood firm, and thankfully the case collapsed. I am glad to have helped save you from that vermin.”
Castiel looked up at the house that was drawing ever nearer. He was almost home.

He was almost with Dean.

+++~+++

Someone must have seen them coming up the drive, for as they reined in at the steps, a sea of humanity burst through the huge doors. Castiel just had time to recognize his three sons plus Samandriel and Garth, before Scaden was lifting him off his horse.

“Papa! You're safe! We were so worried!”

Castiel found himself being hugged on all sides, before there was a pointed cough from behind him.

“He might appreciate it more if you could all let him breathe, perhaps?”

The five men around all turned as one to stare at Victor. Castiel extricated himself from his sons and smiled at him.

“May I?” he asked shyly.

Victor nodded.

“My friends and family, I present to you the magnificent Mr. Victor Henriksen – my rescuer.”

“I think we'd better get you to your husband”, Victor said firmly. “Is he not here?”

The three Winchester sons exchanged looks.

“He went out back some time ago, to the arbour”, Diniel said. “Told us not to disturb him.”

“And not one of you had the wherewithal to run and let him know his mate was home?” Victor looked at them all disapprovingly. “Hmph. Go to him now, Castiel. Don't let him suffer another minute.”

+++~+++

The arbour was a small area around the back of the house, connected to the rest of the garden by a tree-lined walk. There was a statue in the middle of the walk, and it had been long understood amongst everyone that if a Winchester wished for time alone, they could go to there and leave a small red flag in the statue's outstretched hand, and they would not be disturbed. Castiel observed the flag as he went past, but kept on until he was just outside the archway entrance.

His husband was sat facing away from him on one of the benches, his knees pulled up tight to his chest. Castiel's first thought was that he must be cold without a coat, before a quiet sob told him Dean was probably shaking for another reason entirely. He must have scuffed his shoe against a stone as he drew near, because his husband perceptibly stiffened.

“I thought I said I was not to be disturbed?”

Even his voice sounded broken. Castiel's heart reached out to him.

“Not even by your own mate, beloved?”

He whispered the words such that he half-thought his husband would not hear them, but Dean reacted like he had been shot, standing up suddenly and staring incredulously at him.
“Cas?” he gasped.

“Beloved!”

And Dean was on him, falling to his knees, weeping tears of joy into Castiel's old coat and holding him like he would never let him go.

“I missed you so much!”

“I missed you too, beloved. But I am here now.”

Dean turned a tearful face up to him.

“I couldn't go on without you, you know.”

“Nor I you, beloved”, Castiel said, gently wiping the tears from his husband's face. “Victor saved me. He's here now.”

“Vic?” Dean exclaimed. “I am so going to owe him for this. I must see him.”

“Let me get you cleaned up first”, Castiel smiled. “We don't want them all thinking their alpha male is soppy, do we?”

Dean swept him into a kiss that left the omega breathless.

“Don't care anymore!” he growled. “I love you, and anyone who has a problem with that can take the next coach to Timbuctoo!”

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“Well, as it happens, I do have a favour that needs doing.”

Victor grinned at them. It was the day after Castiel's return to Pemberley, and the omega was frankly more than a little exhausted from all the greetings and congratulations he had received from everybody.

He was also possible just a little tired from his husband's enthusiastic welcome home the night before. He shifted in his seat, trying to get comfortable. Dean still had some stamina in him when roused.

The master of Pemberley grinned at his friend.

“Vic, if it's in my power to do it, you know I'll do it”, he smiled. “After this stroke, there's nothing I wouldn't do for you.”

“It's about Bruno, isn't it?” Castiel asked gently.

Victor looked at him.

“I thought you were sniffing something at the inn”, he said. “You know?”

“I'm guessing six weeks.”

“You're good. It's just past five.”

“Excuse me”, Dean said, “but can someone explain what is going on here?”
Castiel turned to him.

“Bruno is Victor's mate”, he explained. “I didn't believe it at first when I could scent his being pregnant, but he's definitely an omega.”

“Despite being built like an alpha!” Victor laughed.

“More like two alphas!” Castiel said. “And because you were right next to me, I knew you had to be his mate. But I could also sense your protectiveness, and that didn't make any sense. Why would you endanger your mate's life at a time like this?”

“Because I had no choice”, Victor explained. “I told him I wasn't prepared to risk his neck because I thought he might be expecting, then the damned fool went and got a job with Zachariah without telling me, so I had to let him stay there. I planted a couple of other people as well, and managed to have them all around at the kidnap attempt.”

“But why did you let him go through with it?” Dean asked curiously.

“It was safer. Besides, he'd just set up that meeting with that snivelling merchant. I wonder if he gets sea-sick? Those slave galleys aren't all that well kept!”

They all laughed.

“So this favour involves me doing something for your mate?” Dean asked.

“Partly. Him and his omega brother, Wolfgang. Wolfie to his mates; he's just turned eighteen, but he's even bigger than Bruno. If they stay around London, Bruno will only try to help me. I can't risk my future son, and Bruno won't go anywhere without his brother.”

“Two large muscular men”, Castiel said thoughtfully. “I could certainly find a use for them.....”

Dean glared warningly at him.

“I did not miss those sorts of remarks, I should point out!” he said acidly. “I can easily find them work on the estate, Vic. Consider it done.”

“Thanks, friend.”

+++++

Christmas that year was a quiet affair, possibly because people were still in shock from the kidnap attempt. Dean quickly found Bruno and his brother work on the estate, primarily in the stables, where they could manhandle the horses with ease. Wolfgang turned out also to be skilled at ironwork, and was soon working regularly at the forge. Victor stayed to see his mate settled in, then left for London, promising to return as soon as possible.

Three days before the end of the year, Castiel had a brief respite from the wedding planning (at one point he had threatened to try to get kidnapped again, just to get away from it all!) when a letter arrived from Sussex. Michael was due to give birth sometime around the end of February or early March, but a sudden change in his scent had led Adam to take him to the doctor, who had confirmed they were expecting twins. He also wrote that Adam was still asking to marry him, even though they would have to keep it secret whilst Lord William was alive. Michael was reluctant to enter into such a subterfuge, however, and asked his brother's advice. Castiel talked the matter over with his husband.
“Legally, Adam has to use his real name or the marriage is invalid”, Dean pointed out. “But that means the vicar who performs the service may recognize him, and may try to take advantage by informing Earl William.”

“He does say their local vicar at Fletcherstoke is a bit of a gossip”, Castiel said, musing on this. “Perhaps the Reverend Green might be persuaded to go and perform the service? We know he can be trusted.”

“A cross-country ride on winter roads!” Dean said, shivering apprehensively. “Rather him than me. But it would be good if he agreed. If, of course, he is prepared to marry someone six to seven months pregnant.”

“We should send someone, even if we can't go ourselves”, Castiel said. “I know you're training up Dino, but how about Ry? He's nearly eighteen, and I'm sure he can be trusted.”

“I bet he'll hate the idea, though”, Dean said. “A winter out on our poor excuses for roads? And I won't force him to go.”

+++++

As it happened, the Reverend Brenton Green was delighted to go and perform the service, even if it did mean travelling on winter roads for nearly four hundred miles.

Until he found out who his travelling companion was. Precisely six seconds after he agreed to go. Then he went home and said something that was definitely not in any prayer book.
January 1822

The Reverend Brenton Green was one hundred per cent sure there was a God in Heaven. Not just because his job depended on it – there were always some strange clerics who liked to show off by questioning His existence – but because right now, that was one of three things he was absolutely sure of.

The second thing was that his ultimate superior had a warped sense of humour, and this particular cleric was increasingly unappreciative as to his currently being on the receiving end of it.

The third thing was that his resolve was about to be sorely tested, with two days travelling in each direction, plus a night in Sussex either side of the actual wedding. He and Ryazan were to break their journey in Hertfordshire each way, staying with the boy's grandmother on the way down, and with Mr. and Msr. Collins on the way back. If the trip had been made on his own, Brenton would have looked forward to it, but the thoughts of that determined beta lusting after him for the best part of four hundred miles had him breaking out in a sweat. Not to mention what the boy's father would almost certainly do to him if he found out.

Not that there was anything to find out about.

Yet, a quiet voice whispered from the back of his mind. It sounded horribly like a certain young beta.

And in three months' time he'll be a man…

Brenton wiped his brow and went back to his packing.

+~+~+

It was bitterly cold on the day the two set off, leaving from Pemberley because Brenton had agreed to use one of the estate horses rather than his own. He would normally have been reluctant to do so, but as Lord Winchester had pointed out, his usual mount was used to doing the rounds of the local villages, and might not take kindly to travelling the length of England without warning. Instead he had a solid mare called Philomena, not a racehorse by any stretch of the imagination, but much better suited for the journey ahead of him. Ryazan was on his own mare, Waverley.

Dean and Castiel gave them a couple of gifts to take with them – small ones, the vicar was relieved to note – and bade them Godspeed. There was already the threat of snow, and the vicar was suddenly struck with a terrible image of the two of them being stuck in the snow for weeks.

“I'm not actually going to bite you, you know!”

Ryazan was looking across at him from beneath his golden locks. Brenton blushed.

“You've done everything but!” he snapped back, knowing how peevish he sounded.
“On the other hand, if you ask nicely.....”

The vicar shot him a warning look.

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Brenton had only met Mrs. Bennet once, when she and her son had visited Pemberley. He had found her tiring (and her youngest son infinitely worse!), but fortunately bad weather had delayed their arrival at Longbourn, and he was able to plead an early exit to the safety of his bedroom.

Where he found the one person he had been dreading.

“I really do not think it is appropriate for you to be in here”, he frowned.

Balthazar Bennet grinned at him.

“Just checking to see the servants have got your bed warm, vicar”, he smirked. “Wouldn't want you to get cold, would we now?”

“Thank you, Mr Bennet”, he said heavily. “If that is all?”

“Unless there's anything else I can help you with?”

The vicar blushed, but was saved from replying by a knock at the door. Ryazan entered the room, carrying a book.

“You asked me to give you this back before you turned in”, he said, handing over a bible.

It was a lie; Brenton had asked him no such thing. But he understood that the boy was rescuing him from his uncle, and was grateful. Until Ryazan came over and sat next to him wrapping an arm round him and looking pointedly at Balthazar.

“I see”, the elder omega said, frowning. “Like that, is it? Well, I'm not one to follow lost causes. Tata, boys! And men!”

He slipped out of the room. Brenton waited until he was sure he had gone before sliding away from the beta, who quirked an eyebrow at him.

“Scylla and Charybdis?” he said dryly. “Don't worry, vicar. Your virtue is safe with me.”

Brenton was aware that he had visibly relaxed.

“Until my birthday in three and a half months' time, that is! Sleep well!”

And he was gone. The vicar stared after him, wondering if he would get any sleep tonight after all this.

+++~+++

They passed through London the next day, and continued southwards until they reached the vineyard. Brenton found that both the prospective newly-weds were nervous verging on terrified, partly because they had somehow convinced themselves he might change his mind and refuse to perform the service. Even his assurances that this was not so did not seem to do much to calm them down, and after a while Ryazan drew him away. Brenton tensed, but for once it seemed the boy had other things on his mind.
“We need to get them calmed down, and they're only making each other worry like this”, he said quietly. “I'll take my uncle for a walk, and you keep Adam here. Hopefully once they're apart, they might ease up a little.”

It was a surprisingly thoughtful action, and the vicar's feelings must have shown, because Ryazan frowned at him.

“I don't spend every waking minute thinking only of us two!” he snapped. Then he seemed to think for a moment before adding, “well, not every minute.”

Brenton blushed.

“Besides, my uncle's happiness takes priority right now. I'll get him and his clothes sorted out, and head off with him. You take care of Lord Adam.”

Brenton bowed.

“Of course, your lordship!”

Ryazan swatted at him.

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The marriage of Michael Bennet and Lord Adam Fitzwilliam was mercifully uneventful, and Brenton allowed himself a quiet sigh of relief when he pronounced the two united. He knew Lord Winchester – he could never bring himself to think of him as Dean, despite always being told by the man in question to call him that – had pulled several strings to secure the church and all the necessary formalities to make this wedding legal, so that the offspring of their union might one day inherit Standford.

Thinking of Lord Winchester reminded him of the beta standing in front of him, currently showering the happy couple with the traditional rice. Dean Winchester as his mate’s father. Brenton swallowed involuntarily.

“Still just over three months”, Ryazan whispered to him, as the happy couple walked towards their carriage. “My father rented them a house in Brighton for their honeymoon, so at least they haven't got far to go. And papa gave Adam a new watch, and Michael one of their father's old books that he had had restored.”

Brenton looked at him. Oddly, he somehow knew that the boy was wondering where the two of them might go on their own honeymoon.

“Brighton is close, which is good for someone in Michael's condition”, Ryazan said. “If it was me, I should like to go over to the Isle of Man.”

“Why?” the vicar asked.

Ryazan shrugged his shoulders.

“I just like the name. And I love the thought of being on an island with the one I love.”

He looked meaningfully at Brenton, who this time held his gaze.

“I believe the ferry sails from Liverpool”, he observed, smiling slightly.

It was probably the first time he had ever initiated anything emotional with the beta, who arched his
eyebrows in response.

“I had better send for the ferry times when we get home, then”, the boy smiled, before linking his arm in the vicar’s and taking him down the church path.

+++~+++\

Something had changed between himself and Ryazan, and he was not quite sure what it was, but they were somehow much closer than they had been before the wedding. The beta seemed much more relaxed, as if he now knew he had the love of the man he wanted, and could sit and wait out the time until his birthday.

Michael and Adam Fitzwilliam were due to leave on their honeymoon as soon as their two visitors were on their way, so there were two carriages outside the farmhouse. Brenton was waiting for Ryazan to come out with his bag when Michael walked out to his carriage, carrying a light bag of his own. The vicar would have offered to carry it for him, but he knew how proud the omega was, so held back. Ryazan and Adam came out of the door, pausing as Adam locked it behind them.

Michael suddenly turned to look at the vicar.

“I think you'll make a great new brother”, he said, smiling knowingly.

Brenton reeled, but before he could react the others were there, and he had to make his farewells. As the carriages rolled away towards the main road where one would head north and the other south, his head was still reeling. Were they really that obvious?

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The answer came later that day, when they finally reached Lucas Lodge, and were welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Collins. Their arrival had been delayed by some heavy fog in London, but the Collinses had prepared a cold buffet, on which both their visitors fell with relish. They discussed the wedding and of course the kidnap attempt on Castiel, and Ryazan and the two young Collinses had turned in before the subject turned to other matters.

“I hope you do not think this an impertinent question, reverend”, Mr. Collins said slowly, “but there is something I have been wondering.”

The vicar looked at him in surprise.

“Go on”, he said.

“This relationship between you and Mr. Ryazan. I presume his father is not yet aware of it?”

Brenton spluttered into his port, and Inias quickly handed him a napkin.

“Relationship?” he squeaked.

The Collinses exchanged a knowing look.

“The two of you were practically glowing at dinner”, Inias explained. “Even Paul spotted it, and he’s about emotionally close to zero as anyone.”

Brenton blushed.

“No, his lordship does not”, he said. “Are we really that obvious?”
“You wiped his chin with your napkin”, Mr. Collins observed.

“And you were holding hands under the table”, Inias added.

The blush deepened.

“His father... it's complicated. Besides, he's not eighteen yet.”

“You will have to tell him one day”, Inias prompted.

“The day after Ryazan's birthday”, Brenton said firmly. “I'll do it then.”

“Really?”

They all turned to see the subject of their discussion standing in the doorway, wearing a long red dressing-gown. He came over and sat on the arm of Brenton's chair.

“You... would do that?” he asked, sounding almost incredulous.

“Two days after”, Brenton corrected. Seeing the surprise in the boy's face, he quickly explained, “the day after is Diniel's birthday. That wouldn't be fair. I promise to talk to your father about us on April the twenty-fourth.”

Ryazan beamed.

“But the two of you had better avoid being seen together before then”, Inias warned. “It's patently obvious that there's something between you. People would have to be blind not to see it.”

“I can wait three months”, Ryazan said firmly. “If I know there's a reward like that waiting for me at the end.”

Brenton pulled him gently into the chair beside him, and cuddled him. The Collinses smiled at them, and the conversation turned to other matters.

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“Did your trip go well?” Castiel asked politely.

“Wonderful!” Ryazan beamed. “Michael Fitzwilliam and his mate are enjoying the delights of Brighton as we speak.

“That's good”, Castiel smiled. “And how are you feeling, son?”

Ryazan hesitated. There was something in the way his papa had phrased that particular question.

“I am well, papa”, he said cautiously. “The trip was long, but I got a lot out of it.”

“It is always good to see a fellow family member make a good marriage”, Castiel said quietly. “A happy brother. Or son.”

He stared meaningfully at his son, who blushed fiercely.

“He's going to talk to father once our birthdays are out of the way!” he blurted out.

“The twenty-fourth?” Castiel asked.

“Yes.”
“Then I shall endeavour to make sure your father is in a good mood come the twenty-fourth.”

Ryazan smiled at him. He truly felt he had never been happier.
February 1822

January had been cold without the weather really being bad, but on the second day of the second month the skies darkened ominously, and the following day the snow began to fall. And kept on falling for the next few days, so that Dean’s plans for a Valentine’s Day Ball (no, he was not being romantic, thank you very much, it was just for the staff and close friends) came under threat. Fortunately the snow stopped on the eighth, and although the skies continued to look threatening, work could be undertaken to clear paths and enable everyone to attend.

The Smith brothers, Bruno and Wolfgang, were the first to volunteer for snow-clearing duty, although Dean made it clear that Bruno was not to do more than an hour’s work, especially now that he was nearly four months pregnant. He had a strong inkling that the omega would defy him, so asked Castiel to go round to their cottage and check up on them. To the laird’s surprise, he found the elder Smith with his feet up, sipping a hot chocolate.

“Wolfie made it clear I wasn’t doing anything outside the cottage grounds”, he explained, “otherwise he’d drag me back in and tie me to the chair!”

“He is very protective of you”, Castiel observed. He paused, before adding tentatively, “may I ask a personal question?”

Bruno looked at him thoughtfully.

“It’s about his not speaking, isn’t it?” he said flatly.

Castiel blushed.

“Yes. I’m sorry, I have no right to ask….”

“You and Lord Winchester put us up here for nothing”, Bruno said easily. “I can tell you. But it’s not a good story.”

“Go on”, Castiel said nervously.

Bruno sipped his drink.

“When we were very young – I was five and he was four, I think – some thugs broke in and killed our parents over a debt. Not only that, they tortured them before they finished them off. They did a quick search upstairs, but we hid under the bed; luckily someone was alerted by the noise and came to the door, so they ran. He was a quiet child even before then, but Wolfie has never spoken since.”

“I’m so sorry”, Castiel said sadly. “Did… they catch up with the men who did it?”
The huge omega looked hard at him. Castiel suddenly felt chilled.

“Eleven years later, I caught up with them”, Bruno said softly. “Slow but sure moves the might of the gods.”

“Euripides”, Castiel said at once. “Roughly and often incorrectly translated as ‘justice may be delayed, but never denied’.”

The other omega grinned at him.

“How does a Swiss thug via London end up knowing Ancient Greek literature, you’re wondering?”

Castiel blushed again, but nodded.

“Wolfie loved the classics”, Bruno explained. “Still does. I used to help him read them. I guess I just fell into them. Our uncle brought us up, but after I dealt with our parents’ killers, we obviously had to leave Switzerland. Then in London I was lucky enough to run into Vic, and he has a small library of his own. I should have asked him to bring some up for me.”

Castiel hesitated.

“Bruno”, he said slowly, “may I ask a favour of you?”

“Another request?” grinned the huge omega. “Ask away, and ye may receive!”

“Bring Wolfie to our library”, Castiel said. “I am quite fond of the classics myself, and we have a good range. The two of you are welcome to borrow any book you want. After all, you’ll be resting a lot soon, so you’ll need something to entertain you.”

For a moment he thought the huge omega might refuse, then Bruno suddenly grinned at him.

“I’m glad I helped rescue you!” he smiled.

Castiel smiled back.

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The day before the ball, which was to be held on a Thursday, Castiel received a letter from Sussex. He read it with growing excitement, and then hurried to his husband’s study to share the news with him.

“It’s from Michael and Adam”, he smiled. “Michael went into labour just days after they arrived back from Brighton, a few weeks early, but he’s been safely delivered of twins. A beta and a girl.”

“That’s great” his husband smiled. “Any names for them yet?”

“Abdiel and Rachel. Both doing well.”

“We must look into buying them a christening present”, Dean said. “Except this time, I’m taking you shopping. I don’t want a repeat of your last trip!”

“Dean, the last report we had of Mr. Adler was that he was chained to an oar in a galley operating somewhere off Cape Bon!” Castiel laughed. “But it would be nice to have you with me. I know how much you just love shopping!”

Dean growled.
“It’s a testament to how much I love you that I do that sort of thing!” he groused. “Let me know when you want to go, and I’ll be ready.”

“Wouldn’t it be better if you let me know when you can fit me in?” Castiel asked, surprised. “You’re much busier than I am.”

His husband stared hard at him.

“Beloved”, he said slowly, “whatever I have to do and whomever I have to meet – from the humblest peasant to that great whale on the English throne – you always come first. Now go and think about what you want to buy for your brother, and I’ll see you at dinner.”

Castiel quickly crossed the room and kissed him lightly on the hair, before slipping back to the door.

“I do love you!” he whispered. “And when we get to Valentine’s Day night – I might wear that French maid outfit again!”

He slipped away before Dean could comment, leaving a totally flustered but very happy alpha behind him.

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The wedding of Lancelot Bingley and Sasha Krushnic, held on Valentine’s Day itself, passed off uneventfully, although Sam had to support Gabriel when the omega teared up at the ‘I do’s’. Castiel enjoyed it greatly, and he was glad that his first cousin once removed (who, he had to admit, did look like a younger version of himself) was so happy.

A notable event occurred – or in a sense, did not occur - at the reception. Castiel had always thought modern dancing a bit strange, spending minutes at a time moving around the floor in such intricate moves that, if one person got their part wrong, it generally threw everyone else. But the motions of those on the dance floor held nothing to the increasing fascination with which he watched the strange ‘dance’ between his youngest son and the vicar of Kympton. It was like some bizarre scientific experiment, the one where two magnets automatically repelled each other once they got too close. They avoided dancing at the same time, and if by chance they ended up moving towards each other, both would turn right round and head in the opposite direction. Fortunately his husband was too intent on socializing, but Castiel could not help but notice.

He was not the only one.

“Are you planning to have a clerical connection, brother?” Gabriel asked lightly, watching as Ryazan almost fell over his feet in his attempt to get across the room from the vicar. ‘Except the only way those two could be more obvious was to have big signs above their heads saying….”’

“Gabe!”

“You always assume I’m going to come out with something rude”, Gabriel pouted.

Castiel stared pointedly at his brother, who eventually sighed.

“Shut up, Cassie!”

“I never said anything.”

“I know. But you're a master of the disapproving silence!”
Castiel smiled.

“I did hope that getting the two of them to go to Sussex together might help them iron out the problems in their relationship”, he admitted. “Yes, they have an understanding. Brenton will speak to Dean after Ryazan’s birthday.”

“You’re going to ask me not to tell the moose, aren’t you?”

His brother laughed.

“You still call him that? No, you can tell him. I don’t like keeping a secret from Dean, but it is better this way, and it’s only for a few months. I can trust Sam.”

“And me, of course.”

Castiel looked at him through his lashes. Gabriel glared back at him.

“How do you do that?” the elder omega grumbled.

+~+~+

Last year, Dean had surprised his mater with a gift on Valentine’s Day – the romantic getaway to Gretna Green and the marriage over the anvil. The year before, of course, had been between the deaths of first Anna’s husband then dean’s sister herself, so no-one had felt like celebrating, but the year before that dean had gifted his mater their en suite bathroom. This year Castiel had made it clear that it was his turn to deliver a surprise, which after his comment about the maid’s uniform had left the alpha tense with anticipation.

Castiel slipped away from him as soon as they arrived back at Pemberley, whispering that he needed five minutes to himself. Dean duly went to his study, but found himself unable to concentrate on anything, until Beddowes knocked at the door. The butler was holding a folded piece of paper.

“Mr. Castiel said to give you this, sir”, he said enigmatically.

Dean took the paper and unfolded it, noticing that Beddowes immediately left. Obviously there was no need for a reply then. The paper read:

‘1 – The Waiting-Room’

Puzzled, Dean strode across to the waiting-room, and went in. Everything seemed normal, until he suddenly sniffed. There was a definite aroma of baked apples, and when he turned round, he could see why. A large eight-tiered silver cake-stand had been placed on the top shelf of the small bookcase, and on the bottom platter was a small apple-pie. On the platter above it was another piece of paper. He unfolded it, and read:

‘2 – The Billiard-Room’

This time, his target was much easier to spot, a luscious blackberry tart right in the middle of the billiard table. Despite having been snacking on and off throughout the evening, he was tempted to devour both pies right now, but seeing the folded piece of paper sticking out, he held back.

‘3 – The Lounge’

This one took a bit more finding, on the lower level of the fireside table. Rhubarb, possibly with some apple by the smell.
Dean’s travels then took him on to the ball-room (lemon meringue), library (mixed berries of some sort), reading-room (strawberry) and conservatory (something with custard, but it smelt so heavenly he didn’t care about not being sure). Finally the eighth clue sent him to his own bedroom, where a note on the door instructed him to leave the pie-stand outside, then enter. Puzzled, he did so.

And stopped dead.

Castiel was wearing the French maid’s uniform, and Dean’s heart missed a beat. There was some sort of stand fitted in the fire, and Castiel beckoned him over to the empty chair, which was laden with blankets.

“I thought your favourite pies, heated up, with your favourite omega, already hot”, he said quietly, stepping out to retrieve the pie-stand. “The perfect end to the day for lovers.”

Dean somehow managed to stumble across to the fireplace and collapse untidily into the blankets, before a tear ran down his cheeks. And because Castiel was the best mate in the world, he never told anyone.

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Of course, Dean did have some really bad indigestion the next day. And he ached in places he hadn’t even thought possible. But it had definitely been worth it!

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One of the master of Pemberley’s few bad habits was that he eavesdropped. Of course this occasionally backfired on him, as had happened the time he burst in his doctor and his niece, but he usually found he learnt a lot more when people didn’t know he was listening in on their conversations.

Like right now, for example. Scaden and Samandriel had come over to dinner, and Dean’s eldest son had pulled his mate away to the library as soon as the meal was over to talk to him about something in private. So if Dean just happened to be passing the library window in his way to the stables – he was taking the scenic route for a change– well, that was pure coincidence.

“You know how Father is about these things”, he heard Scaden’s voice through the slightly open window. “He won’t approve.”

“But he’s so adorable!” Samandriel’s voice whined. “The way he looked up at us with those cute little blue eyes… I could eat him all up!”

“Yes, but adoption is a big step. We really need to run it by father first.”

“He couldn’t possibly object!”

“He might. Especially if the new Winchester makes too much of a mess. Papa once said Dad was clueless when it came to raising anything more than a burp!”

Samandriel laughed. Dean frowned. That was uncalled for, however accurate.

All right, it was pretty accurate. But that didn’t justify….

His nephew’s voice came through the window again.

“I don’t see why we can’t adopt all six of them.”
Dean blinked. What on earth…? He hurried back to the house, and met Castiel and the young men in the hall.

“Hullo, beloved”, Castiel smiled. “You’ll never guess what the boys are going to do?”

Dean managed to suppress the urge to scream out that he very much might.

“No”, he ground out instead. “What?”

Castiel looked surprised at his gruff voice, but carried on anyway.

“They’re going to adopt a puppy!”

Dean stared at the two boys, who promptly collapsed into each other in hysterical laughter. The light finally dawned.

“You knew!” he growled.

“Oh father, your face!” Scaden laughed. “You looked like thunder!”

Castiel looked between the three of them in confusion.

“What's going on?” he asked.

“I hate you both!” Dean snapped, and stormed off into his study, slamming the door behind him. His son and his nephew continued to laugh, before taking Castiel away and explaining their little joke to him.

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“I have some good news”, Dean said as they went to bed that night. “I have finally found a painter who will be able to picture the two of us, and best of all, he will not need us to sit for hours at a time. He will do most of the work from short sketches of us, then sit us for only the finishing touches.”

“That is wonderful, beloved”, Castiel smiled, yawning a little. “Excuse me, but I really am dog-tired.”

Dean shot him a warning look.

“He will be here the day after tomorrow”, he said. “He’s staying in Lambton, and travelling in each day.”

“Good”, Castiel smiled. ”I think I would have to be barking mad to pass up such a wonderful opportunity.”

“Stop it!” Dean growled.

“Stop what, beloved?”

“The dog references. It’s not funny!”

“I’m sorry, beloved.”

Dean glared at him, wondering if he had finished, but Castiel just looked up sweetly at him.

“No more remarks?” Dean asked.
“I shall put a muzzle on it.”

Dean suddenly leapt on him and pinned him into the bed.

“You know I get rough when I’m angry”, he warned, though there was a smile in his eyes.

“But I like it when you get ‘wuff’, beloved”."

“Stop it, Cas!”

Castiel looked at him like a wounded pu…. like some small creature possibly of the canine species that had been injured.

“Be nice to me, beloved”, he whispered, looking at Dean through his long lashes. “After all, you promised to stand by me for better for worse, and I shall always love, honour and obey you, just like, to take a totally random example, a faithful do…."

Dean Winchester put his hand across his mate’s mouth, then silenced him more permanently in the best way he knew how. And Castiel Winchester did not mind one little bit.
Old Friends?

Chapter Summary

Castiel receives a letter from an old friend, whilst Lord Adam finds himself in danger of committing bigamy.

March 1822

Castiel always tried not to keep things from his husband, as he knew it was usually a recipe for disaster. But he also knew Dean’s failings, probably the worst of which was his jealousy. So when he received a letter from Hertfordshire whilst Dean was away visiting a mill he owned in Derby, he decided to keep it to himself. Or at least, himself and his youngest son.

“What is it, papa?” Ryazan asked, looking across the library at him.

“It’s from an old friend of mine, back in Hertfordshire”, his papa said. “A Mr. Bartholomew Browne, or rather Doctor Browne as he is now. He is touring the county next month, and asks if we might meet up somewhere.”

Ryazan raised an eyebrow.

“What sort of old friend, papa?” he asked curiously.

“He proposed to me on the same day your father did.”

“What!” Ryazan almost shouted.

Castiel chuckled.

“There was no love involved”, he said. “It would have been quite a respectable match, and if your father had not have come along when he did, I would probably have accepted him. Mr. Browne was quite fond of me in his own way, and I don’t think he took my decision very well at the time, but he eventually got over it.”

“Perhaps he might have an idea for your, er, treatments?” Ryazan suggested.

“Perhaps”, Castiel said. “But I can’t invite him here; your father would go through the roof!”

“True!” Ryazan grinned. “I still remember the time poor Mr. Woodhouse held you a bit too close at that dance last year. If it hadn’t have been for you, I was sure father would have attacked him.”

“It’s only because he cares”, Castiel smiled. “But it would be nice to see… Doctor Browne again. I wonder if he ever married….”

Samandriel tried not to smile at the sight in front of him. He failed miserably, but at least he tried.

His mate and his mate’s brothers, all sat at the kitchen table, each devouring (or in Scaden’s case, positively inhaling) slices of Mrs. Moseley’s pie. Blackberry and something, judging from the stains
around their mouths.

“Definitely your father's sons!” he laughed, descending the stairs.

Scaden looked briefly up at him, and smiled through a mouthful of pie before reaching out for the custard jug and pouring more of the hot yellow liquid onto what remained of his slice.

“Men have killed for less”, he ground out. “This is pure ambrosia!”

“There will be one each for you and Mr. Diniel to take with you when you go”, Mrs. Moseley said from her position by the sink. “Is Mr. Garth not up yet?”

“Went for a walk”, Diniel said, spluttering pastry flakes across the table as he spoke and earning himself a glare from his brothers. “What? You did ask!”

“Didn't ask to be covered in your pie!” Ryazan retorted, wiping his cheek with a napkin. “That was heavenly, Mrs. Moseley. Thank you.”

She smiled at him, and turned back to the sink.

“Garth said he wants to take me to father and papa's cottage in Cumberland”, Diniel said. “We were thinking we might head off the day after my birthday.”

Mrs. Moseley turned round.

“I don't think that's a good idea, Mr. Diniel”, she said quietly. “Even if it is to avoid the master's reaction when the Reverend Green sees him the next day.”

Ryazan spluttered into his coffee, and was about to ask the obvious when he remembered.

“Of course!” he muttered.

The cook smiled knowingly at him.

“So why would I want to wait, Mrs. Moseley?” Diniel asked curiously.

“It might be for the best”, she said mysteriously. “Something is going to happen next month, and the signs are that it is going to happen on or near Mr. Ryazan's birthday.”

“You think father will be angry and me and the Reverend Green?” Ryazan asked anxiously.

She paused.

“I think it's best if the three of you are here when it happens”, she said at last. “Don't ask me what it is, because I don't know. I just know it will be bad.”

“How bad?” Samandriel asked.

She handed him his own slice of pie, and stood back.

“Very bad”, she said firmly.

+~+~+

As the owner of the greatest of the great houses in Derbyshire, Dean Winchester had to meet a lot of people on his own social level. Some of them were all right, the majority was tolerable, and some
were downright unpleasant. But there was no-one quite like Lady Cecily Emilia Wilhelmina Fforbes-Westinghouse. She was the daughter and only child of Lord Martin Fforbes, an impoverished baronet whose father had lost most of the family fortune at the gaming tables, leaving his son with a large house, a larger mortgage and little else. To rescue the family estate, Martin had married Emily Westinghouse, daughter and sole heiress to an American business tycoon, the man obligingly dying soon after the wedding and leaving his entire fortune to his daughter. Who had less obligingly died in childbirth a year later, leaving a floundering Lord Martin to raise their only daughter. Lady Cecily had ended up a spoilt brat in Dean's (and almost everyone else's) opinion; her father had tentatively suggested that she marry Ryazan when he came of age, but Dean had managed to veto the idea on the grounds of age difference (his son had been sixteen at the time, and Lady Cecily was twenty-nine). That and his feelings about cruelty to children.

The first day of spring saw Dean having to attend a ball in Manchester. His mate was in bed with a sore ankle (Dean strongly suspected he was playing this up to avoid going, but Castiel had been quite persuasive the night before into letting him off, so he had agreed. Very persuasive, in fact. He smiled slightly at the memory, before turning his attention back to the man in front of him, Lord Martin Fforbes.

“How is your daughter faring?” he asked politely.

Across the room he could see Lady Cecily talking to some poor alpha, whose body language was positively screaming 'somebody save me!'. Her voice carried right across the room, sounding like a donkey in distress, and there was a notable gap all around her. Dean shuddered, glad he wasn't in that alpha's shoes.

“How well”, Lord Martin beamed. “She is engaged to be married.”

Who's the victim? Dean thought uncharitably.

“Who's the lucky man?” he said.

“A friend of yours, actually”, Lord Martin said. “Adam Fitzwilliam, the heir to Standford.”

Dean stared at him in horror.

“Is something wrong, Lord Winchester?” Lord Martin asked politely. “You seem perturbed.”

“Er, no”, Dean got out. “I thought Adam would never get married.”

Twice.

“Well, strictly speaking, he doesn't even know yet, and I'd be grateful if you don't let on. I was beginning to think I would never find her someone.”

“He doesn't know?” Dean said incredulously.

“His brother Earl William is arranging it all”, Lord Martin explained. “He was afraid Adam would never have children, and the estate would pass to some foreign relatives he strongly disapproves of.”

Dean nodded. He could understand that, at least. The Earldom of Hexhamshire was one of the oldest in the country, having been founded along with the county of that name in Norman times. It could only pass down direct male lineages, otherwise Dean himself could have inherited. He was still trying to get his head round his friend's future – second – marriage. To…. that.
“What if Lord Adam says no?” he asked tentatively. “I mean, he's a grown man. He may have ideas of his own.”

He may also have a mate who he's married in secret, and by whom he's just had two children.

“Oh, he'll have to agree, Earl William will make sure of that”, Lord Martin said confidently. “He has gone to London to speak in the House of Lords debate on some new law or other, but when he gets back, everything will be settled. It is such a relief!”

He bowed, and moved away to speak to someone else.

It won't be for Adam when he finds out, Dean thought bitterly. Then he saw Lady Cecily's alpha had finally managed to escape, and she was making her way straight towards him, a determined look on her horsey face (he offered up a quiet mental apology to all horses for that comparison). Blanching, he turned and walked quickly to the toilets.

He only broke into a run once he was round the first corner.

++++

As soon as he got home, Dean wrote immediately to his friend, warning him what was afoot and begging him to make the journey home as soon as his mate felt capable. He did consider going to London and trying to talk Earl William out of it, but could not see how. It was indeed a prestigious match, and would bring Standford a huge injection of funds, assuming Granton Manor was sold off. Castiel included his own letter to his brother, congratulating him on the births and telling him they would wait until the two got home before sorting out presents for the new arrivals.

++++

‘Dear Friend,

Thank you for your swift reply to my last letter. I am afraid I am still determinedly single, as the only omega ever to capture my heart was taken by someone better, even though I am happy for him. It would be wonderful to see you again, and I shall be in the town of Buxton between April the twenty-third and twenty-sixth, staying at the Falcon Inn. I shall be arriving in that town around two of the clock in the afternoon of the twenty-third, so if you would like to drop by on that day, I would be delighted to see you as soon as possible. I do have some ideas as to the problems you seem to be having with your heats at this time, and have one or two possible new courses of treatment that may be what you need.

Yours most sincerely

Bartholomew’

Castiel smiled at the letter, and decided he would go and visit his friend after all. But he would tell his husband that it was just a shopping trip, and thus avoid any jealous scenes.

++++

A few days later, a Hertfordshire doctor was looking at two letters on his desk. One was from an old friend who had moved away, agreeing to meet him as he had requested. The other was from his financial advisor, telling him that his investments in the West Indies had been all but wiped out by a local uprising.

He opened a draw and drew out a small bottle of red pills. His eyes narrowed cruelly.
“Throw me over for some lord, would you, Mr Castiel Bennet?” he muttered quietly. “Well, I know all about your medical history, and the risks of you having another bastard child by that snotty alpha. We'll see who laughs last....”
April 1822

The fourth month of the year after King George IV’s coronation would be one of the most important times in the life of Dean Winchester, aged forty-nine. In that month, he would do something so stupid that it would ruin his relationship with the man he loved, and would tear him apart from all those close to him. As Mrs. Moseley had so sagely predicted, he would indeed commit a great wrong against the man he truly loved.

The first few weeks of April bore no sign of the awful deed to come. The weather finally seemed to remember that it was supposed to be spring, and a few flowers bloomed tentatively around Pemberley’s gardens, as if they weren’t sure it was really worth the effort. On the seventh, a letter arrived from Anna and Peter, who were visiting friends in Warwickshire, saying that she had given birth one month early to a healthy beta, whom they were calling Dane after his uncle. She had been ill after the birth, but was now well again, thanks to her husband’s efforts. Dean definitely did not get emotional at his first great-nephew.

Well, not much. And Castiel covered for him as always, not letting anyone see him until he had composed himself.

+++ +++

Ryazan’s eighteenth birthday party was held on his actual birthday, the twenty-second, that year. The only disappointment was that Brenton could not be there, as he had to attend to one of his parishioners whose mother had just died. But he did send the young man as he now was a small golden cross, with a note inside reiterating his promise to speak to his father in two days’ time.

+++ +++

It was April the twenty-third, Diniel’s birthday, but they had celebrated it and given him his presents the day before, as he would be spending the day visiting Derby with his husband. Castiel and Dean were sat at the breakfast table.

“I have to go into Manchester to sign some papers”, Dean said. “Would you like me to take you shopping there instead of Buxton? There are some much better shops. Or I could take you to Buxton, and pick you up on my way home?”

Castiel hesitated.

“I don’t know how long I’ll be, and that wouldn’t be fair on you”, he hedged. “I’ll just go there on my own, if that is all right?”

“Are you sure you’ll be safe?” Dean asked anxiously.
Castiel shot him a warning glance.

“I can’t be scared of going out just in case I bump into another madman like Mr. Adler”, he said firmly. “You have to have more faith in me, beloved.”

“It’s faith in others I have trouble with!” Dean said darkly.

Castiel got up and went over to his mate, fondling his sandy hair before gently kissing him on the head.

“I will be fine”, he said. “I will take Wolfie with me, if it makes you feel any easier.”

“It would”, Dean smiled.

Neither of them could know it, but it was the last occasion they would be together like this for a very long time.

+++

Dean was about to leave when he remembered Castiel's book. His mate had been fascinated by the novel that the alpha had purchased for him, and Dean knew the sequel was due out around this time, so he went to the omega's room to find it, and note down the title. He found the book easily enough, but whilst looking for a piece of paper to write the title down, he found a folded letter on his mate's desk. He read it, and frowned.

Castiel hadn't told him about this meeting. And he remembered the name of the beta who had proposed to Castiel on the same day back in 1801 that he himself had. Why were they meeting? And why hadn't the omega told him about it? Unfortunately his mate had already left, so he couldn't ask him about it.

Feeling worried, he headed downstairs to his carriage.

++++

Castiel arrived at the Falcon, and knew immediately from the receptionist’s worried face that there was a problem.

“He isn’t here?” Castiel asked, feeling a little annoyed.

“Well, he is and he isn’t sir, if you see what I mean”, she said.

Castiel didn’t. He waited for further elucidation.

“He was here, sir”, the woman explained. “But two of our chambermaids were taken ill with a stomach bug or something this morning, and he offered to treat them. He went with them to the hospital, just to make sure. He left you a message, to say he would be back here by three-thirty at the absolute latest, and would see you then.”

“Oh. I see. Thank you for letting me know.”

It looked like he was doing more shopping than he had planned. Still, it would improve his cover story.

++++

Dean’s day, after the unpleasant surprise earlier, was going better than expected. The signing of the
legal papers had been very quick – Mr. Carstairs had retired, but his son seemed much more efficient – and he finished an hour earlier than he had planned. He was about to set off for Pemberley when he remembered the small glassware shop Castiel had liked in town the last time they had visited, and decided to go there to purchase him something as a gift. He was still thinking about that letter, but pushed it to the back of his mind for now.

+~+~+

Dean was sat trying to read a book when the carriage slowed to an unexpected halt. A few moments later, his driver stood at the door.

“Beg pardon, my lord, but the road is blocked. Some fool has managed to overturn a cart right across it.”

Dean groaned inwardly.

“Is there no way around it?” he asked.

“There is the road through Marple and Buxton, sir. That's only a few miles longer, but it's a poor road.”

Dean brightened. Perhaps he might run into his mate and his mysterious ‘friend’.

“Great!” he said. “Maybe I can find Cas and take him home with me. Drive on, please.”

The driver bowed, and a few moments later the carriage turned left and headed off in a new direction.

+~+~+

Doctor Browne finally arrived at the hotel shortly before four o’clock, apologizing profusely for his lateness. He had aged well was Castiel’s first thought, although he strongly suspected that whatever was perched uneasily on the top of his head was a wig.

“I am so sorry, Castiel!” he panted. “It took forever to get the hospital to treat ‘servants’, and the only way I could persuade them to do it was to help out on a couple of other cases. I did ask them to send you a note, but I suspect they didn’t.”

“You suspect right”, Castiel smiled. “But you’re here now.”

They talked about past and present acquaintances, before Castiel explained his problem.

“The pills I am on keep stopping working”, he said. “This is the third lot, and my nephew – who’s a doctor as well – tells me there’s not that many left that would suit someone of my age.”

“Your age is certainly part of it”, his friend said. “But it’s also your body. You told me in your letter that you and your husband had three children. Your body wants more, and now it’s reached a certain age, it’s worrying it may not get them.”

“But can it be controlled?” Castiel asked anxiously. “I can’t spend the next ten years worrying in case a heat is going to break through at the wrong time.”

“You are feeling the start of one now, aren’t you?” the doctor asked.

“Yes. And the pills I am on are not controlling it as well as the last time.”
“You’ll be safe once you’re home, my friend”, the doctor said reassuringly. When Castiel still looked nervous, he reached into his bag and took out a small bottle of red pills. “These are anti-heat boosters. You can take them quite safely alongside your current treatment; in fact, the way you’re starting to smell, I strongly advise taking one now.”

He handed the bottle to the omega, who undid it and popped a pill into his mouth. The doctor smiled, and took him by the hand.

“Everything’s going to be fine, Castiel”, he smiled. “I'll give you a quick examination in my room if you like.”

Castiel stared into the doctor’s green eyes – they reminded him in a way of his husband, though nothing like as beautiful – and smiled.

“Thank you”, he said.

That was the exact moment that said husband, looking through the window of the inn, caught sight of him.

+++

Dean’s face went white. His mate holding hands with another man? Cas was betraying him?

Suddenly his world was falling apart. He backed away from the window, almost falling into the road, before scrambling to the safety of his coach.

He could not believe it. Castiel, who had always been faithful to him, who he loved more than life itself – Castiel had lied to him. He was seeing another alpha, and from the brief glimpse Dean had had of him, an attractive one to boot. What was he to do? He couldn’t go on at Pemberley without his mate. He just couldn’t.

Then the two men got up and walked off in the direction of the rooms. Dean's heart sank.

“Back to Pemberley, sir?”

He realized the carriage had pulled up alongside, and the coachman was staring at him, waiting for a response.

“Give me a minute, Woods.”

He climbed slowly into his carriage and tried to think through what he had just seen.

+++

Castiel woke up slowly, wondering why he felt so strange and dizzy. This wasn’t his bed, and the man in it….

“Bartholomew!”

The doctor grinned at him from across the bed, and Castiel suddenly knew what he had done. He felt sick. But before he could speak, the door to the room burst open, and a familiar figure loomed in it….
April 1822

“Mr Castiel, sir!”

Castiel stared. He was torn between shock at hearing the huge omega’s voice for the first time, and shock at his sudden appearance.

“Wolfie…” he began.

“What the hell did he do to you?”

Wolfgang’s face had darkened. Castiel slipped out of bed and away from his attacker, moving towards the other omega. This proved to be a mistake, when his friend sniffed him. His look somehow got even angrier.

“He raped you!”

“Merely claimed what should have been mine in the first place”, Mr Browne drawled lazily, getting off the bed and pulling on a dressing-gown. “I’m only sorry I’ve not got anything contagious, though now you’re bearing my brat, you’re as good as dead anyway!”

“Mr. Castiel, sir, would you mind waiting downstairs?”

It wasn’t what he said, but the way he said it. Castiel suddenly knew exactly what he had in mind.

“Wolfie! No!”

“Downstairs, sir, if you please.”

Castiel stared at him for a moment, then moved towards the door.

“I don’t think so, 'friend'!”

He turned round to see that Mr. Browne was pointing a gun straight at Wolfgang.

“One bullet for the bodyguard, and I’m pretty sure I can silence you myself!” he sneered. “And since I checked in under an assumed name….

There was a faint swishing sound, and suddenly Wolfgang was standing right next to Mr. Browne, carefully removing the gun from his hand as he slumped to the ground, a stunned look on his paling face. The omega then quietly placed the gun on the table and extracted his knife from the man’s jugular.

“He’s dead. Or as good as. We need to be out of here now, sir.”
Castiel stared at him in shock, then, to his subsequent embarrassment, fainted.

++++

He came round to find himself being knocked around. For a moment he thought he was under attack, but then he realized he was in his carriage. Wolfgang was sitting opposite, looking at him.

“I hope you’ll pardon the liberty, sir”, he said apologetically, “but in the circumstances, I thought it better if I was here when you came to. I told the coachman that you had fainted.”

Castiel blinked dazedly.

“Oh, right”, he said, smiling reassuringly. “Er, you can talk?”

“Yes, sir. In the circumstances I thought it better to speak out.”

Oh yes. The circumstances. Castiel wondered exactly how he was going to phrase his next question.

“Doctor Browne’s remains have been dealt with, sir”, the huge omega said, almost as if they were discussing the weather. “Everything is fine.”

“Oh. Good. Wonderful. Er, thank you, Wolfie.”

“I am glad to be of service, sir. Would you prefer me to take a place outside now, if you wish for some time alone?”

“No, no”, Castiel said hurriedly. “Just stay there.”

“As you wish, sir.”

++++

It was an hour after sunset by the time they finally drew up in front of Pemberley. Castiel heaved a sigh of relief to be home. They had swung by Wolfgang and Bruno’s cottage to drop the huge omega off, though not before Castiel had thanked him again for everything he had done that day. He was just wondering exactly how he was going to explain his almost certain pregnancy to his husband.

He met Scaden in the hall.

“Have you seen Father yet?” his son asked, looking worried.

“I’ve only just got in”, Castiel replied. “Is something wrong?”

“He came back a couple of hours ago and locked himself in his study, telling Mrs. Campbell he wasn’t to be disturbed”, Scaden said. “That’s not like him.”

“I’ll go and see him”, Castiel said.

“I’m coming with you”, Scaden said. When his papa looked at him in surprise, he added, “I’ve got a bad feeling about this, for some reason.”

Castiel looked at him strangely, but knocked at his husband’s study door. When there was no reply, he opened it and stepped slowly in, his son following close behind.

“Dean?” Castiel said.
His husband was standing at the fireplace, clearly drunk. He gazed strangely at the omega, and for some reason Castiel began to feel uneasy.

“You’ve been drinking?”

Dean finished his glass and laughed hollowly.

“I have. You’ve been whoring!”

Castiel stared at him in astonishment.

“What?”

Dean staggered over to him, having to clutch the chair at one point to keep himself from falling. He squinted at Castiel like he didn’t know who he was.

Then he hit him, slapping the omega across the face so he stumbled back into his stunned son.

“Get out, whore!” Dean yelled. “What, a Winchester alpha no longer good enough for you? Get out and stay out, and as soon as I can do it, I’ll get a divorce from you, you traitorous….”

Dean slumped to the floor, as Scaden’s fist connected squarely with his jaw. There was a terrible silence in the room.

“Papa, I’m taking you somewhere safer!” Scaden said firmly. “Let’s go.”

“But Dean….”

“I’ll tell Mrs. Campbell to come and look at him. Let's go!”

Scaden half-dragged, half-carried his stunned papa out of the room and to the stables, where he quickly procured them a horse. Telling one of the stable lads to inform Mrs. Campbell as to the master’s state, he rode off, holding a still trembling omega in his arms, wondering what on earth had happened to cause all this.

+~+~+

Scaden returned to the house as soon as he had got his papa safely installed at Lynton, although the explanations to Sam and Gabriel took some time, and had been very painful. His mate was with him.

“I never thought I’d be afraid to come into my own house”, Scaden muttered.

Samandriel laid a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

“Even if he's up, there's two of us and one of him”, he said.

Scaden took his mate's hand, and together they slipped into the hall, to find Mrs Campbell waiting for them.

“I had two of the footmen put the master to bed”, she told them. “I don't normally approve of such things, but I slipped a sleeping draught into his drink. He won't be up till the morning.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Campbell”, Scaden said, relieved. “What about Dino and Ry?”

“Mr Diniel is upstairs reading, and since you said you were coming back, I thought it best not to disturb him with... recent developments”, she said. “Mr. Ryazan was feeling unwell and went to bed
early. I looked in on him, and he was dead to the world.”

“Let the boy sleep”, Samandriel muttered. “He’ll face cold reality soon enough. That and the wreckage of his own hopes.”

Scaden looked at him.

“Oh my god, I had completely forgotten!” he burst out. “The Reverend Green is coming over tomorrow!”

“You go and talk to Dino and explain things to him, and he can tell Ry tomorrow”, Samandriel told him. “I'll ride over to the vicarage and stop him from coming. Let's not make a bad situation any worse.”

“Or a worse one any the more disastrous!” Scaden muttered.

They kissed and parted.

+~+~+

Ryazan Winchester woke early the following morning, and was reading on his bed when Diniel hurried into his room, looking very upset.

“Dino?” he yawned, pulling himself upright. “What on earth are you doing here?”

Diniel stared at him.

“Ry, something terrible has happened. Father has thrown papa out of the house….”

“What?” Ryazan exclaimed.

“That’s not the worst of it. Get dressed and join me downstairs; we're going over to Lynton. Papa’s staying there.

“I have to stop Bren....”

“Alfie did that last night. We didn't disturb you because you weren't well, and we thought you needed some sleep.”

“You don't look like you got any.”

“I didn't, much.”

“But what's happened?”

“Father has struck papa. And told him he wants a divorce. Scay came back and told me the details late last night. Quick, before dad gets up.”

Ryazan hurried to do as he was told.
Betrayal

Chapter Summary

Dean thinks that a betrayal has ruined his life. He is right - but not in the way he believes.

April 1822

In his three wild years between his father’s death and inheriting the guardianship of Samuel Bingley and his sisters, Dean had woken up many mornings ‘three sheets to the wind’, as his Uncle Bobby so often described it. But he had avoided overdoing the grape ever since, even during that year when he had (twice) proposed to Castiel. So when he woke up on the morning of Wednesday April the twenty-fourth, eighteen hundred and twenty-two in the Year of Our Lord, the blinding pain in his head was the second-most important thing on his mind.

The first was that the bed was empty. And in what was without doubt the absolute worst moment of his entire life, Dean Alexander Winchester instantly knew exactly why that was. He curled himself up into a ball and screwed his eyes shut.

His mate had betrayed him.

He lay there feeling sorry for himself for some considerable time, then finally rang for service. There was a notable delay – much longer than usual – before the housekeeper Mrs. Campbell came through the door. And stopped. With the door open.

Quick escape, Dean thought, wondering what was going on. The housekeeper looked as if she really didn't want to be here. Come to that, Dean belatedly realized, she shouldn’t be here.

“Are none of the maids available?” he inquired, wincing as his own voice hurt his head.

“They are all a little… distracted this morning, sir”, she said.

Dean thought she herself sounded definitely upset, which was decidedly unusual. The woman had the emotional resilience of a mountain.

“Distracted at what?” he asked, confused.

She gave him a look which said, more clearly than any words, that he really ought to know why, but when he continued to stare back at her in confusion, she sighed.

“About Mr. Castiel being attacked, sir.”

And with those six words, Dean’s bad day suddenly got a whole lot worse.

“Attacked?” he said blankly.

“You cannot be that stupid!” her next look almost shouted, but instead she inquired a little archly if he would require breakfast to be brought to him.
“Though I cannot vouch for its quality, sir”, she said stiffly. “Mrs. Moseley has locked herself in her room, and is refusing to come out.”

Yes, the day was getting even worse.

“Just a cup of strong coffee, please Mrs. Campbell”, he said heavily.

She left quickly, as if she was glad to be gone. Dean sank back into his pillows with a sigh, sniffing the still strong omega scent on them. Castiel’s scent.

He had to get his mate back, even if the omega had betrayed him. And if he found the man who had attacked his mate, then whatever Castiel had done, that man would be dead!

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Dressing was difficult because his valet seemed reluctant to be anywhere near him, which made getting the slowly sobering alpha into his clothes a major challenge. Finally however Dean was ready, and able to head downstairs. And increasingly the gravity of what he had done was starting to hit home.

The servants were terrified of him. Usually he passed them in the corridor with a nod and a smile, but the few around today heard him coming and fled. Mrs. Campbell was waiting for him downstairs with his coat ready, a frown on her weathered features. It figured, Dean thought bitterly. Even though she had only been in the post for four months, she too sided with his mate. Yes, he had thrown Castiel out, but he'd had a reason, and alphas and betas did much worse to their omegas every day. This was 1822, after all, and Castiel was lucky he wasn't kept barefoot and collared, like some omegas still were. Dean would be forgiven in time.

He guessed Castiel would most likely go to his brother's house, so rode towards Lynton. When he reached his gatehouse, he found Garth and Diniel talking with Doctor St. John in the garden. All three of them looked up as Dean approached, and none of them looked friendly.

“Father”, Diniel said heavily.

None of them moved forward to greet him.

“Tell me about the attack”, Dean said quietly.

“You bastard!” his son growled, much to Dean's surprise. His mate moved behind him, draping his arms protectively over the omega’s shoulders.

“Don’t talk to your father like that!” Dean snapped back.

“Papa was raped, and you threw him out!”

Dean baulked in shock.

“What?”

“He went to meet a friend, and didn’t tell you because you always get so jealous. That ‘friend’ drugged him and raped him. He’s pregnant, father, and it may kill him. And then you went and threw him out!”

Dean was stunned.

“I thought he was betraying me!” he gasped.
“And that excuses ditching twenty years of loyal service how?” his son demanded.

“I was angry!” Dean said defensively.

“You had better go and apologize to him”, Garth said coldly. “And I hope for his own safety that he decides not to come back to you for a long time.”

Dean stared at the three men, then pulled on his reins and moved away. His life was ruined, and it really was totally his own fault.

+++

Jameson, one of Lynton's footmen, opened the door to him. The look he gave the visitor clearly rated Dean somewhere below something one of the dogs might have done in the garden.

“I shall attempt to ascertain whether the master is in..... sir”, he said coldly. He looked as if he would have far preferred to slam the door in Dean's face, but instead bade him into the waiting-room and left. He was gone some time before returning, a dark look on his face.

“The master has agreed to see you.... sir.”

He led him into the sitting room, then left. Dean found himself with Sam and Gabriel both standing and glaring at him, a physical barrier behind which Doctor Gallagher was sitting with Cas. He instinctively took a step towards his mate.

“Don't you dare!” Gabriel growled. “Cas is here now, and we're going to protect him!”

“Look, I know I did a bad thing, but I seriously thought he was seeing someone else”, Dean said defensively. “How was I to know it was an old friend?”

The looks on Sam's and Gabriel's faces went from anger to contempt.

“Nearly twenty years of marriage, and that's all the faith you have in him?” Sam said scornfully. “Hell, for what you did, you should be locked up!”

“He's my mate! I want him back!”

“Always what you want, Dean, isn't it?” Sam snapped. “Well, we're taking care of him now. He'll come back to you only when he wants to, and not before.”

Dean hesitated.

“Legally, I have the right of ownership”, he said. “And I claim it.”

It was the brutal truth. Omegas might have a lot more respect than in previous years, but legally they were still technically the property of the alpha or beta who married them, and their owners could do more or less anything they liked to them, short of murder. Castiel sighed, and got up and went over to stand before Dean.

“I am sorry for inconveniencing you, Sam”, he said quietly. “I must return to my ‘owner’.”

Dean sighed in relief.

“Cas...” he said, reaching out a hand to the omega's face.

Castiel looked up and saw the hand reaching for him and recoiled sharply, before turning away. But
before he did so, Dean saw something he would never forget – a terrible and overwhelming fear in a pair of blue eyes which had only ever looked at him with love. He stepped back in shock.

“This is where I step in”, Doctor Gallagher said firmly, coming across to stand between Dean and his mate. “I do not know if you keep up with legal matters, sir, but five years ago parliament passed an exception to the laws on omega ownership. If a doctor fears that an omega may be in danger of his life and limb, then he has the power to entrust ownership of said omega into the hands of someone more suitable on a temporary basis, until such time as that threat has passed. I am exercising that power right this minute. I hereby entrust ownership of Castiel to his brother's mate Samuel Bingley, and must request that you leave this room at once.”

Dean was still reeling from the fear in his mate's eyes. He nodded almost dumbly.

“Fine”, he said quietly. “Take all the time you need. I... shall be at home.” he looked at the omega, who Gabriel was helping back to his chair. “I... goodbye, Cas.”

Somehow he made it back to his horse, and set off back to what he knew would be a cold, empty house.

+++

Brenton stared at the young man incredulously.

“You are sure about this?” he asked. “Alfie told me last night, but I can still hardly believe it!”

“Absolutely!” Ryazan said firmly. “My father has thrown my papa out – I know he didn’t know about the rape, but that hardly excuses it. And papa is now almost certainly pregnant, a pregnancy which may well kill him. We can’t approach either of them now.”

“Of course not.” The vicar hesitated before adding, “are you safe there, Ry?”

“Yes. I think Father will be too shocked by what he has done for now. But the next few weeks are going to be horrible!”

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Diniel Winchester had finished preparing a quick cold dinner, and was just about to leave his cottage for Lynton. Doctor St. John had already gone there before starting his rounds, whilst Garth was off on his estate manger duties. He was pulling his coat on when someone knocked at the door. He was half-afraid it was his father, but a quick check out of the window told him otherwise, and he opened the door to find Lord Adam Fitzwilliam standing there.

“Diniel”, he said, looking worried. “Have you seen your father? I went up to the house, but they wouldn't tell me where he had gone.”

Diniel hesitated.

“What's happened?” Adam asked. “I've never seen people acting so strange. And I need to talk to Dean over this arranged marriage.”

“What marriage?” the omega asked.

“My brother the earl wants me to marry some frightful society girl”, Adam groaned. “Dean wrote and told me; Mike and I have only just got back. Do you know where he is?”
Diniel stepped back.

“You had better come in”, he said quietly.

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Adam stared at him in horror.

“I can't believe it!” he said at last.

“Papa fled to Uncle Gabriel's house. I expect father followed him there. I only hope he doesn't try to force him to come home.”

“So that means Cas is....”

“Over ninety-nine percent of all heat couplings result in pregnancy”, the omega said flatly.

Adam paused.

“What will he do?”

“Papa has strong views on the sanctity of life”, Diniel said slowly. “He will keep the child, and carry it to full term. Even if it kills him.”

“And we all know that's a possibility.”

“Yes.”

Adam reached out and took the omega's hand.

“I am so sorry”, he said quietly. “I had better return and tell Michael. He will want to go and see his brother.”

“Of course”, Diniel said.

He was about to offer to see his guest out when he heard the unmistakable sound of hooves on the gravel outside. Moving to the window, he saw his father ride slowly by, his head hanging down. He watched him go, and Adam joined him at the window.

“There goes a man who was ruined his own life”, the alpha said quietly. “May God allow him to find a way to undo the terrible hurt he has done.”

“Amen to that”, Diniel whispered.
May 1822

“Papa!”

Scaden knelt before his papa, taking the small hand in his much larger one. Diniel and Ryazan stood back, looking nervous. Wrapped as he was in several rugs, Castiel was almost invisible, only his face poking out at the top, his nose red with his recent cold. Sam and Gabriel were standing across the room, looking on anxiously.

“Does your father know you have come to see me?” Castiel asked.

Scaden looked up at him.

“No”, he said softly. “Papa….”

“We want you to come home!” Diniel blurted out.

His brothers both turned and glared at him. Gabriel detached himself from Sam and moved swiftly to place an arm around his brother’s well-wrapped form.

“Your papa has been ill, and now you want him to go back to that…. monster?” Gabriel said incredulously. “Someone who would not only throw him out over a mistake, but then try to claim him back like a piece of furniture? We won’t allow it!”

“Please tell me you boys have a reason for this cruelty”, Sam said in his deep voice.

The three Winchester sons exchanged looks.

“It’s the estate”, Scaden said at last. “Father hasn’t left the house since…. well, since. There is a whole list of things he should be doing, but he has lost all interest. He barely leaves his room, and won’t talk to any of us. I tried asking him about some things yesterday, and he almost bit my head off!”

“So your father throws a sulk, and you expect Cassie to come crawling back?” Gabriel scoffed.

“We would never ask you to share a room with him”, Diniel said firmly. “Garth and I have moved back into the house, and if you agreed, we would set you up in your own room, and one of us would be on call at all times….“

“I want a divorce.”

There was a terrible silence.

“Please, papa!” Ryazan said, sinking to his knees by Castiel’s chair. “I beg of you, please don’t.”

“He threw me out over one mistake”, Castiel said quietly. “I know I should have trusted him, but he
didn’t even want to let me explain. I shall have this child, who will of course be your father’s property just as I am, and if by some miracle I survive, I shall seek a separation. Pray God he will let me go.”

“Papa, you will have our full support if you do that”, Diniel said, though his voice was shaking. “But for the sake of the estate, if not for our father – please come home.”

Castiel looked at him sadly.

“I no longer have a home, Dino. But for the sake of the estate, and the people I love who work on it – once I am well again, I shall return to Pemberley.”

Dean Winchester had always been openly proud that he had produced three such fine, strapping young men to bear his name. But as his three sons stood before him in his study, he could not help feel just a little afraid. The anger radiating from them was palpable.

“We have persuaded papa to come home in three days' time”, Scaden said, his voice cold with disapproval.

Dean’s heart leapt. Surely that meant….

His eldest son’s next words took that hope away from him and stamped on it. Hard.

“He will have his own room whilst he is here, and you will not on any account enter it”, Sacden said firmly. “You will not speak to him unless he speaks to you first. One of us will be with him or near him at all times, and anything you wish to communicate to him will be done through one of us.”

“Papa will be here for the rest of his pregnancy”, Diniel said. “He will have all his meals in his room. He will take exercise as and when he needs it, and if he wishes to use a room, we shall check first to make sure you are not already using it. If you enter a room where he is, you will leave at once, and not return until you have been told he has gone. We do not wish to subject him to any more of your presence than is absolutely necessary.”

Dean flinched at his tone. But the worst was still to come.

“He wants a divorce”, Ryazan said bluntly.

“No!” Dean gasped. Hell, that was what he had wanted only a short time ago, but now he knew the truth, he could never lose Cas.

“The child will be legally yours, Father”, his youngest son said coldly. “Be assured, every single one of us will be supporting our beloved papa in the coming months, until he is finally free of you. We shall be watching you very closely, and if you make life the slightest bit difficult for him, we shall take him back to Lynton and keep him there. We will not let you hurt him like that again.”

“You can’t treat me like this!”

Scaden took a step closer to him, and Dean was actually afraid. His eldest son looked furious.

“If you hurt him in any way between now and the birth, I promise you this, Father”, he growled, and Dean could feel his hot breath in his face. “All three of us will publicly disown you, and never speak to you again. Now I suggest you get round to running the estate, before there is nothing left of it. And if he dies as a result of this pregnancy and the way you have treated him – may the Lord have
mercy on you, because we three surely shall not!"

The three young men swept from the room, leaving their father looking after them in amazement.

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Dean had thought living in a Pemberley without his love was the worst thing that could happen to him. During the fifth month of 1822, he found out it wasn’t. Living in a Pemberley where Castiel actually was, but kept away from him – that was ten times worse.

His sons hated him, the servants kept looking at him as if he was going to strike them or worse, and none of his friends called. He threw himself into the running of the estate, because he had to have something to fill the long waking hours, but he found sleeping in the cold, large bed almost impossible. Castiel took all his meals in his room as had been promised (or threatened), and Dean noticed the quality of his own meals had dropped considerably; presumably Mrs. Moseley was devoting all her time to his mate. The fact there was no pie, and he was told there was no fruit available the one time he tentatively requested some, also served to drive the point home.

Worse still was what had been done in their – now his – bedroom. Castiel had brought a single set of three coloured vases from Longbourn after his marriage, and they had always been displayed by the window, where they caught the morning light. Not only were they – the one thing that was indisputably Castiel’s - now removed, but everything Dean had bought his mate during their marriage, including all his clothes, had been left behind. Even the clothes Castiel had fled in had been washed and returned, his sons having bought him new ones to replace those lent to him by Gabriel. It was as if their marriage had already ceased to exist.

After just a few weeks, Dean was living a zombie-like existence, carrying out the motions of running the estate, but doing little else. His sons attended meals, but didn’t talk to him, and Dean spent most of his time looking at one conspicuously empty chair at the end of the table. Any justification for what he had done had been abandoned long ago; he just wanted to put things right. But he couldn’t see how.

Doctor St. John called round at the end of the month, and took some tests to check whether or not Castiel was indeed pregnant. Normally the doctor would have called in to see the master of the house first, if only through courtesy. The fact he went straight to the omega’s room only served to remind Dean how bad things now were. He later found a note from Diniel, left at his place at the dinner table, informing him that as the mate of the omega involved, he would be notified of the test results as soon as possible. It was cold and unfeeling, rather like the house right now.

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The schedule drawn up by the brothers to protect their papa, plus their own assorted estate duties, meant they had little time for socializing. Garth and Samandriel insisted on taking on their share of the watches, but Ryazan still felt it hard that he was seeing so little of the man who had come so close to being his mate. Well, if his Father had said yes. Those hopes lay in ruins, at least for the foreseeable future.

Switching some duties with his brothers meant he was able to get over to Kympton one morning, and to his relief he found Brenton at home.

“Though I have to do my rounds this afternoon”, the omega said, relaxing on the sofa whilst Ryazan lay next to him, his head on the omega’s lap. “Is your papa any better?”

“Not really”, Ryazan said sadly. “I think he’s still stunned by the whole thing. What with this Sword
of Damocles hanging over him, and father being so miserable, Pemberley is awful right now. If it weren’t for papa, I’d leave.”

“You’re welcome to come here any time you like, Ry”, the omega said, fondling the beta’s hair.

“You know people will talk if I do that too often”, Ryazan said, “much as I want to. Somehow we all have to limp through to the birth, and pray papa survives. I do not know what father would do if he didn’t.”

“Perhaps he should have thought about that…”, the vicar said instinctively, before blushing. “I’m sorry, that was uncalled for.”

“You’re right, he should have”, Ryazan said flatly. “But that’s all water under the bridge, now. We must make the best of what we have.”

“And pray for a safe deliverance”, the vicar said wryly.

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Castiel didn’t need a doctor’s tests to know he was bearing a new life inside of him, nor that bringing that life into the world might very well end his own. He knew his sons were doing their best for him, and that they hated the idea of their parents splitting up. Their complete and unstinting support was one of the few things that had kept him going; he couldn’t even draw any more, as his inspiration seemed to have vanished.

One thing which did raise his spirits was a visit from his aunt and uncle at the end of the month (his mother had written asking to come, but he had quickly written back pleading an illness; he could not really face her right now, let alone Balthazar). Ellen and Bobby, on the other hand, were always welcome, Castiel having written to them about his recent troubles.

“No Asher this time?” Castiel asked.

“He’s in London with Kevin, at the launch of that new steamship contraption”, Bobby said gruffly. “Those idiots think a great big wheel and a fire is a better way to power a ship than good old-fashioned sail!”

“Castiel”, his aunt said, sipping her tea, “you do remember that we’re not that far away. If you need to get away from here at any time…..”

“Thank you, aunt, but I think it is better I remain here, for the baby’s sake”, Castiel said, suddenly feeling very tired. “I do not know why I have so little energy; it’s not as if I do anything anymore.”

His aunt and uncle exchanged a look.

“Is it confirmed yet?” she asked quietly.

“No. But I feel it is. And we all know it’s almost a certainty, anyway.”

“The bastard!” Bobby snarled.

“Robert Singer!” his wife exclaimed.

“Well, he is!” the old man snarled. “Treating our boy like that!”

“I am forty-four years old, uncle”, Castiel corrected, smiling slightly. “It’s a long time since I was a ‘boy’.”
“You will always be our third child, Castiel, however old you are”, his aunt said quickly. “And we will support you, whatever you decide to do. We came here today because we wanted to make sure you knew that.”

“Thank you, aunt. I couldn’t do this if it wasn’t for my sons, and for family like you. You are all wonderful.”

“You produced three fine boys there”, Bobby said firmly. “And you’ll produce a fourth before long. You wait and see.”

“I hope so”, Castiel sighed.

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The system his sons had put in place continued to work well, and Dean saw so little of his mate that he might almost as well have stayed at Lynton. He managed to avoid meeting him, but one day he heard a familiar voice outside the open window when he was in the front room. He couldn’t help but overhear, particularly as he just happened to move over to stand behind the curtain.

“Bruno? What’s wrong?”

It was his mate's voice. The two brothers seemed to be having a minor tug-of-war at the bottom of the steps. They looked up at Castiel, and both of them blushed.

“I’ve been trying to persuade my brother to use your library, but he won’t go into the house”, Bruno growled.

“Why not?” Castiel asked, clearly puzzled.

“Big houses scare me, sir”, Wolfgang rumbled.

Castiel came into view as he descended the stairs and stood before the brothers. He knelt down before Wolfgang.

“It’s perfectly safe, Wolfie”, he said gently. “If you would rather, you can take as many books as you want back to your house and read them there. Would that be better for you?”

The younger Smith nodded almost imperceptibly. Castiel reached out a hand to him.

“You can trust me, Wolfie”, he said gently. “Let’s go in, and I’ll see if Mrs. Moseley can’t be persuaded to rustle up some muffins whilst you’re here. Come on.”

Wolfgang looked down at him – a long way down - and nodded again, taking Castiel’s small hand in his much larger one. The laird smiled at him, and led him gently up the stairs. To Dean, it reminded him of a giant ship being nudged into position by a tug-boat.

He must have moved from his place, because something made Bruno look up at his window. The huge omega stared for a moment, then a look of complete hatred filled his face, before it was quickly suppressed. He rushed up the stairs, almost knocking Castiel over in his haste.

“Bruno!”

“Sorry, my laird. I… er,… I wanted to spend some time in the library too.”

“I’m glad to see you're so keen!” Castiel smiled. “Let's go in.”
The three of them went in, and Dean could hardly miss how close Bruno stuck to his mate.

A tear ran down his cheeks. He so missed that smile.

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The news he had been dreading was passed onto him on the very last day of the month, in a short note left amongst his daily letters. It hurt him that Ryazan had seen him at the breakfast table that morning, but still chose to communicate in this way. The note was short and to the point:

‘This is to inform you that your mate is pregnant, the birth being due around the fourth week of January next year.’

Around his fiftieth birthday, then. And after that, one way or another, he and Cas – would be over.

For the first time for many a year, Dean Winchester went to his room and broke down in tears.
Chapter Summary

Dean makes a decision that surprises everyone. And unaware that his future is being settled over a hundred miles away, the Reverend Green meets a familiar figure in London.

June 1822

The only person Dean felt he might possibly talk to over the mess that constituted his now-life was the Reverend Green. The man was a friend of the family, and would therefore almost certainly share his sons’ dislike – hatred - of him for what he had done, but he was also a Church of England vicar, and a professional. If Dean approached him for help or advice, he would not be able to refuse.

Well, probably.

After several days of musing over whether or not to go for it, he finally plucked up the courage to ride out to Kympton. It was better than have the man be summoned to a place that didn’t feel like home any more. And it was actually a tolerable day to ride out; there was no wind, and skies were as blue as… as blue as….

The image of a pair of blue eyes regarding him with utter terror filled his mind, and the day suddenly didn’t seem so fine after all.

+++

He reached Kympton without incident, though when a mother hurried out and bustled her three children into her house as he passed, he felt more than a scintilla of shame. He had always been respected as a hard but fair lord, and now even the locals despised him. He had lost both his mate and his good name. Though he only cared about the former.

The vicarage lay in a slight dip, so Dean could see it sometime before he reached it. Just before the hedge blocked his view again, he saw the vicar emerge from the house. Thinking he might be about to set out on his travels, he reined in and watched him. Then his youngest son emerged from behind the vicar, who then turned, pulled the beta into his arms – and kissed him.

Perhaps seeing the vicar today wasn’t such a good idea after all....

+++ 

Dean hated himself for thinking it, but perhaps this was an opportunity to show his sons he wasn't the ogre they all thought he was. Whilst he didn't approve of the age difference, he knew from the way the two had held each other that it was love, and he had learnt the hard way not to interfere in his sons’ choices of mates. Then he suddenly remembered that Ryazan would probably have ridden over, and might well be going straight back to Pemberley afterwards. He spurred his horse into a canter, to stay ahead of him, and made good time back to the hall.
He strode quickly into the hall, and nearly ran into Castiel and Scaden, who were on their way out. His son immediately and pointedly moved in front of his papa.

“I’m not going to hurt him, son”, Dean said, backing up slightly.

“We all thought that once”, Scaden said crisply. “I am taking papa over to see the Singers at Lynton, and we will be spending the night there.”

“Thank you for letting me know”, Dean said quietly, moving to the side to let them pass. He didn’t miss either the way his son moved round to keep shielding his mate, or the look of mistrust in those oh-so-blue eyes which had once looked at him with nothing but love.

He hated himself.

+++ +++++

“I’m sorry about that”, Scaden said, as soon as they were on their way.

“I can’t always avoid him”, Castiel said. “It’s his house, after all.”

“What will you do when….. you know?”

“I hope to find somewhere in the area, if I can find a job here”, Castiel answered. “It won’t be easy, not for someone of my age and type.”

“Alfie says you’re welcome to stay with us”, Scaden said. "And I know the others feel the same.”

“You all have your own lives to lead”, Castiel pointed out. “It wouldn’t be fair.” He smiled at his son. “But the way you’ve all supported me these past months – that’s been one of the few things that have helped me get through this. Thank you, Scay.”

“We’re your sons. That’s what we do.”

“I was hoping your father might let me see my new child some time – if I am still around, of course…”

Scaden shuddered.

“Don’t say that, papa!”

“Scay, we have to face the fact that it’s more than a possibility. I have never been one to shy away from reality, and I won’t start now.”

His eldest son sniffed. “I hate him!” he said darkly.

Castiel pulled his horse to a stop.

“Scay, I want you to promise me something.”

“Of course, papa.”

“If the worst happens when the baby comes… promise me you will talk to your father afterwards.”
“Papa!” Scaden looked at him in horror.

“I raised three wonderful sons”, Castiel said, his eyes bright with tears, “and I don’t want my legacy to be that they destroyed the family I helped create. Promise me you’ll try to forgive your father, all of you. For my sake, if nothing else. Please, I beg of you!”

His son looked at him in amazement.

“You were always far too good for him”, he said at last. “I promise faithfully. We'll all do our best. But only for you, papa.”

His papa smiled at him.

“Thank you, Scay.”

+~+~+

“I don’t suppose either of you knows what a difference engine is?” Uncle Bobby inquired hopefully.

“I do”, Scaden admitted. When they all looked at him in surprise, he blushed. “I was reading an article about it in the paper the other day. It’s a machine that a certain Mr. Charles Babbage thinks he has the wherewithal to build.”

“So what is it?” his uncle asked.

“The article was confusing, but I think it might be a contrivance made of gears and cogs, so that the machine can do sums.”

“Small boys can do sums!” Mrs. Singer scoffed. “We don’t need a machine to do that!”

“Yes” Scaden said, “but they were talking about really hard sums. Like millions being multiplied by millions, or even bigger.”

“Why would anyone want to know that?” Mr. Singer asked.

“I think the usefulness, if there is any, is at the other end”, Scaden explained. “If it works – and he hasn’t even started building it yet – it would enable lots of medium-sized sums to be done very quickly and accurately, saving lots of time. It could be very useful for merchants and such.”

“Probably be as reliable as that infernal steam-powered ship, and break down at the first opportunity!” Mr. Singer scoffed. “On to more important things. How is our favourite nephew?”

“I am feeling a little better”, Castiel smiled. “I am not showing yet, though.”

“After only six weeks, I'm not surprised”, his aunt said. “I didn't show until four months with Jo, and she turned out fine.”

“What about Ash?” Castiel asked, curious.

“Oh, he showed after barely two months”, his aunt said. “But he still turned out... well, he....”
Her voice trailed off, and everyone laughed, even Castiel.

“I think we all agree Asher Singer is one of a kind”, Scaden said firmly. “I don't think the world could cope with two of him!”

+--+++

Dean was in his study when there was a knock at the door.

“Enter!” he called out.

Beddowes duly entered.

“You asked to be informed when Mr. Scaden and Mr. Castiel returned, sir”, he announced gravely. “They have just done so.”

“Thank you, Beddowes. Could you inform my son I would like a word with him if possible?”

“I will do so sir.”

“That is all. Thank you.”

Beddowes bowed and left. Dean wondered again how he could imbue such a simple action with strong disapproval.

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Scaden Winchester stood before his father, looking as if he wished he were almost anywhere else.

“What was it you wanted to see me about, father?” he asked politely.

“There is a matter I wish to discuss with my.... with Cas, concerning Ry. I need you to ask him if he would consent to a meeting with just the three of us, or with you as well if that would make him more comfortable. I would prefer to talk with him alone first, but I know that is not possible.”

“And you know damned well why!” Scaden snapped, scowling. “I shall communicate your request to the two of them, and one of us will let you know papa’s answer. Is there anything else?”

Yes, I'm your father and I demand you stop treating me like I am some kind of leper!

“No”, he said meekly. “Thank you.”

His son bowed, and left. Dean stared after him, feeling even more depressed.

+--+++

“Oh my God, he knows”

Castiel placed a hand on his youngest son's arm.

“Calm down, Ry”, he said gently. “He accepted his effective heir making a less than ideal match, from society’s point of view. He may well be fine with you and Bren.”
“But what if he isn’t?” the beta almost yelled. “If he can do what he did to you, he's capable of anything! I can't go on without Bren!”

“You love him”, Scaden said.

“Of course I do! I know he's a bit older, but he's it for me.”

“We must see your father, then”, Castiel said firmly.

“Are you sure you're up to it?” Ryazan asked anxiously. “You know we'll both be there to protect you.”

“Thank you for that. But it is his decision, and we have to accept it. Scay, you may go and ask him to come to my room.”

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The atmosphere in the room was frosty, and Dean could feel the hostility of the other four people the moment he entered. Castiel sat by the fireplace, a seat opposite and some distance away clearly denoted for him. All three of his sons stood with their arms folded between the two chairs, a physical barrier protecting their papa. The lack of trust hurt, not least because he knew he deserved it.

He went over and sat on his chair, not failing to notice how his mate flinched even at this distance. Best get it all over with quickly. He looked at his youngest son.

“Ry”, he said, “I wish to talk to you about your relationship with the Reverend Green.”

Ryazan blushed.

“I am eighteen years of age, papa, and a man. I love him, and he loves me.”

Dean looked hard at him, and sighed.

“You all grew up so fast”, he said sadly. “Very well. Subject to your papa's approval, I grant my sanction for the marriage.”

There was a stunned silence in the room.

“You... you.... approve?” Ryazan said at last.

“I cannot say I approve, given the difference in ages”, his father said. “But you clearly love this man, and you deserve the right to be happy. You may go and propose to him, if you so wish.”

“He is in London, on a course just now”, Ryazan said, still stunned. “He will be back at the start of August.”

“Then you should go over and see him then. Good luck.” He smiled at his mate, who was just visible between the bodies of their two eldest sons. “Thank you for allowing me this meeting, Cas. Goodbye.”

He got up and left, leaving four shocked men in the room behind him. After a while Diniel knelt down beside his father.
“I have some news of my own, actually”, he said softly. “I suppose I should have shared it with father, but I wanted to tell you first, papa.”

“What is it, son?”

Diniel hesitated.

“I’m pregnant too. The child is due next January.”

The same time as Castiel’s own birth, everyone thought but didn’t say. Instead they crowded round and congratulated the young omega.

+++

July 1822

The Reverend Brenton Green did not like surprises. And the events of the first few months of this tumultuous year had been far too full of them. He little suspected that for him, the biggest surprise had yet to come. Nor did he realize that a few dumb animals were to help bring it about.

It was the weekend before he was due to head back to Derbyshire when his landlady knocked and told him he had a visitor. Going downstairs, he was surprised to see a familiar face.

“Mr. Broadribb?”

It was indeed the city lawyer.

“Reverend Green”, the lawyer smiled. “We meet again.”

“You are not here in your professional capacity, I hope?”

“I am afraid I am. I have some rather surprising news for you....”
The Reverend Green finds his circumstances suddenly changed, whilst an earlier than expected birth catches everyone off guard.

July 1822
The lawyer seated himself comfortably before beginning.
“Have you heard about Martin's Act?” he asked.
Brenton looked at his visitor, as they sipped the indifferent tea provided by their landlady.
“Should I have done?” he asked.
“It's a new law that had just been passed”, the lawyer explains. “The first real attempt to crack down on cruelty to dumb animals. Yes, members of parliament and dumb animals; the newspapers have had a field day! An M.P. called Richard Martin was the driving force behind it, hence the name.”
“I'm sorry, Mr. Broadribb, but I really do not see...”
“Bear with me on this, reverend”, the lawyer smiled. “Believe me, it will be worth your while.”
The vicar looked at him, puzzled, but said no more.
“The Act faced its strongest opposition in the House of Lords”, the lawyer explained. “They tried to talk it out, but the government is very unpopular right now, and pushed it through to try to improve their standing with the general public. One of the bill's staunchest opponents was Lord Horace de Bourgh.”
“Oh.”
“Yes. And I am afraid the shock of seeing the bill make it onto the statute books proved too much for him. He suffered a heart attack, and died two days ago.”
“Oh dear. I am sure his family must be heartbroken.”
“That is unlikely. He did not have one.”
“Pardon?”
“No mate, no sons, nothing. And the relatively close cousin who might have inherited died last year. The entire Medlington estate, one of the largest in Kent, passes to an even more distant cousin.”
He looked meaningfully at the vicar, who belatedly realized exactly where this conversation was heading. He paled.
“No!”
“The third-largest estate in the county of Kent, with holdings in seven other counties, plus some prize land in the City of London itself.” The lawyer smiled. “Congratulations, Lord Brenton.”

“But I can't be a lord!” Brenton gasped.

“The estate is yours to do with as you wish. Though I do hope you choose to take it on. Until you have children of your own, the next heir is a most unpleasant third cousin once removed who lives in Ireland, and whose track record is frankly appalling. Medlington deserves someone good to help put it back on its feet.”

“Did Lord Horace damage the estate in some way?” Brenton asked.

“More neglect than willful damage, but it needs a thorough shake-up”, the lawyer said. He smiled reassuringly. “I can see this has been a bit of a shock to you. There are papers and things for you to sign, but send a note to my office when you are ready, and I can forward them to you here or in Derbyshire. Or Kent, for that matter. I have brought some details about the estate for you to look through.”

He placed some papers on the desk, and glanced at his watch.

“Heavens, I have an appointment in Shaftesbury Avenue in barely half an hour! I must go. Goodbye, reverend, and good luck!”

He shook the stunned man's hand before leaving. Brenton stared after him, still trying to grasp what had just happened.

He was a lord?

+++

August 1822

Dean frowned when he read the letter. This was really terrible news. And he would definitely have to tell his mate.

Who still didn't want to have anything to do with him.

+++

At least this time it was only Scaden in the room with the two of them, though the huge alpha's presence was bad enough. Dean badly wanted to throw himself at his mate's feet and beg forgiveness, but he somehow knew that the slightest movement towards Cas would have his son hurling him back.

“I asked for this meeting because I have received some bad news from London”, he said quietly. “From Vic.”

Castiel was surprised. Dean's friend had been to Pemberley only recently, visiting and checking up on his mate who was due to give birth next month. What could have happened in the brief time he had gone that was so urgent?

“It was the reason Vic had to return to the city”, Dean told him. “It is very bad news indeed. Nehemiah Collins is dead.”

Castiel gasped.
“How?” he demanded.

“How?” he demanded.

“Vic says he and his uncle Uriel tried to swindle some people out of their savings”, Dean explained. “They chose the wrong victims. There was a fight, and Nehemiah was stabbed, fatally. Uriel escaped, but Vic thinks it is only a matter of time before they catch up with him, too.”

“How?” he demanded.

“Poor Inias”, Castiel muttered. “He and Crowley must be devastated.”

“Would you like to take the carriage and go back to Hertfordshire for a few days, to help them sort things out?” Dean asked, cautiously. “I know the two of you are still close, and perhaps he would appreciate you being on hand.”

“Poor Inias”, Castiel muttered. “He and Crowley must be devastated.”

Castiel stared at him curiously.

“Yes, that would be very... nice”, he said. “Thank you for the offer.”

“If you pack what you need today, you can start out tomorrow”, Dean said. “Come back whenever you feel like; there’s no rush. You may of course offer my condolences on their loss.”

“If you pack what you need today, you can start out tomorrow”, Dean said. “Come back whenever you feel like; there’s no rush. You may of course offer my condolences on their loss.”

“Thank you, Dean.”

It suddenly struck the alpha that this was their first real conversation since he had ridden over to Lynton to try to get his mate back, three months earlier. For some reason that made him very nervous.

“I am glad to be of assistance”, he said. “If there is anything else you need, please let me know. I shall leave you now.”

“I am glad to be of assistance”, he said. “If there is anything else you need, please let me know. I shall leave you now.”

He rose stiffly – his joints seemed to be aching more of late – and left the room. Castiel stared after him.

“That was thoughtful”, Scaden said quietly.

“That was thoughtful”, Scaden said quietly.

“Yes”, his papa agreed. “Very.”

“Yes”, his papa agreed. “Very.”

++++

The Reverend Brenton Green - now apparently Lord Brenton of Medlington - returned to Kympton to find his house unusually clean, and an eager beta waiting for him at the door.

“Thought we were trying not to be too obvious”, he smiled.

“Thought we were trying not to be too obvious”, he smiled.

Ryazan pulled the older man through the doorway, and into a long kiss.

“My father knows about us”, he whispered.

“My father knows about us”, he whispered.

Brenton froze.

And he has given his blessing, as has papa”, Ryazan smiled. “Bren, we can be married! And now, I am going to formally propose to you.”

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To his surprise, the vicar placed a hand on his shoulder.

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“Ry”, he said, sounding strangely nervous, “I need to ask you something first.”

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The beta looked at him in alarm.

The beta looked at him in alarm.
“Of course”, he said edgily. “Go ahead.”

“This”, he said, waving an arm around the cottage. “A country living, a poor overworked vicar – would that really be enough for you?”

Ryazan gently removed the hand from his shoulder, and slowly pulled his love into a close hug.

“Whether this or the meanest hovel in the dirtiest village, I do not care what worldly goods you possess, Brenton Green”, he whispered. “I will take you for poorer or poorer still, regardless of what you are. And I will share your load, whatever your job. Because I love you.”

“That is good”, the vicar whispered back. “Because I came back here with a little more than when I left. I had an unexpected bequest, which I found out about whilst I was in London.”

“Money?”

Benton paused.

“The entire Medlington estate!”

Ryazan stepped back, amazed.

“You are joking!”

Brenton grinned.

“No. Lord Horace had a cousin who should have inherited, but he died last year. His Lordship apparently got so upset over some new law banning cruelty to animals that he had a heart-attack, and followed him into the next world. You are looking at the new Lord of Medlington.”

Ryazan kissed him.

“I don't care!” he said. “You are still my omega, and I love you.”

“So when are you going to propose to me, beta?”

Ryazan tapped him on the nose.

“Cheeky!” he grinned. “Very well. Brenton Green, Lord of Medlington, will you marry me?”

“Aren't you supposed to get down on one knee first?”

“Fine!” The beta duly knelt. “Now, will you marry me?”

Brenton looked at him thoughtfully.

“I don't know”, he said, though there was a smile in his eyes. “I may need some time to think about.... oof!”

The rest of the sentence was left unfinished, as his mouth was being assaulted by a somewhat impatient beta.

+++

Castiel was almost finished with his packing when he heard a commotion outside the house. Hurrying downstairs - he knew Dean had gone out, so the coast was clear – he reached the entrance
hall to find a familiar figure struggling with two of the footmen, West and Williamson.

“I am sorry, sir, but he insisted on trying to see you”, West said.

“Let him go!” Castiel said sharply.

Both the footmen recoiled as if shot. Castiel never raised his voice. The omega stepped forward and smiled at the intruder.

“Wolfie? What is it?”

“Mr. Bruno, sir. He’s giving birth. Right now!”

Castiel stared in shock, before quickly snapping himself out of it.

“West, tell the stables I want the carriage immediately, then take a horse and go to Doctor St. John’s cottage”, he ordered. “Tell him to meet us at Lavender Cottage. Williamson, tell Mrs. Campbell I need her here at once.”

Both men nodded, though they looked unhappy at having to leave their laird with the intruder. Castiel smiled at the huge omega.

“We shall get our housekeeper, who has had experience of helping out at births, and then go to your brother”, he smiled reassuringly.

“Thank you, sir.”

Castiel patted the huge omega on the back, and waited anxiously for Mrs. Campbell to arrive.

+~+~+

The screams from the delivering omega filled the cottage, and the sight of all that blood was almost too much for Castiel. But he bit down his instinctive reaction and held Bruno’s hand through the whole thing, if only because Wolfgang, once things had started, had fallen into a dead faint, crumpling to the floor in an almighty thud that had raised a pile of dust in his wake. Then suddenly Bruno’s yells were replaced by someone else’s. The sound of a newly-born pair of lungs, also at full volume. Doctor St John wiped the child down and gently handed him to his papa.

“Congratulations, Msr. Henriksen”, he smiled, handing over the child. “You have a healthy alpha.”

Bruno smiled in relief and gently held the baby, who even for nan alpha looked incredibly tiny against his massive frame. The doctor went over to help raise Wolfgang to his feet, the younger omega still unsteady after his fall. He looked uncertainly at his new nephew, and a smile creased his craggy features.

“We're going to name him Worseley, partly after Vic’s father and partly after you”, Bruno told him. “He might not have made it had you not got Mr. Castiel here so quickly. I owe you, Wolfie.”

The huge omega turned and smiled at the laird.

“Thank you, Mr. Castiel, sir.”

“I’m glad I could help, Wolfie, though we owe a lot to Mrs. Campbell too”, he said.

Wolfgang took the housekeeper’s hand and lightly kissed it, earning what sounded suspiciously like a stifled giggle from the grey-haired lady. Castiel smiled at them both, and having ensured with the
doctor that everything was now all right, he left to finish his packing. Life at Pemberley was certainly far from dull. He would miss it when.....

He pulled himself up, and told himself to stop thinking such thoughts. His time here was nearly done, one way or another. He carefully escorted Mrs. Campbell back to the carriage, and they set off back to the place that had once been his home.
Chapter Summary

Castiel helps a friend in need, Victor gets to see his son, and someone is watching the Winchesters.

August 1822

Victor stared incredulously at the paper that had just been handed to him.

“You have got to be kidding!” he blurted out at last.

“’Fraid not, guv’nor”, the scruffy man before him muttered, looking for all the world as if he was about to undergo some hellish torture of which Dante could only have dreamt.

Right, Victor thought. I’m a professional. I can deal with this. Stay calm.

“This is the original document?” he asked.

“Yes, guv’nor.”

“Has anyone else seen it?”

“One chap, guv’nor. Male, forties, and in the words of the clerk, ‘he weren’t no gentleman’. Wanted to borrow it, but they said no.”

“And they don’t know you’ve taken it?”

“No, guv’nor. It was in a sealed case, and I left something similar in size. But if anyone asks to see it, they’ll know soon enough.”

Victor thought for a moment.

“Leave me your address”, he said. “I will almost certainly have further use of you. And see Mrs. Fortescue on the way out. She will have your payment for the work done so far.”

The man, who was six foot six and built like a shed, went a deathly shade of white. Then he nodded, and whimpered as he almost fell through the door on his way out, visibly trembling. Victor stared after him, wondering what on earth it was about his secretary – a grizzled elderly lady less than half the size of this guy – which made men like that tremble. Then he picked up his letter-pad, and began to write:

‘Dear Joseph…’

+---++
Inias Collins took his friend by the hands.

“It seems both of us are having a year to forget”, he said sadly.

“Indeed”, Castiel replied. “I shall of course stay at my mother’s, but….”

He didn’t miss the look that passed between the two men.

“What's wrong?” he asked.

“Your mother is fine”, Mr. Collins assured him. “It is just…. there was an incident two days ago, and Balthazar was wounded. I did write to you at once, but it must have missed you.”

“How bad is it?” Castiel asked anxiously.

“Not life-threatening”, Inias said at once. “But in view of what happened, I thought it best to send him to one of the London hospitals straight away, and his mother with him. I am sorry the letter didn’t reach you in time.”

“That was not your fault, and thank you for doing what you did”, Castiel said. “I only hope it was not too expensive for you.”

“Oh, your husband promised to reimburse me for anything like that”, Mr. Collins said.

Castiel stared at him.

“Anything like what?” he asked, puzzled.

Mr Collins turned pale, and looked anxiously at his mate. Inias gently took his husband’s hand.

“I think you owe Castiel an explanation, my love”, he said quietly.

++~+++

“It was over a year ago”, Mr. Collins admitted, still blushing. “I believe you have met Dean’s London friend, Mr. Victor Henriksen?”

“Yes”, Castiel said. “He works in London. His mate is staying on the estate, and they have just had their first child.”

“He was the one who found out about Uriel and Nehemiah for us”, Mr Collins told him. “He found out more, besides. Someone had been making inquiries into your family, Castiel, possibly the same person who was behind that coach crash, and Balthazar being watched, if he didn’t make that bit up himself.”

“Dean never told me”, Castiel said, surprised.

“He didn’t want to worry you at the time. But he told me if anything ever happened to either your mother or brother, I was to do the very best I could for them, and he would pay all the bills himself.”

Castiel was silent. He didn’t like the idea of his husband keeping things from him, but then his keeping his meeting with Dr. Browne from his husband had helped spark this whole sorry mess.
Dean had done his best to protect those Castiel loved, even if he himself disliked those people. And he had kept trying despite their current situation. He wasn’t sure how that made him feel about his husband.

“Tell me about Balthazar’s accident”, he said instead.

“It was at a party”, Inias said, smiling when he saw the look on his friend’s face. “I know, Balthazar at a party! Well, a few of the guests were examining some ancient weapons displayed in one of the rooms, and one of them was playing with one of the old guns when it went off. Balthazar got hit in the arm, and lost a lot of blood, but the doctors say he should make a full recovery. The strange thing was, when the constable made inquiries afterwards, no-one could remember who the person who actually shot him was.”

“The boy is annoying, but I can’t think why anyone would want to actually shoot him”, said Mr Collins.

Castiel refrained from pointing out that Balthazar was thirty-five years old, so was hardly a ‘boy’ any more. Although to be fair he still acted like a teenager.

“I still don’t understand why anyone would want to hurt my family”, he said.

“Jealousy, perhaps?” Inias suggested. “You did take a large step up socially when you married the master of Pemberley.”

Castiel reddened at the mention of his husband.

“I am sorry”, Inias said quickly. “That was thoughtless of me.”

“You are clearly showing now, Castiel”, Mr. Collins said, in an obvious effort to change the subject. “Have you seen a doctor yet?”

“His niece is married to one, my love”, Inias reminded him, smiling slightly.

The beta blushed.

“Peter sees me every week”, Castiel told them. “He says I am a little larger than is normal for four months, but it is nothing to worry about. The birth will be the critical time.”

“You must stay in the house whilst you are here, of course”, Mr Collins said. “We have a lot to do what with arranging the funerals and all.”

“Funerals?” Castiel started at the plural.

The two looked at each other.

“That was in the letter I sent, too”, Inias said quietly. “It must have missed you. The men who killed Nehemiah; they went after Uriel. They found him.”

“A double loss”, Castiel said sadly.

“Yes”, his friend said. “But now we have you here to help us through it all. Thank you for coming, Castiel. It means so much to us.”
Castiel wrapped his arm around his friend, and they all went inside.

++++

Victor stared at the man in front of him. If there was a theory that the Good Lord gave out either talent or looks but never both, then this specimen of (probable) humanity proved it.

“Are you sure you can do it?” he asked.

“That depends, the man said, frowning at the document he had been handed. “What sort of people do you want it to fool?”

“A couple of idiots, but I’m betting they will take it to be examined by a lawyer or some such. I doubt they’ll stretch to someone of your abilities, though.”

Joseph Moskewitz pulled thoughtfully at his beard.

“I can do a passable job in twenty-four hours, or a virtually undetectable one in three to four days”, he said at last. “How urgent is it?”

“The sooner the better, but as it’s under a week I’ll take the second”, Victor said. “I can’t afford to take any chances.”

“You can collect it on Wednesday after closing.”

“Payment?”

The Jew laughed.

“After what you did for my sister and that mad Lybian who wouldn’t stop stalking her?” he said with a smile. “No, Mr. Henriksen. You used your unique talents to help me then, and I shall use mine to help you now.”

Victor bowed.

“Thank you for your time, sir.”

++++

Two days later, Castiel was sitting in his carriage on his way back from London. The funeral arrangements were nearly all in place, and he had had a free day in which his hosts had suggested he take the time to see his mother and brother in the capital. It had been a frankly exhausting visit, mainly because Castiel had spun a lie, provided by Doctor St. John, namely that he was suffering a ‘false pregnancy’, let alone not telling them about the traumatic events of the past few months. He had also had to skirt round Michael and Adam’s relationship, though fortunately his mother would as usual rather talk about herself, and had spent much of the time so doing. Balthazar had been mercifully quiet, presumably still in shock from the incident.

Castiel’s life was frankly horrible right now. As the carriage passed the church at Longbourn, he wondered exactly what he had done to deserve all this.

+++
Dean’s life was frankly horrible right now. As he sat in his cold, lonely study, he knew exactly what
he had done to deserve all this.

Trying to make himself feel just a little bit better, he had made the mistake of attending a ball in
Derby the night before, hoping it might take his mind off things. But he found the conversation of
other people vacuous in the extreme, and felt physically sick when he saw a beautiful woman eying
him up from across the dance floor. He left halfway through, unable to stomach it any longer.

He paused as he crossed to the bookcase, looking at the covered painting in the darkest corner of the
room. The artist had spent about a month on it before… well, before, and had been told he might be
asked back to finish it sometime later. Now the painting stood in the corner of the room, yet another
reminder of what he had done.
He hated himself.

+~+~+

Victor virtually exploded into the cottage, panting heavily.

“Bron!”

The omega looked up, and smiled at his husband.

“Well, you took your time!” he said in mock annoyance.

“I am so sorry!” Victor said, looking ashamed. “Something came up, important or I would have
come at once. As it was I had to wait nearly a week to get things fixed.”

“Is everything all right now?”

“It should be, if the people I am having watched take the bait”, Victor smiled. “It’s partly for Dean,
because nothing else would have kept me from seeing my first-born. And, of course, the love of my
life!”

“Flatterer!”

“So where is the boy?”

There was the tread of heavy footsteps on the stairs.

“We heard your carriage, so Wolfie’s just bringing him down from his nap”, Bruno said. “Here they
come now.”

His brother entered with a well-wrapped baby, and placed it gently into its father’s arms.

“Hullo, Wolseley”, Victor grinned, looking down at his son. “Better late than never, eh? I’m your
father.”

+~+~+

“So you see, sir, it’s been a monumentous year for us all”, the chambermaid babbled.
The man looked encouragingly at her.

“I can see that”, he smiled. “So they are not talking to each other now?”

“The master is hardly ever seen in town any more, and Mr Williamson, my cousin who works there, says they don’t even go into the same room at the same time. And Millie, who helps out there on Tuesdays and special occasions, she says….”

“Florence!”

The thunderous voice came from an elderly female who, judging by her appearance, was clearly someone in authority. That and the fact that the maid took one look and promptly fled down the corridor. The woman glared after her, and followed at a much more sedate pace.

The man grinned. Things were much better than he had expected.

+~+~+

Dean looked at his friend.

“So it was true”, he said heavily.

“I’m afraid so”, Victor admitted. “The only upside to always thinking the worst is that you have to live with usually being right!”

“And do they know?”

“They suspect, but they will need the document to prove it. I expect an attempt to be made on it when he gets back from France next week. I have inserted one of my men onto the staff there, just to make sure.”

“Sammy doesn’t suspect?”

“He and Gabriel are completely in the dark”, Victor said assuredly. “It’s best if they stay that way. In the meantime, I may have to avail myself of another favour from you. Or at least from your mate.”

Dean froze.

“What?” he asked nervously.

“It’s not that bad”, Victor assured him. “I shall be taking Bruno back to London once the child is old enough to travel, at least if we do it in stages. But Wolfie wants to remain here. He’s become very attached to Castiel, after… well, recent events, let us say. You can find him a job here, I suppose?”

“Of course”, Dean smiled. “The stable-boys think he’s great; even old Belisarius comes out meek as a lamb once he enters his stall. But if he’d prefer a job with Cas, I have just the post. If Cas agrees, of course.”

Victor smiled.

“I’m going back to my mate and son now, but I’ll see you at dinner tomorrow, all right?”
“Of course, my friend.”

Dean wished silently that he too could go back to his mate. His own folly meant that that would probably never happen again, now. +~~+-

The double funeral passed off uneventfully, although Castiel noticed both Collinses wince when the vicar delivered the eulogy for the late (and deservedly un lamented) Uriel. He stayed on a couple of days afterwards, before deciding to make his way home. He had enjoyed his trip south - the limited time with his mother and brother had been a definite factor in that, although he blushed when he thought of it that way - but he was looking forward to getting back to Derbyshire.

He looked out of the carriage window, and saw that they had passed Derby and were now in the valley of the Derwent, the river which ran almost all the way to Pemberley. Not his home, in reality. If he survived the coming pregnancy (and Doctor St. John, when pressed, had rated his chances at about two to one against) then he would have to leave. Because much as he still loved Dean – and it pained him to realize this was the case, despite what the alpha had done – he felt he could never fully trust him again.

He knew Dean was watching him return, because he saw the curtains in the study twitch once or twice as he alighted from the carriage. To his surprise, Wolfgang was waiting in front of the house, and escorted him up the stairs.

“Mr. Beddowes says I can be your new valet, if you agree to it”, he beamed. “Bron is off back to London with Mr. Victor soon, but I get to stay here!”

He looked so much like an over-eager puppy that Castiel had to fight to suppress a laugh.

“Have they explained to you what being a valet is, Wolfie?” he asked, as the huge omega lifted his heavy bag as if it were nothing.

To his surprise, the man’s face suddenly darkened.

“Mr Dean’s valet says I have to train with him for two weeks, before I can be your valet proper”, he said, frowning hard.

“You probably need a little training, Wolfie”, Castiel said gently.

The big man muttered something incomprehensible under his breath.

“What was that?” Castiel asked.

“Don’t like Mr. Dean!”

“Why not?” Castiel asked, surprised.

“Because he hurt you. And no-one hurts you. It’s not right.”

“Don’t worry, Wolfie. I am sure he won’t try anything like that again.”

“He had better not!”

Castiel looked at him, and was suddenly aware he’d probably just acquired a bodyguard as well as a
valet. He smiled at him, and led the huge omega up the stairs.

Behind the study curtains, Dean wiped a tear from his face.
September 1822

Michael Fitzwilliam hurried up the steps of Pemberley and when, after what seemed like an interminable wait, the door was finally answered, he asked immediately to see his brother. It seemed an even longer wait before he was informed Castiel was out though expected back soon, but he could see the master. In the circumstances, he felt he had little choice.

“What's wrong?” Dean asked.

“It’s the earl!” Michael said, looking frantic. “He wants to publish the engagement between Adam and that awful woman!”

“Why the hurry?” Dean asked. “I thought her father wanted to wait until after his next trip to America?”

“Didn’t you hear? Earl William had a bad riding accident last week, and broke something. The fool didn’t get it treated, and now an infection has set in. The doctors don’t think he is going to make it, so he wants it all done now.”

“Ah”, Dean said. “That is not good.”

There was a knock at the door.

“Enter!” Dean called out.

Beddowes duly entered.

“You requested to be informed when Mr. Castiel returned, sir”, he informed Michael. “He and Mr. Smith are drawing up outside.”

“Can you ask him to come in here, Beddowes?” Michael said.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea”, Dean said hurriedly. “I’m not supposed to be in the same room as Cas, since… you know.”

“Oh. I didn’t think. Sorry.”

There was an awkward silence, before the door opened again. Castiel stood outside, the unmistakable bulk of Wolfgang right behind him.

“Was there something you wished to see me about, Michael?” he asked, notably not entering the
“I actually wanted help from both of you, but I forgot”, his brother said, blushing.

Wolfgang leant forward and whispered something in the omega’s ear. Castiel smiled slightly.

“If it is an emergency, then I am sure my husband and I can be in the same room together, provided he doesn’t mind Wolfie staying with me.”

“Of course not”, Dean said at once, though he could hardly believe his luck. Castiel actually agreeing to be in the same room as him? Perhaps things were finally looking up.

+++

Perhaps they weren’t. Wolfgang stayed at his master’s side, never once taking his eyes off Dean, who was reminded repeatedly of a particularly ferocious watchdog. One which could quite probably tear him to shreds without breaking a sweat. The friendly look his mate gave the huge omega didn’t go unnoticed, either. Surely not….

He dragged his mind back to the matter at hand.

“If the worst comes to the worst, how long do the doctors say Lord William has got?” he asked, feeling a little callous for the question.

“Two weeks at the most, if the infection continues to spread”, Michael said. “And they all think it will. Why?”

“So we need to stall him for two weeks.”

Wolfgang muttered something under his breath.

“What was that, Wolfie?” Castiel asked, curious.

“Sinope, sir.”

“Pardon?”

“Apollo promised her anything if she would let him have his way with her, and she accepted. But her wish was to remain a virgin, and he had to honour his promise.”

They all looked at him uncomprehendingly.

“So?” Michael asked.

“Mr. Adam should tell Lord William that he promises he will be married by the end of the year. He has to wait three weeks anyway, that's what the Church says. It would not be a lie. It's just words.”

“Wolfie, that’s… brilliant!” Castiel said, patting him on the back.

“Yes, thank you so much!” Michael beamed.

Dean was about to add his thanks, but the way Castiel was looking at the huge omega made him
uneasy. They were two omegas, but even so…. no, Cas would never.

Would he?

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Dean’s bad month managed to get a whole lot worse when Wolfgang caught a cold that turned into a chill.

“Mrs. Moseley has been very good to me”, he told Castiel when he visited him one morning. “But I think if she makes me any more tomato soup, I’ll burst!”

Castiel laughed.

“We are very lucky to have her”, he said.

“Though she is a bit strange”, Wolfgang mused.

“How so?” Castiel asked.

“Well, the other day I was watching her cutting up some pastry, and she asked me about whether I used knives a lot.”

Castiel looked at him meaningfully. They both knew the obvious answer to that question.

“Bruno always says I am much faster with a knife than a gun”, Wolfgang said. “He says if only they did a six-shooter knife, I’d be unstoppable.”

“Do you still carry a knife, Wolfie?”

The huge omega shrank back under the covers, and looked piteously up at his master. It took all Castiel's efforts not to laugh at the 'injured puppy' look.

“Forget I even asked”, he said with a sigh. “In the light of Doctor Browne, perhaps I should be grateful!”

“Mrs. Moseley asked that too”, Wolfie said. “Told me to keep in practice.”

“She has the Sight’, Castiel said unthinkingly.

“A building site?” Wolfgang asked, puzzled.

Castiel laughed.

“No, she can see things in the future, like the oracle at Delphi. Early last year, she told me there would be three great storms in my life. The first was a real thunderstorm, the second when I was kidnapped and you rescued me, and the third… well, you know what the third was.”

The huge omega sniffed.

“I would do anything for you, sir.”
Castiel smiled at him.

“I know, Wolfie.”

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“Castiel, may I talk to you for a moment? I need to speak to your husband as well.”

Castiel smiled at his nephew.

“Of course, Peter. We can go to Dean’s study; I know he’s there.”

“You wouldn’t mind that?”

“Provided someone is with me, I am all right”, Castiel smiled.

The doctor knocked on the study door and entered. He didn’t miss the look on the alpha’s face when he saw who was behind him.

“I wanted to speak to the pair of you because something has come up”, he said. “Not to do with you, Castiel. Your pregnancy is progressing perfectly well, although you’re still slightly larger than normal.”

“Then what is it?” Castiel asked.

“Your friend downstairs, who I just treated”, Peter explained. “You and he might be in for a bit of a shock.”

“Why?”

“He’s a false omega.”

“What?” both men said.

“I’ve tested and retested, and asked Doctor Gallagher to triple-check my results. There’s no doubt about it. He’s one in a million, a false omega. Basically he’s an omega in body, but his sperm are as alive as any alpha’s or beta’s, so he could both bear children and sire them. So legally he’s a beta. Will he consider it good news?”

He was looking at Castiel as he spoke.

“I think he will”, Castiel said slowly. “But I would like to be there when you tell him, if only for reassurance.”

“Of course”, the doctor smiled, before turning to Dean. “I have to register him officially as a beta now, which means a ton of paperwork. But I will send it all over to you, and you just need to sign where I mark.”

“Thank you, Pete”, Dean said quietly. A horrible thought had not just crossed his mind, but had pitched a tent in the front of it and was now making its presence most painfully felt. This mean Wolfgang had a chance with Castiel, despite the age difference. He shook hands with the doctor, and locked the room after the two of them had left.
His wreck of a life was getting even worse.

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It was just bad luck that there was a queue in the tea-shop, and she had to wait some time before being served. It was just bad luck she had to sit outside the full café, even though it was a brisk September day, and windy as well. It was just bad luck that a man trying to turn his cart round in the middle of the high street caused her to look up at just the wrong time, straight into a pair of eyes she had seen only once before, but whose history she knew all too well. They stared back at her in shock, before their owner crossed the street to stand in front of her.

“Well! Fancy seeing you here!”

Then again, perhaps her luck wasn't that bad after all....

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October 1822

Doctor St. John rode up to Pemberley with a heavy frown on his face. He had two pieces of news for the people inside the house, and he knew that whilst one might be welcome, the other would most definitely not be. At least not once they thought it through.

Fortunately he met Scaden in the hall.

“Scay”, he beamed. “How are things?”

The tall alpha smiled.

“Ry and Bren have set a date for the wedding”, he told him. “Mid-February. Just in case... you know.”

The doctor nodded.

“I need to talk to both your parents. Are they home?”

“Yes. I can bring papa to the study if you wish. He's feeling quite tired now, at nearly six months.”

“That would be good of you”, the doctor smiled. “I have a couple of pieces of information, but will wait for you and Cas.”

The alpha smiled and left. The doctor went across and knocked in the study door.

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“First, I have something to tell you which you may not know, as I only learnt of it myself this morning”, the doctor began. “Earl William Fitzwilliam died of the infection brought on by his untreated injuries last night. Lord Adam is now master of Standford.”

There was a heavy silence in the room. It was obviously not acceptable to rejoice at someone else's death, but there was a palpable sense of relief.
“There will be some talk”, Dean said eventually. “Keeping a mate and two children away from society for so long – they will find it hard.”

“You should invite the two of them to a ball here”, Castiel suggested. “It might help people to accept them more.”

Dean smiled at him.

“That’s a wonderful idea!” he said enthusiastically. “I will set one up as soon as I can.”

“The other news is about your pregnancy, Castiel”, the doctor said. “And before you ask, I have double- and triple-checked my results. You are definitely expecting twins.”

“That’s great!” Dean smiled. Then he noticed that neither the doctor nor his mate seemed to be sharing his joy, and his smile faded. “What?”

There was a prolonged silence.

“A multiple birth increases the chances of me not making it, isn't that the case?” Castiel said quietly.

“Yes”, the doctor muttered. “I'm afraid it does. About six to one against.”

“No!” Dean shouted.

They all looked at him in surprise.

“I can't lose you now, Cas!”

His mate sighed, and gestured for his son to help him up.

“You lost me six months ago, Dean”, he said sadly.

Scaden helped him from the room and the doctor followed. The master of Pemberley locked the door behind them, then closed the curtains and retreated to his favourite chair. Where he wept.
Chapter Summary

Castiel makes a will, and Lynton Grange gets an unexpected (and unwelcome) pair of visitors.

November 1822

Although he was totally disorganized in most areas, the one thing Gabriel Bingley could be relied upon to do well was Christmas. So over a month before the big day found him shopping in Lambton for presents and decorations. This often involved him visiting the same shops several times over as he struggled to make up his mind over presents, but he enjoyed the semi-controlled chaos. And he always made sure to pay those servants who were unfortunate enough to have to go with him an extra Christmas bonus.

He went to one of the two cafés for some refreshments after a couple of hours – again, he conscientiously remembered to arrange for his servants to get some food and drink as well – and having finished, was about to leave when he spotted two very familiar figures sat outside the other café, across the road. He baulked and stared at them, before moving to a better position where he was less likely to be spotted. What on earth were they doing in Lambton? And together?

Then the man and woman leaned across the table and kissed each other, and he could clearly see their wedding-rings. He gasped, and charged towards the door.

He didn't make it. A large figure blocked his way, and hustled him very efficiently over to one of the corner tables where a tall man, though not so solidly built as the first, was sat with three cups of tea and a cake-stand.

"Monseigneur Bingley", the man smiled. "We meet at last!"

Gabriel eyed the chocolate cake slice hungrily before snapping himself back to reality.

"Do I know you?" he asked curiously.

"No", the man said. "We have never met. But those two love-birds across the road do not know me either, and they will be there for some time, as they have a lot to discuss. My name is Victor Henriksen, and this is my mate Bruno. I'm a friend of Mr Winchester."

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The chocolate cake had been delicious, though the lemon drizzle had come a close second. Gabriel sighed happily over his tea.

"So they are together now?" he asked.

"A marriage made in hell", Victor said. "Definitely one of convenience. Once they each have what
they want, a split is inevitable.”

“I thought he was dead”, Gabriel said bitterly. "Hoped he was, after what he did to our family.”

“Sadly it seems Hades is reluctant to pollute the depths of the Netherworld any sooner than necessary”, Victor said dryly. “I have something that you should see.”

He moved the drinks to one side, and laid a hand-written letter on the table in front of the omega. Gabriel read it, and went a deathly shade of white.

“No!”

“Exactly”, Victor said. “Now you know why those two are together. Fortunately I alerted Dean as to this danger, and some time ago he instructed me to take certain ‘measures’. Now this is what I have done....”

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“Ry?”

Ryazan Winchester looked up from his book and smiled.

“What is it, papa?”

“Could you please fetch me my book from the reading-room?” Castiel asked. “I left it on the fireside table there.”

“Of course, papa”, the beta smiled. He was spending longer with Castiel now, since Dimiel's pregnancy meant he and Garth needed more time together. It meant fewer opportunities to go over and see Brenton, but now their relationship was secure, he could live with that. He left the room and went to fetch the book.

Castiel had been sat at the table making notes, but his son's departure let a gust of cold air into the room, and he decided to go across and sit by the fire. He was halfway there when a sudden pain in his stomach made him cry out, and he sank to his knees.

There was a knock at the door, and he sighed in relief. One of the servants must have been passing.

“Come in, quickly!” he said.

To his surprise it was his husband. Dean hesitated by the doorway, clearly alarmed at seeing his mate in pain, but unwilling to approach him.

“Just help me to the chair!” Castiel gasped. “This is an emergency. Please, Dean?”

The alpha nodded, and silently came across to him, hoisting him gently into his arms. Castiel instinctively wrapped his arms around his husband's neck before realizing what he was doing, but Dean was so warm he felt he didn't want to let go. His husband gently lowered him onto the fireside chair.

“You're too cold”, he muttered. “Let me get you a blanket.”
He went across and picked up two blankets from the pile on the opposite chair. He was just wrapping the second one around his mate when there was a yell from the door.

“What the hell are you doing?”

Ryazan stood there, glaring at him. The young beta hurried across the room and snatched the blanket from his father.

“Ry!” Castiel said disapprovingly.

“He knows he's not allowed to be with you”, the beta snarled. “And he knows damned well why!”

“I am sorry, son”, Dean said, hanging his head and backing away.

“It was an emergency”, Castiel said patiently. “I fell, and Dean was passing.”

Ryazan stared at his father suspiciously.

“Just passing”, he said dubiously. “Hm.

“I'd better go”, Dean said hurriedly, backing away. “Just... call Peter and get him to check you over. And let me know if everything is all right. Please?”

“I will”, Castiel said, easing himself up in his chair. “And thank you for your help.”

His husband smiled at him and left. When he had gone, his son looked hard at his papa.

“I don’t trust him” he said flatly.

“He is still your father, Ry, and you should respect him”, Castiel said firmly. “Please send for Doctor St. John, and once he has given me the all-clear, I want you to inform your father. In person.”

“Yes, papa.”

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The doctor soon checked Castiel over and declared him to be fine, although he recommended he rest indoors for several days to be sure. The omega was annoyed because this meant he would miss Guy Fawkes' Night. Or so he had assumed.

“Will you be going to watch the fireworks, Wolfie?” he asked. “The display is usually quite good.”

The beta was busy folding away Castiel's washed clothes. He looked up in surprise.

“There isn't one, sir”, he said. “It's been cancelled.”

Castiel stared at him in shock.

“Cancelled? Why?”

“The servants said they didn't want one this year, and Mr. Samuel said he didn't want one with just his own staff.”
“But you all enjoy it so much.”

The beta reddened.

“We all felt it wouldn’t be right this year, sir”, he said quietly. “You know, with things the way they are.”

“Oh.”

“Mrs. Campbell and Mrs. Moseley told Mr. Dean, and he agreed. He said we might have twice as many fireworks next year, if.... things work out.”

Castiel hesitated.

“Wolfie, you do know that things between me and Dean are not going to 'work out'?”

“But you love him, sir!”

Castiel stared at him in shock.

“What?”

The beta blushed.

“The way you look at him, sir. I know he did a Bad Thing, but you love each other. You were happy before this. Why can't you be happy now?”

“Because relationships are built on trust, Wolfie”, Castiel said sadly. “And you're right. I can't stop loving Dean. No-one can just switch off their emotions. But I don't trust him. I could never be sure he wouldn't do something like that again.”

“But you're suffering without him sir.”

Castiel looked at the beta in surprise.

“What makes you say that?” he asked.

“The way you look when he's anywhere around, as if you wish things could go back to normal. Please, sir....”

He stopped, looking down at his huge feet.

“Please what, Wolfie?”

“Just.... try, sir. I just want you to be happy, like you were before.”

“I can never be that happy again”, Castiel said with a sigh. “You can't rewrite the past, Wolfie. Besides, what would you have me do? Tell him I will take him back?”

“No, sir!” Wolfgang almost shouted. He blushed at the volume, and turned away. “But there must be something you can do. A first step, perhaps?”
Castiel thought about it. It now looked as if he only had a few months left anyway. Perhaps Wolfgang was right. Did he really want what might be his last few months to be as miserable as the last six months had been?

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Breakfast was still a bad time for Dean. His sons' quiet disapproval filled the room, and made him wish he was anywhere but with them. One particular cold morning in late November, he was relieved to find only Ryazan there.

His relief did not last long.

“Papa asked me to inform you that Carstairs is coming over this morning”, his son said.

Dean stared at him in alarm. What would Cas want with the family lawyer? He wasn't going to ask for a divorce before the birth, was he?

“I hope you do not mind him using Carstairs”, Ryazan said crisply, helping himself to some more bacon. “If there is a problem....”

“No, no problem”, Dean lied. “I was just wondering why, that was all.”

His son looked at him coolly for a moment.

“Papa is making a will”, he said.

“Isn't that a bit... morbid?” Dean asked.

“He has his small inheritance from his father, and a few personal items of his own”, Ryazan said. “He wants to leave each of us three something to remember him by, if the worst happens. It's barely two months now.”

Dean cringed. Less than two months with his mate of more than twenty years even if they were now separated in all but name.

“He knows it's technically yours anyway, but he wants to leave you the sampler”, Ryazan said flatly.

Dean looked up in surprise. Shortly after their wedding, Cas had had a brief and disastrous flirtation with embroidery, which was something he felt he should have been able to do. His sole effort, a small embroidered sampler less than a foot across, had been truly hideous, but Dean had had it framed and given it pride of place in the living-room, and it still hung there. He had half-expected Cas to take it with him when he had 'moved out', but he supposed it was technically his, as he had begged Cas to let him have it as a birthday gift.

“That's.... very kind of him”, Dean muttered.

“He is a very kind man”, Ryazan said, looking pointedly at him. “I shall..... go and see him now.”

You were going to say 'I shall miss him', Dean thought sadly, as his son headed out of the room.

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Sam and Gabriel had just finished lunch when a carriage drew up outside. Gabriel went to see who it was, and winced when he recognized the two figures getting out. This was it.

“Who is it, Gabe?” his husband asked.

“Two unwelcome visitors”, Gabriel said tartly, crossing quickly to retrieve a piece of paper from his locked desk drawer. “And they bring bad news. Brace yourself, moose. This is going to get ugly.”

Before Sam could reply, the butler announced that a lady and a gentleman (Gabriel snorted at both terms) wished to wait on them. Sam bade him usher them in, but when he saw who came through the door, he went pale.

“You!”
Bastard!

Chapter Summary

Samuel Bingley turns out to be a right bastard, and Dean gets a shock. Wickham finds a cunning way to get revenge.

November 1822

“You!”

Sam stared in amazement at the apparition before him. The hair was shorter and a different colour, and the figure was larger, but it was unmistakably his sister Margaret.

“Hullo, Mr. Bingley!” she said mockingly. “I would greet you as a loving sister, but in the circumstances that is no longer appropriate.”

Sam ignored her jibe.

““What are you doing here? And with him?”
“Mr Bingley, meet my husband, Mr. Metatron Wickham.”

Sam stared at her in astonishment. Finally he found his voice.

“You? Married to him? What on earth possessed you?”

“It was a business arrangement”, Wickham said smoothly, moving forward. “Since my wife was about to come into a large estate and needed a husband to help manage things, she suggested we make an alliance.”

“You really were coming into money?” Sam asked, surprised.

She grinned at him knowingly.

“Oh yes!”

“Aren’t you going to offer your guests a drink?” Wickham said petulantly.

“I only do that to people I want to stay!” Sam snapped.

Wickham laughed knowingly.

“Take it from me, we’re staying.” He sprawled down into one of the chairs, and yawned. His wife perched on the arm, and smiled at him.

“First things first”, the former soldier said. “After all, we want to get this over and done with as soon as possible, don’t we?”
“I believe we do”, Gabriel said quietly.

Wickham gave him a dismissive look, and shrugged his shoulders.

“Whatever. Anyway, when we had that business at Waterloo some years back, I had a few rather unpleasant people who claimed I owed them money. So after the battle, I left my wallet - empty, of course - with my cards in it on the body of a soldier who looked a bit like me. Can’t tell you how annoying it was that somebody swiped it before he could be identified as me, though at least I got the consolation prize of making my useless mate have to wait five years before he could get a divorce form his heroic soldier husband.”

He wrapped an arm around his wife’s waist, and she smiled at him.

“So I’ve been gradually rebuilding a new life for myself ever since, and of course watching my not-grieving widower, who was as badly-behaved as ever.”

“The coach crash!” Sam interrupted. “That was you!”

Wickham grinned at him.

“I never admit to anything, Mr. Bingley”, he smiled. “Surely my friend Lord Winchester told you that?”

“Dean is not your friend!”

“I suppose so. But that hardly matters, does it? Not when I have this.”

He produced a letter from his pocket, and brandished it at Sam and Gabriel.

“Sorry, to break up your little home sweet home, but I want what’s mine, or at least my wife’s”, he said sharply. “This is a letter from one James Bingley M.P.to a Miss Elizabeth McConnaughey, actress, stating that the child she has just had is his own. I would draw your attention to the date, Mr. Bingley. It reads, as clear as daylight, 5th December, 1775.”

Sam stared at him in horror.

“Which means”, Margaret smirked, “that you are a bastard, Samuel Bingley, and the estate devolves onto the next legitimate child who is – let me think about it for a moment – oh yes. Me!”

“I am a fair man”, Wickham sneered. “You may have until the end of the day to pack anything that’s yours. Though I shall want to check, to make sure you don’t take anything that’s now mine. Hadn’t you better get a move on?”

Sam clenched his fists, but Gabriel put a restraining hand on his arm. He stood up and looked at the visitors.

“You always did play a bad hand, Wickham”, he said softly. “Even when you thought you held all the cards, there was always someone who had better.”

“I’d like to see you pull off something better than this!” Wickham laughed, waving the paper at him.
Gabriel reached into his pocket and produced an identical piece of paper to the one Wickham was holding. The former soldier’s confident look faltered visibly.

“Funny you should have that letter that you arranged to have stolen from Sam’s solicitors in London”, Gabriel said brightly. “Because a friend of mine warned us you were sniffing round that particular family secret, and tempted as we were to let you find out the truth, the chance to let you make a complete fool of yourself was just too good to pass up.”

“What do you mean?” Wickham demanded, though he had definitely gone a shade paler. His wife too looked decidedly uneasy.

Gabriel handed him his letter, and when he read the first few lines, he went paler still.

“You will kindly note that this ‘original’ is identical to the ‘forgery’ we placed for you to take, in every way except one”, Gabriel said, a trifle smugly. “The date is 5th February, 1777.” He turned to his husband. “Sorry to let you know this way, moose, but your father did indeed sire a bastard child from that actress. And that child is indeed in this room right now.”

He looked hard at his mate's sister, who went red.

“You lying omega!” she hissed.

“You dug up your own bastardy!” Gabriel smiled. “It serves you right, really.”

Wickham suddenly screwed up the letter he had been given and threw it into the fire, where it quickly caught light and disappeared. He glared triumphantly at the two men, but Gabriel just laughed.

“Still a losing hand”, he chuckled. “That was one of several copies, which are lodged in various places around the house, and amongst our friends and legal advisers. Now, I think the two of you have outstayed your welcome, small though it was to start with. Unless you want us to get the servants to throw you out, I suggest you leave, and do it quickly.”

“You haven’t heard the last of this, Samuel Bingley!” Wickham hissed. “I shall destroy you if it is the last thing I do!”

“Enjoy your marriage to my ‘half-sister’”, Sam said calmly.

“I hate you!” Margaret snapped, deliberately knocking over a small table as she flounced out of the room.

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They were gone. Sam breathed a deep sigh of relief, and turned to his mate.

“I so owe you!” he smiled.

“You do!” Gabriel grinned. “Tonight you can start clearing your bill!”

Sam kissed him.

“And to think she was the illegitimate one all along!”
To his surprise, his mate went red. Sam looked sharply at him.

“Gabe? What aren’t you telling me?”

The omega looked away from him.

“I may not have been strictly truthful in absolutely everything I told them”, he said quietly.

“Go on”, Sam said.

“That letter saying you were the illegitimate one – that was the original. It was true. I’m sorry, Sam.”

Sam stared at him in confusion.

“But then how….”

“Dean’s London friend found out they were sniffing around your family, and got one of his friends to make a copy with just the date changed.”

“So the document he has – it’s true?” Sam had gone pale.

Gabriel grinned knowingly.

“For now.”

“What do you mean?”

“Mr Henriksen – Dean’s friend – knows he has only three copies of that letter. One he showed us, one back at his London house, and one with his lawyer. Victor’s having the lawyer’s office and the house broken into as we speak, and a pickpocket is waiting for when he gets back to the hotel. All three copies will be in our possession very soon.”

“So Meg was right. I really am a bastard?”

“I always thought you were!”

“Hey!”

+~+~+

December 1822

Victor sipped appreciatively at the whisky.

“You have a new butler, and a good quality one”, he smiled.

“You didn’t come here to talk about my staff!” Dean said tersely. “What news?”

“Mixed. First, there’s no sign of where the Terrible Twosome have gone. They’re only spending one day in each place, so by the time I get any reports, they’ve moved on. But I did get all the original documents off them, so now they have nothing that can harm your friends.”
“That’s a relief.”

“I’m not the only one looking for them, either. The London authorities want to have a long talk with Mr. Wickham, as regards certain medicinal potions he has been hawking around the capital.”

“What sort of medicines?” Dean asked.

“Aphrodisiacs. He brought back a ton of illegal herbage from his time in Africa, and has been selling it to rich people to help them, um, perform. However, there have been some unwelcome side-effects.”

“I don’t follow.”

“The stuff makes the drinker lose complete control of his inhibitions, once it enters his bloodstream”, Victor explained. “It also leads to jaundice, irregular heartbeat, and for older people, ‘dying in the saddle’, to coin a phrase. Poor Lady Fordham is still in shock after her husband expired in the act, and he was only thirty-two!”

“Ouch!”

Victor looked at him again.

“Take care of yourself, friend”, he said, a note of warning in his voice. “Metatron Wickham has nothing to lose now, and his money is bound to run out sooner rather than later. Desperate men do desperate deeds.”

“You think he may try and hurt Sammy?”

“He’ll either strike at someone in Lynton, or he may turn his attention here. I’m glad Wolfie is Cas’ valet now. You should make sure he doesn’t leave the house without him.”

++++

Scaden, Diniel and Ryazan stared at their papa in shock. It was the youngest son who found his voice first.

“You are sure about this, papa?” he asked tremulously.

“Absolutely sure”, Castiel said firmly. “It's less than two months now. Things can never be the same as they were, but even if the worst happens....”

“Papa!” Diniel burst out.

“... even if the worst happens, Dino, I want this family to stay together. I spent so much effort bringing up three fine young men, and I won't see that thrown away just because I was too proud to do what is right.”

There was a long silence. Then Scaden knelt before his papa's chair.

“We will support you in this, papa”, he said firmly. “I still think it's wrong – but you have our full support.”
Diniel and Ryazan came one either side of his chair, and took a hand each. Castiel looked proudly at his three sons. Even if the worst happened, he had done well to gift humanity such fine young men.

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Dean got dressed as usual the following day, and went downstairs to breakfast, wondering which of his sons would be glaring across at him this morning. He had almost reached the food table when he realized that there was only one other person in the room, and it wasn’t one of his offspring.

“Hullo, Dean”, his mate said, a slight smile on his face.

If a leviathan had broken through the main window and instantly devoured the table and everything on it, Dean could not have been more surprised.

“Um… hullo, Cas”, he spluttered.

Somehow he managed to get some food on his plate (and a lot more over the table), and staggered to his seat. His mate didn’t say anything, but neither did he leave. Dean ate slowly (and for once, silently), trying to grasp what on earth was happening.

“You, er, won’t want to come to the ball tonight, I suppose?” he managed after a while.

“I don’t really think that’s an option in my condition, Dean”, Castiel said, still smiling slightly.

Dean would have killed to keep that smile on his beloved’s face.

“Would you like me to ask the staff to bring you up some of the food?” he asked tentatively.

“Mrs. Campbell has already said she would do that, but thank you for your consideration”, Castiel said.

Dean desperately wanted to ask what this appearance alone meant for their relationship of what was left of it, but he was afraid it might provoke a reaction. So he ate slowly, until Castiel excused himself to go and read in his room. Wolfgang hurried in at his bell, and glared disapprovingly at Dean as he guided the omega carefully from the room.

Still in the doghouse there, then.

+++++

The 1822 Christmas Eve ball at Pemberley was memorable indeed. Though possibly not for any of the reasons those attending might have expected.

Dean was busy greeting the latest bunch of arrivals when he saw a familiar face directly behind them. He froze in anger, as Metatron Wickham strode towards him.

“Sir”, the former soldier almost shouted, even though he was standing almost right in front of Dean, “your mate is a slut!”

Dean didn’t even think. His fist shot out so fast that the other man never saw it coming, and slumped to the ground with a thud. His wife ran up from behind and tried to help him up, his lip now
“You will withdraw that remark, or else!” Dean snarled.

“You have injured me!” Wickham said, sounding shocked. “I demand satisfaction!”

There was an audible gasp from the people around them. They all knew what that particular statement meant.

“Name the place!” Dean said stiffly.

“Gentlemen!”

The Reverend Green inserted himself between the two men, glaring at both of them.

“This is the season of goodwill!” he snapped. “It is neither the time nor the place!”

“I agree”, Wickham sneered. “Besides, a trained soldier must give a common civilian every chance. One month from this day, sir, at a place of your choosing.”

“I concur”, Dean sneered back.

Wickham glared at him, but was hustled away by his wife. The Reverend Green walked up to Dean.

“Very clever”, he murmured.

“What? Why?”

The vicar turned to him.

“Because not only has he engineered a duel on your birthday, he has ensured the authorities won’t touch him until it is over”, the vicar said dryly. “They never interfere in what they classify as ‘personal matters between gentlemen’.”

“Wickham is no gentlemen!”

“But he knows how to handle a gun”, the vicar said quietly. “Probably better than you do, my lord.”

Dean sipped his drink, and wondered at the sudden turn of events. In particular, exactly what his mate would make of it all.
Duel

Chapter Summary

Castiel decides to make the most of what is almost certainly his last month, and the deadly duel between Dean and the hateful Wickham begins....

December 1822

Dean didn’t have to wait long to find out his mate’s reaction to the duel. The reverend suggested he go to his room to calm down a little before resuming his duties. He had not been there five minutes before Castiel burst in.

“Is it true?” he demanded.

“Calm down, be…. Cas”, he said, guiding the omega over to a chair. “He insulted you. I could not let it ride.”

“Dean, I’m about to give birth to your next child, and I probably won’t survive!” Castiel said bluntly, his voice breaking with a sob. “And now you want to ensure the child loses both parents? What were you thinking?”

Dean hung his head

“You”, he muttered.

“What?”

“I was thinking of you”, Dean said heavily. “I know the odds aren’t good, and I may lose you over this. But this past year, ever since I did that terrible thing to you – I feel like I’ve lost you already. I’ve nothing left to live for, Cas. At least this way, I have a chance to remove a blemish from society. A blemish I failed to remove before. I intend to remedy that next month.”

“And what if he removes you, Dean?” Castiel said angrily. “Have you thought of that? He’s the one who’s spent years using firearms!”

“I shall make sure everything is arranged in case the worst happens”, Dean said steadily. “Our sons will of course look after you. And the authorities will….”

“Damn the authorities, Dean, I want you!”

The alpha stared at his mate in shock.

“After the way I treated you, you would have to be out of your mind…”

“I am out of my mind!” Castiel shouted, and Dean took a step back in shock. He had never seen the omega so angry before. “Out of my mind with worry over you, you stupid, reckless alpha! Damn it, I
He was crying by this time, and Dean was torn, half of him wanting to comfort his mate and the other half still holding back in a mixture of shame and fear. Then Castiel held out his arms to him, and his resistance melted; he rushed forward and hugged his mate close. The omega’s body melted into his, and for a wonderful moment it was as if the last eight terrible months had never been.

“I love you so much!” Dean whispered into the predictably untidy dark hair. “And I so don’t deserve your love.”

“Then if I might paraphrase Salome”, Castiel muttered into his collar, “you can prove it by bringing me the head of Metatron Wickham.”

“Would a bullet-ridden corpse be acceptable?” Dean said quietly.

“Perfectly!”

They stayed like that for what seemed like an eternity, until Dean reluctantly pulled back.

“I have to go back to my guests, beloved.” He winced as the endearment slipped out, waiting for a reaction.

There was one.

“Take me with you.”

“Cas?” He stared at his mate in astonishment.

“Only for half an hour at most”, Castiel said. “Then I want to go back to…. our room.”

Dean stared at him incredulously, before gently taking him by the hand and leading him from the room. And if there were tears in the alpha’s eyes, he frankly didn’t give a damn!

+++

True to his word, Castiel spent just over thirty minutes circulating and charming the guests, not even complaining when asked about his pregnancy for the umpteenth time. He might have spent longer, but when he caught a smothered yawn, Dean was by his side at once, insisting that the omega be allowed to go and rest, and summoning Wolfgang (who was still glaring at him) to escort him away.

By the time he had finally persuaded the last guest to leave, he was exhausted, and had quite forgotten his mate’s earlier promise. Until he entered his room and saw a familiar figure in his bed, reading by candlelight.

For possibly the first time in his life, Dean Winchester felt embarrassed in his own bedroom. He changed in the side room, and came out to find Castiel had snuffed out the candle and was sleeping in the dark, his figure lit only by the faint moonlight seeping through the gap in the curtains. Den slipped quietly into bed beside him, wondering where their shifting boundaries were just now.

“Cas, are you asleep?”

There was a pause.
“You are aware that is one of the stupidest questions ever?”

“Sorry. I was just wondering something.”

“Yes, Dean?”

“May I…. hold you?”

There was a longer pause. Dean was just wondering if he had made yet another blunder when the answer came across the darkness.

“Yes, Dean.”

It took him over a minute to sidle across the bed, until his front was in contact with his mate’s back. Slowly, he felt the tension leave his body.

“I love you, Dean.”

And with those four words something broke in the alpha. He threw an arm over the omega, dragging him closer in, and wept tears of relief onto Castiel’s nightshirt. The omega carefully turned his body round until he was facing his husband, and took the blond head gently onto his chest, his hand patting the alpha’s broad back. They stayed like that until exhaustion finally claimed them, and they both fell into a dreamless sleep.

+++

Dean woke the next day to two revelations, which came almost on top of each other. He was less than a month away from a death match against his deadliest foe, and the most beautiful omega in the whole wide world was lying in bed next to him, smiling in his sleep.

Then a third revelation arrived, which was markedly less welcome. Dean gulped. It was Christmas Day, he hadn’t got Cas a present! Damnation!

He slipped out of bed, being careful not to wake the omega (how could Cas make a snore sound cute?), slipped on his dressing-gown and slippers, and headed out of the room. He was turning his assorted problems over in his head, so didn’t notice how full the breakfast room was until he was through the door. His three sons, plus their mates or future mates, were all sat there, and all six of them were staring straight at him.

Ah.

There were few situations in his life that Dean Winchester had ever fled from, but he was just wondering whether this might be about to be added to the list when his eldest son stood up and came across to him. Seaden looked him up and down, then smiled.

“Papa has forgiven you”, he said quietly.

The others said nothing.

“He has”, Dean agreed.
“But you’re still a bloody fool for taking on a soldier with a gun!” Scaden snapped. You’ll spend the next month training up, to give yourself at least a chance.”

“The estate….”

“We will all run the estate”, Diniel said, heaving his large figure off a chair. Garth immediately hurried round to assist him. “Galahad is coming over today to start your training; there’s nothing he doesn’t know about guns, despite his age.”

“And we’ve let the servants take the Christmas decorations down”, Ryazan said.


“We’re not going to celebrate Christmas with this hanging over us”, Garth said crisply. “Your staff agree; it was their idea, actually. After you’ve disposed of Wickham, we’ll put them all up again for a couple of weeks, and celebrate a real Christmas where we can all relax.”

“Now get some food inside you, then get started”, Scaden said, fondly. He hugged his father quickly, before returning to his seat, leaving Dean standing there, dumbstruck.

“Uh… thanks, everyone”, he muttered, before moving over to the food table.

+~+~+

Things were definitely not back to normal. Dean hadn’t even asked, but he somehow knew anything more than cuddling in the bedroom would not be allowed. That everyone seemed to have followed Castiel’s lead and forgiven him – well, everyone except Wolfgang, who still looked at him as if he would like to stab him – was a great relief. Even better was that the young Galahad Bingley, despite being barely turned eighteen, proved as skilled in weaponry and duelling tactics as Dean had hoped, and was able to considerably improve his skills in the short time they had.

There were no New Year’s Eve celebrations to see in 1823. No-one at Pemberley felt it would be right, given the circumstances. But there was still excitement; Diniel went into labour several weeks early, and shortly before midnight was safely delivered of an alpha son, whom they named Alexander Castiel Winchester, after both his grandfathers. This time, Dean didn’t even care if they saw him shed a tear. That baby would be master of Pemberley one day, and the Winchester line was surely secured. And to cap it all, news arrived from Lynton that Lancelot and Sasha had had their first child on the same day, a healthy beta who they were calling Ryan, after his grandfather.

+~+~+

January 1823

“You have to get over it, Wolfie.”

Wolfgang jumped. He had been toying with a piece of apple pie in the kitchen, having finished for the day after helping the men shoe three of the horses.

“Get over what, Mrs. Moseley?” he asked.

“This hatred you have towards the master”, she said. “It’s upsetting for Mr. Castiel, now they’re almost back together again.”
He stared at her, confused.

“What do you mean, ‘almost’ back together?”

She looked at him knowingly, and the penny finally dropped. He blushed.

“It’s not right!” he said. “I know the master was drunk and all that, but even so, he shouldn’t have
done it. Mr. Castiel is one of the most beautiful people alive….”

She came and sat down across the table from him.

“Wolfie”, she said gently, “you’re in love, aren't you?”

The huge beta nodded silently.

“But I've got nothing, Mrs M.”, he sniffed. “He's the top level of society, and I'm just a servant!”

“Some of Lord Winchester's family reacted that way when he married a humble little omega from
Hertfordshire”, she mused. “Some, like Lady Naomi, wouldn't even speak to him for years as a
result. But they do say love conquers all!”

“I'd like to see it conquer this!”

She thought for a moment.

“Do you know where this duel is being held, Wolfie?” she asked.

“Cartham Common”, he said. “On Mr. Dean’s birthday, at ten a.m.”

“You should be there.”

“Why? I’m Mr. Castiel's servant, not Mr. Dean’s.”

“I just have a feeling”, she said. “Metatron Wickham is many things, but he's not dumb. He swore
he'd have revenge on Mr. Samuel for the humiliation he suffered, and I think he still stands by that.
He knows he'll be arrested and sent to jail once the duel is over, so he's got nothing to lose.”
She looked at him meaningfully. He thought for some time, before realization dawned.
“He wouldn't!” he exclaimed in horror.

+++

Wickham smiled as the Reverend Green gave him the card.

“The details of the duel”, the reverend explained. “Unfortunately Cartham Common is the closest
place available. The sheriff of Derbyshire bans all duels in his county.”

“I'll be there”, Wickham said grimly.

“Are you proposing your wife as your second?”

“Yes. Is that a problem?”
“It is technically a breach of duel practice” the reverend said. “However, I foresaw that you might so do, and your rival has agreed to accept her presence, provided you agree to the field of battle being limited to the seven of us.”

Wickham frowned.

“Seven?” he asked.

“Myself, you, Mr. Winchester, Mrs. Wickham as your second, Mr. Lancelot Bingley as Lord Winchester's second, Doctor St. John for obvious reasons, and Wolfgang Smith, Laird Castiel's valet.”

“Why the hell do we need a valet?” Wickham snapped.

“Because your slight was against the laird, he is entitled to either attend or nominate a representative to attend on his behalf”, the reverend explained patiently. “It is within the rules, a copy of which I have brought for you. Lord Winchester is to provide the duelling pistols, and you will take first pick of weapon.”

“I'll be there!” Wickham said grimly.

The reverend bowed and left. Wickham grinned after him.

Galahad Bingley, just as planned, he thought to himself. I'll be revenged on you yet, dear Samuel!”

“Gentlemen, the rules are these”, the Reverend Green said, staring at the two men in front of him. “These are two identical pistols, each loaded with one shot. You will each chose one – Mr. Wickham first, as Lord Winchester had provided the weapons – then stand back to back on the mark provided. I will call out the word ‘begin’ followed by the numbers from one to ten. On the command ten, then and only then you may turn and fire. Any breach of these rules, and the contest is immediately awarded to your opponent. Is that clearly understood?”

It was a cold January day – Dean’s fiftieth birthday – and the little party had assembled on the common. As the reverend had promised Wickham, it was just the seven of them there, although there were several other people standing off from the field of battle.

“Let's just get on with it!” Wickham snapped.

“Agreed!” Dean said, glaring back.

Wickham chose his gun, and marched immediately away to the mark, seemingly impatient for it to be started. His wife blew a kiss at him and scowled at Dean as he took the other gun, the alpha following his foe over to the mark where they stood back to back. The reverend waited for them to be still, then called out, “Begin!”

“One.”

“Two.”

“Three.”
“Four.”

“Five.”

“Six.”

“Seven.”

“Eight… no!”

Wickham suddenly spun round and held out his pistol, pointing it at his target just a few yards away. He squeezed the trigger…..
January 1822

Galahad Bingley had warned Dean something like this might happen, when duelling with someone of Wickham's low reputation. So when he heard the sudden rustle of movement behind him, even before the reverend's warning shout, Dean instinctively rolled to one side, expecting to hear the sound of his enemy's gun going off any minute. It did – matched almost simultaneously by a strange swish sound of something cutting through the air.

Dean stared in shock. Wickham was pointing the gun not at him but at Galahad Bingley, whose left arm was bleeding heavily. But he was in a better state that Dean's opponent, who looked totally aghast. A gleaming dagger-handle protruded from his chest, where it had precisely pierced his heart, his life-blood rapidly seeping through his shirt. He slumped slowly to the ground, his gun falling from his hand, and the duel was very clearly over.

Margaret Wickham had collapsed in tears, and was already being taken away by four large men, one of whom Dean recognized as the parish constable. He stared dumbly at the scene in front if him, unable to believe what had happened. Doctor St. John hurried up to the inert figure of the former soldier, and quickly checked for a pulse. The look on his face when he raised it to them made his answer clear even before he spoke.

“Dead”, he said flatly. “Those who live by the sword die by it.”

“Or the dagger”, Wolfgang said flatly, coming up and effortlessly pulling his weapon from the dead body, before wiping it on his handkerchief as if knifing people was all in a day’s work. “Are you all right, sir?” he asked Galahad.

The young beta stared at him in shock.

“You saved my life!” he ground out. “He was trying to kill me.”

“He swore vengeance on your family”, Wolfgang said heavily. “He knew that as a weapons expert, you would train your uncle and attend the duel as his second. What better chance to kill the son of the man who had just humiliated him?”

“I can never repay you....”

“Get that arm seen to”, Wolfgang interrupted him. “You're losing too much blood. I'll take you to the cart.”

He hoisted Galahad effortlessly into his arms, then seemed to remember Dean, and turned to him. Dean did not back away, but it was a close run thing.
“Mr. Castiel has chosen to take you back, sir”, he said crisply. “I shall respect that judgment, and protect you as I shall protect him. But if you ever hurt him like that again, the next person to feel this dagger will be you!”

Dean nodded.

“Wolfie, if I ever treat him like that again, I shall take your dagger and use it on myself!”

The huge beta grinned, then strode off carrying Galahad, whose uninjured arm was wrapped around him as he slipped towards unconsciousness. The four men had by this time escorted Mrs. Wickham into the local constable's cart, but now there was a commotion around the carriages behind, which continued until Samuel Bingley came loping over, stopping only to briefly check his son was all right.

“Dean, you have to get back to Pemberley right away!”

“Why?”

“Castiel has gone into labour!”

Suddenly Dean's good day seemed about to head south. He scrambled to his feet and hurried over to his coach.

+++++

The journey home seemed to take forever, and Dean cursed the fact he had accepted a duelling place so far away. It took nearly an hour to get home, and when he got there Dean fairly charged into the hall, nearly knocking over Doctor Gallagher, who was just emerging from one of the side-rooms. He looked exhausted.

“My lord”, he bowed.

“Bugger my lord!” Dean snapped. “Is Cas all right?”

There was the sound of a child screaming from the room the doctor had just come out of, and it rapidly became a chorus.

“You have two fine baby sons, an alpha and a beta”, the doctor said.

Dean wanted to shake him.

“Cas!” he almost shouted.

“Your mate is fine”, the doctor smiled. “Exhausted, certainly, but fine. I was worried up to about an hour ago, then he suddenly seemed to relax, and the births went really well.”

An hour ago, Dean thought. That was when I survived and Wickham died. Cas knew.

“I have to see him!”

“Of course. Come this way.”
The lounge was a mess, with blood on several of the surfaces, but the master of Pemberley had eyes neither for that nor for the occupants of the two makeshift cots to the side. Instead he saw only the man he loved, the man he would always love, pale, tired, but alive! He was the most beautiful sight he had ever seen. The eyes were as blue as ever, and the hair was actually a shade tidier than usual, amazingly. Dean rushed forwards, and sank down beside the sofa.

“You're alive!”

He knew he was crying at this point, but he just didn't care. Castiel reached across and stopped a tear from falling.

“So are you”, he said softly. “You killed him.”

“Wolfie killed him, when he tried to shoot Guy before the call. He's dead, and the authorities have taken her away too. We're safe now.”

“I love you, Dean.”

“And I love you, Cas. You and the five wonderful sons you have given me.”

Cas sighed, and Dean took his hand and kissed it gently.

“Have you thought of any names for the two over there?” he asked.

The omega blushed.

“You'll think it stupid”, he muttered.

“Try me.”

“I really like the names Castor and Polydeuces”, Castiel blurted out. “Castor because it's like me, plus they were brothers, faithful to the end.”

Dean hugged his mate.

“I like them too”, he smiled. “Castor and Polydeuces it is!”

Castiel kissed him, and they held each other tightly, whilst the two newest Winchesters slept on.

+++

Dean woke up the following morning to find the bed empty. For a horrible moment he thought the past twenty-four hours had been a dream, but then he saw a small Christmas present lying on Cas' bedside table, with his name on it. Reaching across, he smelt the scent of the omega on the sheets and pillows, and rolled over to wrap himself in it, before picking up the box and unwrapping it. He stared at the contents for nearly a whole minute before gently placing it back onto the table, then threw himself into the pillows and wept.

It was another sampler, and he knew Castiel must have spent the last month making it. Much simpler than the first one, it had a green and blue border with a green D and a blue C entwined in the centre, and cream-coloured hearts all around.
It was beautiful. And he knew he so didn't deserve it.

++++

Castiel had got up early to attend to Castor and Polydeuces, despite the fact the staff had already drawn up a rota to make sure they had 24-hour care for the next few weeks. He considered going back to bed, but seeing the time decided instead to head for the breakfast-room, noting with pleasure how the staff had got all the Christmas decorations back up overnight. The only thing left was the decorating of the tree, which was traditionally done by the family anyway.

His husband was already at the table, and by Castiel's place there was an official-looking envelope addressed to him. He looked up at Dean curiously, and the alpha gestured him to open it. He looked strangely nervous, Castiel thought, but duly slit it open and drew out a formal-looking certificate. And gasped.

“It's a Certificate of Revocation”, Dean confirmed, looking anxiously at him. “I shall never forget the way you looked at me that terrible day at Lynton, and I behaved like a monster in claiming that I 'owned' you. No-one should ever own someone as beautiful as you, Cas. That formally waives all claims I have on you, and sets you free. And I promise to take you shopping as soon as you feel up to it, and you can buy as many of those hideous sweaters as you like!”

Castiel stared at him in astonishment, then rushed round to hug him. He could feel the alpha shaking in his chair, and could only hope it was out of happiness.

“Merry belated Christmas, Cas”, Dean smiled, easing the omega into his arms. Castiel sighed pleasurably.

“I love you, Dean Winchester. Merry belated Christmas.”
January 1823

When he awoke the next morning, Dean was momentarily confused, thinking for one awful moment that it was the day of the duel, and he still had to face his hated rival. Then he realized that there was a warm and wonderful omega in the bed with him and he relaxed, pulling Castiel closer to him. Last night he and his mate had made love — sex had been involved, but only after Castiel had agreed to it (or to be more accurate, begged for it!), and this morning Dean felt wonderful. He could write off most of the last year as an aberration, and get on with his life and his wonderful mate.

“Not bad for a fifty-year-old!” Castiel muttered quietly.

Dean slapped him lightly on the behind.

“I thought you were asleep, beloved.”

“Hard to sleep when that thing keeps rubbing the back of my leg, o insatiable alpha!”

Dean eased him gently round, and kissed him lightly on the lips.

“May I?” he asked tentatively.

“You don’t have to ask, Dean….”

“Yes I do!”

He said it with such vehemence that Castiel almost edged away, but his husband held onto him. Dean steadied himself.

“I know we both want to put the past year behind us”, he said carefully, “but I did a terrible thing to you. Let this be the one thing we keep to remind us of it. I will never assume you want me to do anything without asking you first. I promise that on my honour as an alpha.”

“Dean, you don’t have to….”

“Please, Cas! Let me have this!”

He looked so earnest that the omega smiled.

“All right”, he agreed. “And yes.”

“Yes what?” Dean asked, puzzled.
Castiel reached down, and Dean suddenly knew what that yes had been for. He grinned, and pulled his mate closer.

+++

Over at Lynton Grange, there was trouble in the sitting room. And in the fourth bedroom.

Galahad Bingley struggled to get up, only to find a very firm hand forcing him back down. Doctor St. John glared at him.

“Absolute rest for at least a week, Mr. Bingley”, he said firmly. “I’ll see you again next Sunday, and we’ll decide then what you can and cannot do.”

“I won’t be held prisoner in my own house!”

The doctor sighed heavily.

“I had a feeling when I spoke to Castiel and Gabriel that you might be a little ‘difficult’”, he said, smiling slightly. “So I persuaded them to allocate me someone to oversee your convalescence, and make sure you don’t overexert yourself.”

Galahad brightened.

“An attractive nurse?” he asked hopefully.

“No exactly”, rumbled a familiar voice from the door.

Galahad turned, and froze. Suddenly he knew what the next seven days would hold – him doing exactly what he was told. Because standing at the door was someone who could probably beat him to a pulp without so much as breaking a sweat. The person who only recently had saved his life.

Wolfgang came across to the bed, and sat down beside it.

“The doctor says you’re not to overdo things”, he said studiously. “Mr. Castiel has loaned me to his brother for the next week or two.”

Galahad sighed.

“Guess I’m staying in bed, then”, he groused. The doctor smiled benevolently at him.

“There’s a good beta!”

+++

Downstairs in the sitting room, matters were proceeding even less smoothly. Samuel Bingley stared at his eldest son and his mate in shock, before finally finding his voice.

“You want to move where?”

Gabriel winced. His husband was normally one of the quietest of creatures, but that voice usually heralded the rare (but not rare enough) Sam temper.
“I’m sure they have a perfectly well thought-out plan, Samson”, he said carefully. He looked meaningfully at the two tall blond alphas before adding, “you do have a plan, don’t you, boys?”

Samandriel looked at Scaden before answering.

“We want to go to the Missouri Territory”, he said slowly.

Sam frowned.

“Isn’t that near Red Indian lands?” he said at once.

“Their lands are all over the place”, Scaden said reassuringly. “We both think the territory will become part of the United States officially once there are enough people there. The first people in will be like the Founding Fathers, just further west.”

Sam looked at his mate, who nodded slightly.

“How long have you been planning this?” Gabriel asked his son.

Samandriel blushed.

“We first thought of it last year, but what with things…. you know”, he said. “So we decided to keep it to ourselves until things sorted themselves out.”

“Which means you’re now going to have to tell Dean”, Sam said pointedly.

“He’ll flip!” Scaden said at once.

They all looked at each other. None of the others felt inclined or able to contradict that statement.

“We could always just go and leave you two to tell him”, Samandriel suggested.

Both Gabriel and Sam gave his death glares.

“Maybe not”, he added.

+++

Castiel looked up in surprise as Dean swore under his breath across the breakfast table.

“What is it, Dean?” he asked.

His husband waved the newspaper across at him.

“Two days, and it’s in the papers!” he grumbled. “Mr. Metatron Wickham, formerly an officer in His Majesty’s armed forces, dead after a duel on Cartham Common.”

Castiel took the paper and quickly scanned the article.

“They don’t say who else was involved”, he pointed out. “And it’s only a small article on page two. They seem to be more interested in this pre-historic discovery in Glamorganshire.”
“Outshone by an old mummy!” Dean grumbled. “I suppose history has its uses.”

“Not a mummy”, Castiel said patiently. “It’s far older than the Ancient Egyptians, and proof that our ancestors weren’t just cavemen who went around shouting ‘Ug!’ at each other. Perhaps people in those times weren’t as brutal as we once thought.”

Dean was silent.

“You’re thinking of us both in cavemen outfits, aren’t you?” Castiel grinned.

“I was not!”

Castiel raised an eyebrow at him. Dean sighed.

“All right, I was. But there’s something wonderful and basic about just throwing your omega over your shoulder and taking him home to your bed. I'm allowed the odd fantasy, Cas!”

Castiel grinned, and went over to the door. As he passed his husband’s seat, he whispered, “I’m sure that clothes store in Buxton could make us some caveman costumes”

Dean could not suppress a whimper of happiness. He so did not deserve to have the best omega in the whole wide world!

+++

Today Dean had to travel to Manchester for business. He would always associate the town with that disastrous trip last April, which had come close to destroying his marriage…

He stopped himself. That was wrong; the whole disastrous episode was nobody’s fault but his own. He had let his innate pride and jealousy carry him away to the point where he’d thrown away the most beautiful thing in his life, and nearly lost everything that mattered to him. He knew he would spend the rest of his life, no matter how long or short that would be, trying to right that wrong, and this trip today was an important next step. If anything could show his beloved just how sorry he was, this was it.

He just hoped Carstairs would be free in two weeks’ time.

++++

Galahad Bingley opened the door cautiously, and looked up and down the corridor. The coast was clear; his guard-dog had gone to the kitchens to get him some hot chocolate, and he would have at least five minutes before he came back. He stepped confidently out into the corridor.

“Going somewhere, sir?” came a voice from behind him.

He froze. That was impossible….

“The doctor said rest, and he’ll be back in a few days to check you over”, Wolfgang said amiably.

“I’m bored!” Galahad complained. “I just want to get outside for a bit.”
“If you let me put you in the wheelchair, I could wheel you around”, Wolfgang offered.

Galahad snorted.

“Betas do not get ported round in wheelchairs!” he said flatly.

“Then betas do not go outside!” Wolfgang said, equally determinedly.

“You’re far too bossy for a beta!” Galahad grumbled.

“I’m actually a false omega”, Wolfgang said, steering his charge back into the bedroom. “I could bear children if I wanted, but Doctor St. John says I could also impregnate an omega and have sons that way.”

“Once you’ve done being my jailer!” Galahad grumbled. “And now I’m being ordered about by a mere omega!”

The minute he said the words he wished them back. Wolfgang winced as if he’s been struck. There was a pained silence.

“I’m sorry, Wolfie”, the alpha said, retreating swiftly back into his room. “That was beneath me, especially considering…..”

“Yes, it was”, scowled the beta.

He helped his patient gently onto the bed, handed him his book, then pointedly took his own book to the furthest chair in the room. Galahad sighed.

+-+++

February 1823

The first day of the month was a Saturday, and amongst the many vessels that tied up in London on that grim misty morning was the Santa Maria, from Boston via Lisbon. A tall young man stepped off the ship, and made his way quickly to the customs office. There was something military in his bearing, which drew the attention of the sleepy official. Though not as much as the name on his travel documents, and the fact both his name and picture strongly resembled something he’d seen only hours before in his newspaper. He suddenly became much more alert.

“Would you please step this way, 'Mr. Wickham'….?”
Victor gets a shock, Ellen and Bobby lose half their garden, and Galahad goes a step too far with Wolfgang. Mrs Moseley makes a difficult decision.

February 1823

Victor raised an eyebrow when he saw the mess in the kitchen. His mate was cooking dinner, next to a large pile of orange skins.

“Pregnancy giving you cravings again, Bron?” he said sympathetically.

“I've had over twenty of the damned things today, and I still want more!” the omega groused. “I can't believe I let you knock me up so soon after Wolseley!”

Victor grinned.

“As I remember it, it was you that pinned me to the bed, and told me that you would remove part of my anatomy I didn't knot you within the next ten minutes!” he reminded his mate. “And much as I deal with the dark side of our fair city, I wasn't prepared to suffer that. Particularly when the alternative was so delicious!”

Bruno laughed, and started on another orange.

“Oh, one of your men dropped a letter off for you. It's on the hall table.”

Victor frowned. Very few of the men who provided him with his information were aware of his home address, and those that did knew only to bother him there in urgent situations.

“You can take it into your study and read it there, if you want privacy”, Bruno suggested, stirring a saucepan.

“After recent events, I don't think I have much that's private from you, Bron!”

“Go read your letter, husband dearest”, Bruno laughed. “Dinner will be ready in ten minutes.”

Victor hugged him and kissed his neck, then walked away to his study.

++~++

Ten minutes later, he was frantically making a list of people to call when he heard his mate's stentorian tones announcing that dinner was ready. Sighing, he locked his letter in his desk and went out. This was all he needed!

++~++
Castiel was surprised when one of the footmen entered the lounge, and informed him that his aunt and uncle had come to see him. Ellen and Bobby Singer always wrote ahead, so any departure from that norm was cause for concern. Worried, he asked for them to be let in.

“We hate to impose, Castiel”, his aunt said abruptly, “but would you and Dean be able to put us up for a while?”

“Of course!” Castiel said at once. “What has happened?”

“Part of the hill above our house rolled into our back garden”, his uncle explained, sitting down heavily in a chair. “The surveyors say the house itself is at risk from any further collapse, so they want us out whilst they stabilize the bank. At least one month, maybe more.”

“I'm sure Dean would love you to stay here”, Castiel smiled. “It's only the two of you, after all.”

Ellen and Robert exchanged glances, and she sat down too.

“We did have my nephew Raziel staying with us”, he said. “My late sister Karen's son. When Rufus died, his brother Ranulph took him in. But his wife was never happy about it, and now they're off to Canada, she won't let him go with them. Cow!”

His wife looked reprovingly at him, and the old man blushed.

“Sorry, love”, he muttered.

“So the boy came to live with us last month”, Ellen went on. Then for some reason she too blushed. “It's not been easy....”

Castiel was confused for a moment before he worked it out.

“The boy is a half-caste?” he ventured carefully.

“Clearly not one of us, and equally clearly not one of them”, Robert said. “Painfully shy, as well. We've hardly been able to get a word out of him since he came. This couldn't have come at a worse time.”

“Why?” Castiel asked.

“We finally had a letter from Jo”, Ellen said. “Apparently she decided against Central America at the last minute – too dangerous even for her! - so she has been working her way across the United States. She should be back here any time in the next month or so. And us without a home.”

“That's not true”, Castiel said at once. “You'll always have a home here; it's hardly as if we don't have the space! I'll ring for Mrs. Campbell and get her to sort out rooms for you.”

Wolfgang Smith was probably one of the most even-tempered men on the planet. But a whole week of his charge whining, complaining and endlessly trying to slip his leash meant his patience was just about exhausted. When Doctor St. John said Galahad could go out on walks but should always have someone with him just in case he found it too much, the beta visibly crowed. Sure enough, fifteen
minutes later he dispatched Wolfgang to fetch him a book, then slipped silently out of the room once he had gone. He made it almost to the top of the stairs before he saw a footman crossing the hall below. He waited for the man to go, edging back slightly to avoid being seen, only to step into something very solid just behind him.

How on earth...?

“Going somewhere, sir?”

Galahad spun round angrily. Wolfgang was looking equally angry, his arms folded.

“I don’t need you to watch over my every move!” the alpha almost shouted. “I am going to the herb garden, and there is nothing you can do to stop me!”

It took him less than a second to realize that was a mistake. There was something in the huge man’s eyes that looked very bad.

“You want to go to the herb garden, sir?” he said softly, his voice dripping with menace. “I have had it up to here with your complaints, your moaning, your rudeness – frankly, you are insufferable! I’ll give you the bloody herb garden!”

And with that he grabbed the beta as if he weighed nothing and threw him over his shoulder, carrying him easily down the stairs. He didn't even stop when Gabriel came out of the study, wondering what all the noise was. He just nodded his head to his charge's papa as he strode past, then headed out of the door, ignoring the shouts, yells and thumpings on the back from his prisoner.

Gabriel watched him go, and grinned. His third son had always had too high an opinion of himself. It would do him good to be taken down a peg or two. He only hoped Wolfgang didn't go so far as to dump poor Guy in the fountain!

+~+~+

“His name is Brady DeVille”, Mr. Moskewitz said. “And yes, I am very much afraid he is Mr. Metatron Wickham's son.”

Victor sighed heavily. So it was true.

“How?” he asked eventually.

Joseph Moskewitz consulted his notes.

“Mr. Metatron Wickham had an affair some two years into his marriage”, he explained. “It was when we trying to keep the Americans out of the war that had just restarted against Napoleon. The Americans sent over some diplomats, and one of them ended up attached to Wickham's regiment. And perhaps predictably, Wickham ended up attached to the diplomat's wife. Horizontally speaking.”

“Didn't the man find out?” Victor asked.

"She was able to pass it off as one of his. And he died in an accident a few years later – a real accident; I checked. She raised the child herself, but she died three months ago. Wickham had arranged some travel documents if his son ever felt like looking him up; unfortunately he arrived just
days after the duel. And told customs official his name was Metatron Wickham, who had just been reported dead in the Times! No wonder they held him for twenty-four hours!"

“But he’s free now?”

“I am afraid so. I do not know what his plans are, but I doubt they are good. What little I was able to learn of his past suggests he is as unstable and malicious as his late, unlamented father.”

Victor groaned inwardly.

“Thank you, sir”, he said. “How much do I owe you?”

The Jew smiled.

“You waited six years after helping me that time, and never asked for payment”, he said eventually. “Maybe I will need your services again, Mr. Henriksen, upon which I am sure you will help me as, I hope, I have helped you. The information on that sheet includes where Mr. DeVille is staying. I would expect him to seek work in the docks so as to amass some funds first, but one never knows with people like that.”

“More’s the pity! Thank you, sir.”

+++

Castiel looked at the card that had been presented to him, and grinned to himself. His brother had related the amusing events at Lynton the other day, and his valet had arrived back at Pemberley looking very sorry for himself, even though Gabriel had reassured him he was not angry with him.

“You're cross with me, sir”.

Castiel smiled at the beta.

“No, Wolfie”, he said gently. “I know Galahad Bingley, and there are times when he does need putting in his place. Perhaps you were a tad too forcible.....”

“He made me so mad, sir!” the beta burst out. “I virtually saved his life, and he treated me like dirt!”

“Indeed he did.”

Wolfgang spun round, to see Sam Bingley and his third son standing in the doorway. Galahad hung his head in shame, until his father gave him a sharp shove.

“Well?” Sam said sharply.

Galahad blushed, but walked over to Wolfgang.

“I am.... really sorry for the way I behaved”, he said, not looking the taller man in the eye. “You deserved so much better.”

Wolfgang looked suspiciously at him.

“Oh, Right. Well, then, I am sorry for hoisting you over my shoulder and porting you round the
garden.”

“I deserved it.” Galahad still stared at the carpet, as if he found it suddenly fascinating.

“Guy!” Sam said warningly.

The beta looked up, almost fearfully.

“Please come back!” he said. “I promise to behave, and Doctor St. John says it will only be for two more weeks!”

Wolfgang looked at him uncertainly, then at his master.

“Your decision, Wolfie”, Castiel said firmly. “If you want to, then you may go.”

“All right”, the huge beta said slowly. “But if he ever speaks to me like that again, next time I'll dump him in the fountain and leave him there!”

“You wouldn't!” Galahad gasped.

Wolfgang took a step towards him, and the other beta instinctively stepped back.

“Just try me!”

+~+~+

The trouble with predictions is that, when they're bad, they also tend to be right. And Missouri Moseley knew that more than most.

She had had a bad feeling for some weeks now, but had kept it to herself. But after all her masters had been through, she had succumbed eventually, and looked long and hard into the future. And the one that was most likely was worrying for many people. Including herself.

Sighing, she went across to the huge dresser, and removing a key from her ample bosom, unlocked a small drawer. Inside were two things she hoped she would never have to use. One was a bottle of red pills, tightly sealed. The other was a sharp dagger, that she had borrowed from Wolfgang some months ago and 'forgotten' to return. Though she was fairly sure the beta had made a point of not asking for it back.

She sighed again, and wondered which of the two she would have to use.

You were right, Grandmother Okry, she thought bitterly. But I had these powers for a reason, and if needs be, I will pay the price.....
Bruising Encounters

Chapter Summary

Dean finds out about his eldest son's plans to leave the country. Adam and Michael find society less than accepting, and Galahad goes up the wrong staircase, a decision he later comes to regret.

February 1823

Before he had met Castiel, Dean had been largely indifferent to major social events like the ball he was currently attending. However, the omega's arrival at Pemberley made him increasingly resentful at having to spend time in the public gaze. This particular evening was proving more difficult than most, and only the calming presence of his mate at his side was preventing several people from being hit very hard. Though he noted that, for once, even Monseigneur Castiel Winchester's amazing forbearance was beginning to show signs of wearing thin.

The cause was standing some distance in front of them, and was Lord Adam Fitzwilliam and his mate, attending their first public event since the birth the year before. That society might take against someone keeping a mate in secret could have been expected, but the reactions of the majority of people here was openly hostile, ignoring the couple such that they stood in their own little island of space. Dean was about to suggest to Castiel that they go over to join them when he saw the host, Lord Windermere, approaching them. 'Old Windy' (Dean had wanted to reprove his mate for calling him that, but it was just too accurate) was a minor baron, puffed up with his own importance and, as Castiel had so rightly said, too much food.

Lord Windermere looked sharply at Adam.

"I seem to recall your invitation was for one person, my lord”, he said coldly.

Adam pulled Michael in closer to him.

"I have brought my mate, as have several other people”, he said calmly. “Is that a problem, my lord?”

"Keeping your marriage secret from your dear late brother was a vile thing to do!” Lord Windermere spat out. “You should be hanging your head in shame!”

Adam looked as if he was about to hit the man, but Dean moved swiftly to stand between them. He glanced sharply at the host.

“Our party is leaving!” he said loudly. “We do not wish to attend an event when members of our family are unwelcome. Furthermore, my lord, you are no longer welcome at Pemberley until you apologize for treating my cousin like this. And that goes for anyone else here who shares your 'beliefs'!”

Lord Windermere stared at him angrily.
“Your family arrangements are highly irregular, Lord Winchester!” he snapped.

Dean stepped closer to him whilst baring his teeth, and Castiel was afraid there was going to be violence. Fortunately the tall alpha merely snarled in the face of the elderly man, before turning and leading his family away.

+++

“I want a full list of anyone who has either slighted or offended either of you of late!” Dean said angrily, once they were all safely back in his carriage and on the way back to Pemberley. “No-one speaks to a member of my family like that! No-one!”

He was clearly still furious. Castiel nestled closer to him, trying to calm him down.

“You do realize that our own ball will be sparsely attended if you ignore all those people”, he said quietly.

“I do not care!” Dean said firmly. “People like that are not worth our time!”

“Why are you having the Valentine's Ball so late?” Adam asked, clearly trying to change the subject slightly. “I thought you two normally do something special on the big day?”

“I planned something for Cas”, Dean explained, “but it's not ready yet. He'll get it on the twenty-eighth, though, so at least it will still be in February.”

Castiel squeezed his arm.

“I am looking forward to it!” he whispered.

+++

Castiel stared in shock at his eldest son.

“The United States?” he said at last. “Permanently?”

Scaden pulled his mate closer, and ruffled his hair.

“We have thought it through”, he said. “Besides, we're really only in the way here, now that Lance’s and Dino’s sons will inherit the houses. It's a great adventure.”

“What's a great adventure?”

They all froze. Dean had just walked in at the door. Castiel covertly checked round to see if there was anything breakable in the vicinity.

“Your son and his mate want to settle in the United States, in the new lands west of the Mississippi River”, the omega said flatly.

They all waited for the inevitable explosion. Dean sighed.

“Very well.”
It was the best part of a minute before Scaden was the first to find his voice.

“You... don’t mind, father?” he said, amazed.

“If your papa is all right with it, then it is fine by me.”
Another prolonged silence.
“Well, I suppose I am”, Castiel managed eventually.

“Good”, Dean said. “Now you can tell me all about your detailed plans for it, and see if your papa and I can help you at all.”

++++

That night, Dean got to their bedchamber to find his mate already under the covers, though not asleep.

“You took Scaden's announcement very well”, Castiel observed.

Dean pulled on his nightshirt.

“Wolfie told me about their plans the last time I was over at Lynton”, he explained. “Don't worry, Cas. I've learnt my lesson about over-reacting.”

He slipped under the covers, then paused.

“You.... you're wearing the French maid's costume, aren't you?” he said quietly.

“Still think you don't over-react?” Castiel teased.

For the first time that day, Dean Winchester did over-react. And he enjoyed every minute of it.

++++

Galahad Bingley was in trouble.

He had woken in the middle of the night, and decided to go downstairs and get a drink. He walked into one of the doors in the dark – he’d have a bruise to remember that by the following morning – but got his drink and eventually made it back to his room, climbed back into bed, and dropped straight off to sleep. And if he dreamt of holding a certain large beta in his arms, well, no-one was to know.

At least, until he woke the following morning to find that the dream was very much a reality, and he was indeed wrapped around that same beta, who was awake and eying him curiously. Galahad suddenly remembered to his horror that he had returned via the back staircase, and the fourth door along must therefore have been not his but Wolfgang’s, across the corridor.

“I take it there is a reason for this?” the huge man said calmly.

Galahad was all too aware that the beta didn't seem to favour nightshirts. Or any bed apparel. That body.....

“I'll just go back to my room and pretend this never happened, all right?” he said quietly.
He was two-thirds of the way to the door before he heard a quiet chuckle from behind him.

“You can pretend if you wish.... sir!”

He fled with what little remained of his dignity.

+~+~+

He managed to lose that dignity at breakfast, though. Typically almost everyone was there before him – all five brothers, his parents and Scay, just no Wolfgang – and the way they all looked at him was far, far too knowing. That damned man must have told them!

“All right, I slept part of the night in Wolfie's room”, he groused, coming to the table. “So shoot me!”

There was a stunned silence, broken eventually by Gabriel.

“We were all just wondering where you got that bruise”, he said, unusually calmly for him. “But thank you for the information.”

Galahad suddenly remembered walking into the door in the dark last night. And he had just come out and....

He took his plate and stalked from the room, trying to ignore his siblings' (and his papa's) laughter.

+~+~+

The Pemberley Valentine's Day Ball was a great success, even if many of the county's top nobility were notable by their absence. Dean made a point of inviting along a friendly journalist from the local newspaper, and making sure he knew why these people were currently not welcome at Pemberley. He also unveiled a new statue for the garden entrance, showing the twin Greek gods of love given and love returned, Eros and Anteros. In a short speech, he had explained how Anteros was created because the Greeks understood that love had to be both given and received to work, just as he and his mate could not exist without each other. Castiel had blushed intensely, but smiled.

Later, in the privacy of Dean's study, Castiel made an observation.

“You invited Mr. Carstairs”, he said. The family lawyer usually only came to Pemberley on business, living as he did the other side of Manchester.

“Yes”, Dean said. “He's staying the night. He was away in London for much of the month, and I needed him here to give you your Valentine's Day gift. It's not much – you sort of have it already – but I think it's necessary.”

He unlocked his desk and drew out a single sheet of paper, which he unfolded and passed to his mate. Castiel read it, and went pale.

“Dean!”

“Pemberley was half yours from the moment you set foot in it as my mate”, the alpha said, blushing fiercely. “But I wanted to make it official. Sign that, Carstairs will counter-sign it tomorrow, and you will own half of the whole estate for your lifetime, it only reverting to either me or my heir when you
pass on.”

“But this is your house....”

“No, Cas!” Dean said firmly. “It's our house. It's been our house for over two decades now, and I want to make that official. Please let me do this.”

He looked beseechingly at the omega, who smiled and gently kissed him.

“I love you, Dean Winchester”, he said firmly. “And I will spend the rest of my natural life loving you. Now, take me to our bedchamber, and let me show you just how much.”

Dean did.

+~+~+

March 1823

The spring rains were beating hard against the window, and the room was already half dark.

“Doctor St. John says I am perfectly well again”, Galahad said quietly.

“Then I can go back to Mr. Castiel”, Wolfgang said at once. rising from his chair.

“Do you have to go back today?” Galahad said quickly. “I mean, it's late, it's getting dark, and Castiel won't miss you for one more day, surely?”

“It's best if I do”, Wolfgang sighed. “I'm coming into heat, and there are far too many alphas and betas in this house for comfort. Some of whom can't seem to stop finding their way into my bed at night!”

Galahad blushed.

“I am really sorry for the way I behaved”, he said at last. “You saved my life, and I was an ungrateful bastard.”

“You were.”

“Will you..... come over and see me again?”

The larger man looked surprised.

“Mr. Galahad, I am only a valet, and you are still quite close to inheriting a great house”, he said stiffly. “We live in two different worlds.”

“But I like you as a person!”

To his surprise, Wolfgang laughed before picking up his book.

“Well”, he said flatly, “if that's how you treat people you actually like, then Mr. Lancelot and Monseigneur Sasha had better start churning out more heirs, because your chances of finding anyone with that attitude are nil!”
He strode from the room. Galahad looked after him thoughtfully.
Chapter Summary

Wolfgang makes a decision, and Galahad wakes up to a surprise. Ellen and Bobby return to Cheshire, and Brady plots his vengeance.

March 1823

His papa knew something was wrong the minute the beta entered the room - mainly because Galahad Bingley actually managed to enter the room quietly for once. Gabriel sighed, put down his pen, and turned to his son.

“Is it really him you want?” he asked bluntly.

Galahad sat down heavily, and held his head in his hands.

“He’s coming into heat”, he said mournfully. “He’s fertile, just ready for some lucky alpha or beta to come and breed him. Why would he choose a jerk like me?”

“Have you actually told him how you feel?” his papa asked.

“What’s the point?” Galahad groused. “He thinks we’re from two different worlds. And he hates me!”

Gabriel sighed, and crossed to the window.

“It’s raining again”, he observed thoughtfully. “You should tell him we’ll send him back first thing tomorrow, rather than risk wet roads in the dark.”

“I’ll get one of the servants....”

“Tell him yourself, son. You’re a man now. You have to face up to things like this.”

His son sighed heavily, but left the room.

+W+++

Wolfgang listened to the sound of rain beating against the window panes, and sighed in exasperation. His hosts were right; going out on wet roads in the winter dark was an unnecessary risk, and Gabriel had sent him the key to his room, just in case his heat suddenly got worse. He was about to sit down with his book when he heard a knock at the door.

“Wolfie?”

Damnation! Him again! He went over to the door.
“I can’t let you in, sir”, he said as calmly as he could manage. “You know the risks as well as I do.”

“I know”, came Galahad’s voice. “Papa sent you up some supper, if you want it. I’ll leave it on the table by the door. And Wolfie....”

“Yes?”

“I am sorry. For everything.”

There was the sound of footsteps crossing to the door opposite, followed by the sound of a door closing. Wolfgang waited for a moment, then cautiously opened his own door and looked out. A tray with three small plates on it, one covered and steaming slightly, had been left on the table. There was also a vase with a single red rose in it. There was no sign of his former charge. Sighing, he took it into his room, being careful to lock the door behind him.

+~+~+

Wolfgang awoke the next morning to a familiar feeling. There was a clingy beta wrapped all around him.

“Not again!” he almost yelled.

Galahad opened an eye at him.

“Useful things, secret passages”, he muttered. “You smell good.”

“Get that knot of your anywhere near me, and you’ll never have to worry about having your own children!”

“I don’t do rape”, Galahad said, sitting up. “Especially when it comes to the man I intend to marry.”

Wolfgang stared at him in shock.

“What?” he gasped.

“I plan to court you, and once you are prepared to accept my suit, I will propose”, Galahad said quietly, getting up and heading to the still-locked door. He turned to give the beta a final look. “I never give up when I want something, Wolfie. And I want you enough to leave you, a false omega in heat, in this room, and let you go home to Pemberley today. But I will follow you, and you will have me. One day.”

He slipped out of the door, and was gone, leaving an unusually flustered beta behind him. If he was shaking with an almost irresistible urge to go back into that room, there was no-one there to see it.

+~+~+

It had been good to be back at Pemberley with his master. Until Castiel told him his plans. Wolfgang stared at his master in horror.

“A whole week?” he managed at last.

“Dean is going to Sheffield on business”, Castiel explained, “but I do not like the town. So I am
going to spend that week with my brother, and then when Dean comes back, we can go to London to see this new music academy that has just opened. My aunt and uncle want to stay at a hotel near their house, so they can oversee the final stage of the repairs. You look pale, Wolfie.”

The beta gulped. He could do this. He just had to stick close to his master, and avoid.... a certain someone.

+++

He made it to the third day before his master confronted him about it.

“Wolfie, what is going on between you and Galahad?”

The beta hung his head.

“He says he loves me, sir”, he muttered.

“Is that a bad thing?” Castiel asked curiously. “Or is it that you do not like him in return?”

“No.... well... I don't know.” Wolfgang looked horribly embarrassed. “It's just..... he's a noble and I'm just a commoner.”

To his surprise Castiel laughed.

“All the nobles were commoners at one time or another, Wolfie”, he smiled. “And many of them married commoners and raised them to their ranks. I myself was socially many levels below Dean before he married me, and true, some of his relatives opposed the union on those grounds, but he loved me enough to ignore them. Does Galahad really love you?”

“I think he does”, the beta admitted.

“Do you have feelings for him?” Castiel asked gently.

“I thought he was a complete idiot at first, and he was so rude to me. But he's not so bad when you come to know him.”

“You need a little more than 'not so bad', Wolfie.”

“Maybe I do like him just a bit, sir.”

Castiel smiled.

“Maybe?”

The beta suddenly grinned.

“I wonder what Bron would say”, he mused. “Humble little me, a nob!”

“Wolfie!”

“Sorry, sir.”
The following morning, Galahad Bingley awoke from a particularly pleasant dream, to find out it wasn’t a dream at all. He was being very firmly held by a strong, muscular beta.

“Useful things, secret passages!”

Castiel and Wolfgang returned to Pemberley a few days later, the same day Bobby and Ellen received a letter from their nephew, stating that their daughter would be back in Cheshire the following week.

“I think Raziel would enjoy it here”, Ellen said as they watched the servants loading up the carriage.

“He is welcome to come here any time”, Castiel said. “He could spend a few weeks here if he likes, once we get back from London. Though he might find it quieter if he avoids the times when my mother and Balthazar are here.”

“Are they coming back up with you?” Ellen asked.

Dean, who was passing behind them, muttered something under his breath. Castiel swatted at him.

“I do not think my mate is overly keen on that idea”, he said teasingly. “They will be here in May most likely, so Raziel could come over any time from June onwards.”

“I am sure he would appreciate that”, Ellen said.

“So they’re engaged?” Dean asked, as their carriage bowled along the road to London.

They were off to spend a week in the capital, and would call in on Castiel's family and the Collinses in Hertfordshire before returning home in early April. They had wanted to continue and call in on Brenton and Ryazan in Kent, but they were visiting friends in the West Country, and would not be back in time.

“If Wolfie's not pregnant already!” Castiel laughed.

Dean looked at him in surprise.

“I thought he just came off his heat before you went to Lynton?” he said.

“Peter says that with false omegas like him, any strong emotion can trigger a new heat”, Castiel explained. “And he and Galahad have certainly put each other through the emotional wringer of late. Though I had to tell poor Wolfie three times that he was allowed to stay behind for this trip!”

“I only hope the locals accept them better than they did Adam and your brother”, Dean said bitterly. Some of the county nobility were still holding off from Standford and its new owners, although after the sharp article in the local newspaper about certain well-known members of society no longer being welcome at the county's greatest house, attitudes had softened somewhat.
“They’ll come around”, Castiel said.

“I wonder if I can get to see Vic in London”, Dean mused. “We must invite him and Bruno up to Derbyshire, if Bruno’s well enough to travel in his state.

“I hope so”, Castiel said. “We both owe that man a lot.”

++~++

They both stared in horror at the Dutchman.

“Is it true?” Dean asked at last.

“I am afraid so”, Victor said. “It seems the spawn of this particular devil – or DeVille, I should say – are not done with polluting this world yet.”

“So what is he here for?” Castiel asked. “Because of his father’s death?”

“No”, Victor said. “He arrived just after, so there was no way he could have known beforehand. I suspect he just decided to look him up because his mother died recently. I am of course having him trailed, and I can only hope he goes back to the United States as soon as possible.”

“Amen to that!” Dean said heart-feltedly.

++~++

Barely ten miles away, the subject of their conversation was sat in a shady guest-house, carefully reading through several old newspapers. Reports of his father's death were sketchy at best, the newspapers by and large considering it a minor matter that an unpopular army officer should meet his end in this way. But one newspaper did speculate that the matter might involve Lord Dean Winchester of Pemberley, the largest house in Derbyshire and not far from where the duel took place, particularly as the deceased was known to have at one time been on more than friendly terms with the current Laird of Pemberley, Castiel Bennet, or Winchester as he now was.

“Don’t worry”, Brady hissed, and he stared at the small picture in the locket, the one possession he had of his late father. “I'll avenge you yet!”
Victor is suspicious over Brady, despite being mostly preoccupied with his mate's second pregnancy. Castiel and Dean visit Hertfordshire, where they make some surprising discoveries. Galahad is still having trouble with his relationship with Wolfgang, and the sky is still blue.

March 1823

Castiel normally only accompanied his husband on his trips to the capital when they knew they would have plenty of time together. On this occasion, although Dean would be busy attending to estate matters for the majority of the time, the alpha had wanted him to come to see the recently-opened Academy of Music, where the best musicians could reach even higher levels of playing. Castiel loved music, and as he saw his mate trying to hide the fact he was drumming his fingers along to the beat of a particularly accomplished harpist, Dean made a mental note to take the omega out to more recitals. Now that they had their lives back to normal, they should make the most of the time they had together. Because with the track record of Dean's luck in the past few years, he could never be sure when disaster was going to strike next.

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As Dean had hoped, Victor did put in an appearance during their visit, coming round to Winchester House one evening just before they were due to start back for Hertfordshire.

“How is Bruno doing?” Castiel asked. “He must be four months along now?”

“Very well”, Victor smiled. “Thankfully the morning sickness has stopped, but he’s still getting food cravings. It’s eggs this week, and if I never see another omelette again, it will be too soon! How is Wolfie doing?”

Dean and Castiel looked at each other.

“He’s all but engaged”, Dean said.

“What?” Victor almost shouted.

“That nephew of mine who trained me up for the duel, Galahad Bingley. Wolfie helped him through his convalescence, and they’ve somehow become an item.”

“That’s great!”

“The only trouble is, Wolfie thinks the man is too good for him”, Castiel said. “Plus, a valet marrying a rich man’s son, particularly with Galahad still fairly close to the succession to Lynton – well, people are bound to talk.”
“Let them!” Victor said firmly. “I’m delighted for the boy. I thought when he had those gender problems that might put a spoke in his love life, but apparently not.”

“Talking of spokes in people’s lives”, Dean said, “is there any further news on our Mr. DeVille?”

“He left London on the seventeenth, on a ship bound for New York.”

His tone was strangely flat. Both men looked at him.

“That should be good news, surely?” Castiel asked.

“Yes”, Victor said slowly, “but… I don’t know, it just doesn’t fit with what I know about him. I didn’t think he would give up so easily. I have a friend making the crossing this summer, and I’m going to ask him to make sure he got there.”

“You think it might be a trick?” Dean asked.

“It just smells wrong”, Victor frowned. “And in my line of work, that’s a good enough reason to worry!”

+++~+++

April 1823

The first sign that something was amiss came when the Winchester carriage pulled up outside what was most definitely a deserted Longbourn. The house was not closed up, but judging from the state of the garden and windows, clearly it had not been attended to for some little time. Knocking at the door yielded no answer, and it was a puzzled husband and mate who made their way over to Lucas Lodge, hoping Crowley and Inias Collins would not mind their unannounced arrival.

They did not, of course. But they had a surprise of their own.

“You’re pregnant!” Castiel gasped. Inias was not showing at all, but all male omegas knew from the scent if one of their own was expecting.

“Don’t sound so shocked!” Inias laughed, as his friend fussed round him. “I only found out myself last week, and since we knew you would be in London by then, we decided to wait to tell you in person.”

“Congratulations, Crowley!” Dean beamed. He had the unspoken thought that, following the deaths of their eldest son Nehemiah and Inias’ brother Uriel last year, this was the perfect tonic, but he was wise enough not to say it. Though he guessed from the looks on the couple’s faces that they were thinking much the same thought.

“Yes, it must have been that Christmas party”, the beta smiled. “The new owners of Netherfield Park hosted it – a lovely old retired Navy couple; you must meet them whilst you are here – and when we came back afterwards…. well…. ”

He stopped, blushing.

“I was planning to stay with my mother, but the house seems empty”, Castiel said, hurrying to change the subject. “Do you know why?”
The Collinses looked at each other in surprise.

“We thought she must have written to you, before she left two weeks ago”, Inias said. “Did she not?”

“Left?” Castiel asked, puzzled. “And written to me about what?”

Another exchange of looks, and both Collinses had gone red.

“Young mother is engaged to be married”, Mr. Collins said softly. “I am sorry you had to find out this way,”

Castiel looked shocked. Dean immediately wrapped his arm around the omega, and pulled him closer.

“Have you met her new husband?” the alpha asked, gently rubbing his mate’s back to try to comfort him.

“Yes”, Inias said. “He’s a good man, name of Franklyn Devereux. An American, he came over here after the Napoleonic Wars, and started his own transport business. Was married once before, but his mate died in childbirth. He’s quite well-off, and has a house in the county of Surrey. Croydon, I think.”

“Coulsdon”, his husband corrected. “It’s a sizable house, larger than Longbourn. I think your mother plans to move there, Castiel.”

“But what about Balthazar?” Castiel objected. “I don’t think he would want to go all that way.”

“He gets on well with Mr. Devereux, but your brother has never been the same since the shooting”, Mr Collins said softly. “It’s like it made him grow up all of a sudden. I even saw him in the library the other day” – he saw how his guests were staring at him, and smiled – “yes, I know; I had to look twice to make sure I wasn’t seeing things!”

“Poor Balthazar!” Castiel sighed sympathetically. “And how are your sons doing, Inias?”

“Paul is doing better at school now”, Inias smiled. “There’s a girl in the village he wants to impress, so suddenly he’s the studious type. I hope it lasts! Ion went with your mother and Mr. Devereux as far as London, so he could stay with a friend. I am a little worried that he hasn’t written; that’s not like him.”

“Probably too busy enjoying the sights!” Dean said reassuringly. “He’s eighteen this year, isn’t he?”

“Next month”, Mr. Collins sighed. “I offered to present him at the next county ball, and he told me, ‘Father, I am not that sort of omega! And you know how people are when a new omega appears in society.”

“Indeed!” Castiel smiled. “I remember when my late father insisted all five of us be presented at the same time, even though Balthazar was only just turned fifteen. At least with five of us, everyone’s attentions were divided amongst us all.”

“Why not bring him to Derbyshire when you come, and he could be presented there?” Dean
suggested. “He’s never come before, so this could be a first for him? And he would have all of us around him for back up.”

“That is a lovely idea!” Mr Collins said with a smile. “I only wish you could have met Mr. Devereux whilst you were here, but he and Castiel’s mother are not due back for another month. Indeed, I doubt she will want to travel with us whilst he is around.”

Judging from the look on the beta’s face, he knew full well just what a wonderful piece of news that was for the lord of Pemberley, who didn’t quite mask his joy before his mate turned to him. Castiel shot him a warning look, and Dean knew he would have some making up to do later on. But then, he quite enjoyed that.

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“Have you talked to Joss lately?”

Sam looked up in surprise at his mate.

“No”, he said. “Why?”

“Because ever since you and he came back from Manchester last week, he’s been very quiet.”

“That’s just Joss. If it was Lance or Guy being quiet, then I would definitely worry!”

Gabriel swatted at him.

“I meant quieter than usual”, he persisted. “It’s as if he….”

Whatever else he was going to say was lost when his third son stormed into the room, slamming the door behind him.

“I am going to kill him!”

Sam and Gabriel looked at each other, and sighed.

“What did you do to upset Wolfie this time?” Sam asked patiently.

His son huffed indignantly.

“Why are you taking his side?” he demanded. “And what makes you think it was me that did something?”

They both looked pointedly at him. It took him under half a minute to fold.

“All right!” he grumbled. “But he’s being downright unreasonable! He actually wants to carry on being a valet after we get married? I mean, that's just plain ridiculous!”

Gabriel went over and took his son’s hand.

“You’re not seeing it from his point of view, Guy”, he said gently. “Wolfie’s spent his whole life supporting himself and his brother. He doesn’t know any other way. To have to totally rely on someone else for the first time – he probably finds it more than a little worrying.”
“He knows I would always support him!”

“Have you told him that?” Sam asked.
Galahad blushed.

“Er, well…..”

His parents both sighed.

“Go and see him, and tell him”, Gabriel said firmly. “And Guy….”

“Yes, papa?”

“Tell him downstairs. No taking him upstairs to apologize that way!”

Galahad went even redder, and left the room quickly.

+++++

The bell above the door rang, and the clerk looked up expectantly. A tall dark man crossed the room, looking uncertainly around him.

“What's the cheapest way to get over to England?” he asked gruffly.

Rude, the clerk thought bitterly, but then the non-Irish often were.

“From Cork, it's at least a guinea to cross to Bristol”, he said.

The man's face fell. The clerk sighed.

“But if you want the cheapest possible way, there's a merchant who makes the crossing each month from Waterford, along the coast”, he said helpfully. “Though I think he usually goes just to Pembrokeshire.”

Brady DeVille smiled.

“That sounds right up my alley!”
April 1823

Before they left Hertfordshire, it was agreed that the Collinses would be invited to the wedding of Galahad and Wolfgang (“assuming they haven’t killed each other by now!” Dean had quipped). The journey back was not very pleasant, April showers having apparently decided to last for virtually the entire length of the journey, so they were both glad when Pemberley came in sight. And very relieved when they got in to find that the engagement was still on, even if Wolfgang was muttering to himself about insufferable mates who thought they knew everything. Dean was less than amused when his omega agreed with him on that point. But Castiel more than made it up to him later.

++++

“I have a surprise for you, my love.”

Dean looked up as he was getting undressed. Castiel was already in bed, and he was looking forward to them marking their return home in their usual way.

“Will I like it?” he asked.

“I think so”, Castiel said. “It’s sort of a belated birthday present; I promised to get you something as well as that sampler, but it took time to have it made. You did say you would like it. It’s over behind the screen.”

Dean wondered at this and went over to look. There was a single coat-hanger, with what looked like a very rough animal fur hanging from it. At first he didn’t understand, before everything suddenly clicked into place. And he blushed fiercely.

“Cas…. are you wearing…..?”

“Yes, Dean. You did say you liked the idea of being a caveman?”

Dean just looked at him, tears in his eyes.

“If you don’t want to…..” Castiel began.

“No!” Dean said quickly, trying not to cry. “It’s just…. you’re so good to me. I’m so lucky to have you.”
“And I you, Dean. Now come on, caveman. Let’s see how primal you really are!”

+++

‘Dearest nephew,
Thank you for agreeing to have Raziel with you for a month. We applied to Oxford on his behalf (which shocked the poor boy dreadfully!), and he has to produce a major essay on a topic of his choice as part of the process. He has no confidence in his own abilities, and I was hoping some time just doing a little quiet research may help him to think better of himself.

We had thought we would have to abandon the house again when they discovered new cracks in one of the walls, but fortunately only one side is affected, and we can live fairly comfortably in the other. Even better, the owner of the land that is now covering our back garden has (reluctantly) agreed to fund all the repairs, after your uncle threatened to get the lawyers involved.

Jo is back from her travels safe and sound, I am pleased to say. Perhaps typically, she went right round the world preaching the Good Word without coming to any harm, then just as she was looking at an art exhibition in Manchester whilst waiting for our carriage, some horrible alpha went and groped her! Apparently she was in a generous mood, as she let him off with just a few bruises, so I don’t think he will be trying that on anyone else! She looks forward to seeing you and Gabriel again.

Ash and Kevin have started up their own small shipping company in Liverpool, and are planning to try for a child sometime early next year.

Do let us know how the wedding plans are going, and/or if those two love-birds have killed each other yet.

Yours affectionately

Ellen Singer’

Castiel winced slightly in his chair – those caveman outfits had been more effective than he had dared hope – then folded up his aunt’s letter and thought for a while. He eventually smiled to himself and wrote a quick note of his own, then summoned a servant and dispatched it.

That might just work….

++++

Raziel Turner looked up anxiously at the huge house, as his carriage drew up before it. The door was opened for him, and he stepped out, wondering just how you properly greeted someone as far up the social scale as….

Oh.

The figure standing before him was definitely neither Lord nor Laird Winchester, both of whom he knew from his aunt's descriptions. This man was in his mid-twenties, quite tall if not military in his bearing, but the most prominent feature was a huge scar running down half of his face. Raziel blinked in surprise.

“Theyir lordships are out today”, the man smiled, “so they asked me to meet you. “I’m Garth Winchester, the husband of Lord Dean’s second son Diniel. I was away when you were here last.”
Raziel finally found his voice.

“Um, hullo”, he said softly.

“You must be tired after your journey”, Garth smiled. “I’ll show you to your room, and we can have dinner once my mate gets back. He’s shopping in Matlock, may the Lord have pity on my wallet!”

He ushered the young man into the house.

+++++

Diniel Winchester turned out to be a complete contrast to his husband. Though an omega, he had a no-nonsense air about him, and if he hadn’t had learnt it from the servant who took his bag to his room, Raziel might have already guessed that he was effectively heir to the estate. He was also clearly passionately in love with his alpha, who equally clearly couldn’t get enough of him.

“I hear you’ve applied to Oxford”, Diniel said.

“My aunt and uncle applied for me”, Raziel admitted, trying not to moan around an impossibly delicious pastry. “I have to do a five-thousand word essay in just a month, although I do get to pick the subject.”

“What did you choose?” Garth asked.

“The Iliad and the Odyssey: Truth or Myth?”, Raziel answered. “It was really very nice of Lord Winchester to allow me access to his library. I remember his mate is particularly fond of the classics.”

“Dean doesn’t like them much, but he buys them for Cas”, Diniel said. “I see you like Mrs. Moseley’s pastries.”

“They’re heavenly!”

“I’ll be your point of contact if you need anything during your stay”, Garth told him. “I’m the estate manager, by the way, and Dino and I have our own rooms in the west wing, so I’ll see you for meals most days. If there’s anything you need, just ask.”

“Thank you”, Raziel said politely.

+++++

A week later, and the house was in full swing as the wedding for Wolfgang and Galahad was to be held on May the third, just three weeks away. Raziel found himself more than a little confused. He had grown up with everyone he had met seeing his skin colour first and adjusting their approach to him as a result, but here – nothing. Everyone seemed to regard him as just another house-guest, to be treated exactly the same as anyone else regardless. And in a house where the lord had married someone socially far beneath him, the heir had married someone who was badly scarred, and the laird’s valet was about to marry a local lord’s son!

Ancient Greece was so much simpler than modern English society.

+++++
Castiel had finally received a letter from his mother mentioning her plans to remarry (on page two, and after her eulogizing about a new dress!), and her planned move to Surrey. He felt annoyed that she seemed to be giving little though to Balthazar in all this; his brother was presumably expected to just tag along. He considered inviting his brother to Derbyshire, but knew Dean would probably be against the idea, although of course he could be persuaded. The wedding was not until the summer – Mr. Devereux had to travel to France to pursue some business interests there, apparently - so there was plenty of time.

Pemberley also had a new guest. Wolfgang had asked if his uncle, who had moved to London earlier in the year, might be allowed to stay for the wedding, and both Castiel and Dean had been delighted to agree. Heinrich Albertson proved to be quite a handful; built on an even bigger scale that either of his nephews, he dominated any room he was in, and had a voice that carried for some distance. He had initially been highly skeptical of his future nephew, and despite Wolfgang’s assurances, still regarded the young man with some suspicion. Castiel had little doubt that, if Galahad had a last-minute attack of nerves and fled down the aisle, his prospective uncle would make sure he didn’t reach the church door.

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May 1823

Scaden and Samandriel knocked at the study door.

“Come in”, Dean's voice came from inside the room.

They duly entered. He looked at them.

“You have a date for going?” he said quietly.

“July the eighteenth”, Scaden said, looking nervous. Samandriel squeezed his hand, and he smiled at his mate before turning back to his father.

“What are your plans when you get there?”

“We want to spend a few days in New York”, Scaden said”, and we'll arrange travel out west whilst we are there.”

“We plan to stop first in a town called St. Louis, where the Mississippi and Missouri rivers meet”, Samandriel said. “But we want to settle somewhere that's not in an actual state when we do it for real.”

“You will keep in touch?” Dean asked.

“Yes”, Scaden said. “I promise I will write.”

“I'll make sure he does”, Samandriel put in.

“Bossy!”

Dean smiled at them both. He was, in truth, more than a little worried about their great adventure, but he had resigned himself to the inevitable, and knew he could but hope for the best.
It was the day of the wedding, and so far all had gone to plan. Galahad and Wolfgang Bingley had been successfully made one, and Castiel felt he was not the only one to heave a silent sigh of relief when the service was over.

The Collinses had come up for the wedding as promised, although the Singers very nearly failed to make it, only beating the happy couple into the church by a few minutes owing to a wheel coming loose on their carriage en route. Castiel was relieved to see them slipping into the back of the church just as the music started playing. After the service, he went over to see them.

“Hullo, Aunt Ellen, Uncle Bobby. Hullo, Raziel. It’s good to see you, Jo.”

She beamed at him. Her travels round the world had left her with a strong tan, and like her father she looked ten kinds of uncomfortable in her formal dress.

“It’s nice to be back in the old country, Castiel”, she smiled. “I’ll go and say hello to Gabe later, once he’s stopped crying!”

“Leave him be”, Castiel laughed. “It's only the third time he's had to give a son away, and he has three more to face yet!”

Jo laughed.

“I didn’t realize how much I missed….”

She stopped, her face frozen in a mask of horror. She was looking over his shoulder, towards where Sam and Gabriel's family were milling round the happy couple. Castiel was about to ask what was wrong when she spoke again, much louder than before.

“I don't believe it!”
Dean and Castiel visit Ryazan and Brenton in Kent. Joscelyn Bingley finds that instinctive reactions can have some very unpleasant consequences, and Castiel realizes that his husband finds it ‘hard’ to cope with certain new technological developments.

May 1823

Jo looked as if she was about to storm over and cause a major scene, but her mother and stepfather were quicker. Moving with practiced ease, they each grabbed an arm, virtually dragging the clearly furious girl out of the church. Castiel watched them go, then focussed his attention on the wedding group. And in particular on Joscelyn Bingley, who had gone bright red.

Interesting, he thought.

+++

Brady DeVille swore profusely as he left the quayside. The merchant he'd been hoping to get him across to England (or at least Wales) had put his ship in repair for two months, and the only other ships leaving were headed up the coast to Dublin. He had considered the Irish capital – there might be more crossings there – but no ships going there needed any extra men. Still, he would need money when he got over there, so the job he had scored as a dockworker would help to that end.

He just wanted to get things done!

+++

The Singers were resting in their room later that day when there was a knock at the door. Bobby went across to open it, and grinned when he saw who was standing outside. Joscelyn Bingley shuffled his feet nervously, not looking the man in the eye.

“Come in, lad”, Bobby said, trying not to smile. “I expect you're here to apologize, eh?”

“Yes, sir”, Joscelyn muttered. Ellen and Jo were both sat at the table, both glaring at him.

“Well, we'll let you get on with it!” Bobby said. “Ellen are me are just going out for a walk.”

His wife looked at him sharply, but merely nodded and left with him, though she gave the visitor another glare when she passed by him. Joscelyn blushed again.

“I'm waiting!” Jo snapped.

“You're not exactly making this easy!”

“You groped me in a public gallery!”
“You kicked me... you know where in that same gallery!”

“You deserved it!”

There was an awkward silence.

“Why did you do it?” she snapped.

Joscelyn hung his head.

“I've never..... you know, tried to ask a girl out before.”

She stared at him in shock.

“You are kidding!”

“Now you're just embarrassing me!”

“You deserve that too!”

“I promise I won't do anything like that again, all right?”

“Can I have that in writing?”

He scowled at her.

“I am sorry, and I am leaving”, he snapped. He stormed from the room, nearly knocking over Ellen and Bobby, who were both crouched just outside the door.”

“He likes you!” Ellen teased, as they came back into the room.

Jo groaned.

“Could you two be any more embarrassing?”

“Wait till you see us dance at your wedding!” her stepfather teased.

His daughter's face turned pale. +~+~+

They had been lucky with the weather for the day of the wedding, it being one of the few bright days in a very wet spring. Galahad and Wolfgang had gone to Lynton for the evening before setting out on their honeymoon the day after; they had asked for and been given the keys to the Cumberland cottage for two weeks. The morning of their departure saw the return of the rain, not that Castiel minded, as he had some news that would lighten the mood considerably in the house. He waited until after breakfast, and went to see his husband in his study. Dean welcomed him with a smile.

“What is it, beloved?” Dean asked. “Surely not just after we've eaten...?”

Castiel slapped him lightly.

“It isn't always about that, Dean!”
“Oh. Is there pie?”

Castiel rolled his eyes.

“We had a letter from Bren and Ry”, he said. “Bren is expecting, sometime in December or January.”

“That's brilliant news!” Dean beamed. “Although I suppose it means they won't be travelling up any time soon.”

“We could always go and see them the next time we are in the capital”, Castiel suggested. “Medlington isn't that far from London.”

“Good idea. I was going to make a short trip next month, but we can extend it, if they can have us.”

“Our third grandson”, Castiel mused.

“Third?” Dean looked confused.

“Dino did tell you at breakfast that he and Garth are expecting again, but you just grunted from behind your newspaper.”

“That's brilliant! My mind must have been on other things at the time.”

“Dean Winchester, your mind is always on just one thing!”

“That and pie!” Dean grinned, turning reluctantly to his paperwork.

+++

The Collinses were staying for the whole week after the wedding, and had just adjourned to their rooms after breakfast. Inias pulled his older son to one side.

“You need to be a little more discreet, son”, he said reprovingly.

“What do you mean, papa?” Ion asked.

“The way you were looking at poor young Mr. Turner over the breakfast table was most unbecoming”, Inias insisted. “He is here to do some research, not to be a public spectacle!”

Ion blushed.

“I'm sorry, papa”, he said quietly. “It's just..... he's so different.”

“What do you mean?” Inias asked.

“When he and the laird were talking about all that Ancient Greek stuff, his face just lit up”, Ion explained. “And he was so well-read. We got taught all that at school, but it wasn't half as interesting as he made it out to be.”

“Well, he is single, and a beta.....”
“Papa!”

Inias laughed.

“You could try actually talking to him, instead of staring until he freaks out”, he suggested. “What harm can it do?”

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Two days later, Sam and Gabriel were preparing to leave, having stayed on for a while so Galahad and Wolfgang could have Lynton to themselves for their first night as a couple. Lancelot, who had already packed, was sprawled with his mate in a fireside chair, when Joscelyn entered the room and went over to stand by the fire. Only slowly did he become aware that everyone else in the room was looking at him.

“What?” he asked, puzzled.

His papa chortled, whilst his brother turned his face away to hide a laugh.

“You might want to look in a mirror sometime soon, son”, his father said gently. Joscelyn frowned, and went over to retrieve a small hand-mirror from the desk. He looked in it, then ran it up and down his clothes before exploding with anger. A large red hand-print had been painted across the back of his trousers.

“I will kill her!”

“Better not!” Lancelot grinned. “The Lord alone knows what she might do if you really upset her!”

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June 1823

“It's like the Sixteen all over again!” Dean grumbled, as their carriage rolled through the gates of Medlington Manor. “Another Year Without A Summer!”

The locals say things will improve later”, Castiel said, trying to sound cheerful. “Though I could do with a new coat. I shall go shopping when we stop in London on the way back.”

Dean was silent.

“It's all right; you don't have to come with me”, Castiel smiled.

“Thank you!”

+++

“You seem to have settled in to the life of a lord well”, Dean observed. His son's mate was sat by the fire, with Ryazan standing behind him.

“It's not been easy”, Brenton admitted. “We spent most of this year seeing off a legal challenge from the cousin who would have inherited after me, trying to claim that omegas could not inherit the
estate. He's financially ruined as a result, and only the lawyers are happy about it. But I've been lucky - plus I had a good teacher.”

He reached back to his husband, who smiled down at him.

“I had a keen pupil”, he replied. “Some of the local nobility have been a bit sniffy about Bren inheriting through so distant a connection, but that seems to have passed.”

“People can be like that”, Castiel observed. “We had a problem with getting Adam and Michael accepted into society earlier this year, but thankfully that's all behind us now.”

“Except for Old Windy!” Dean snorted. “He still won't talk to them.”

“I think they can get over that particular disappointment, my love”, Castiel smiled.

“Any more news of granny?” Ryazan asked.

“She would probably had a fit with you calling her that!” Castiel chuckled. “We're dropping in on our way home, and we get to meet the mysterious Mr. Devereux for the first time. My stepfather to be.”

They discussed the recent wedding and other news, before all turning in for the night.

+~+~+

Dean hadn't meant to meet up with his mate that day in London, but his last business meeting ended with him taking a friend to a coffee-shop, and when they came out he realized that the tailor Castiel had said he would visit was in the same street, so he walked along to see if his beloved was still there. Asking at the front desk, he was told Monseigneur Winchester was trying out a new coat, and would be out shortly, so he decided to wait. Sure enough, six minutes later Castiel emerged in a long tan-coloured coat, the like of which Dean had never seen before.

“Hullo, Dean”, Castiel smiled. “What do you think of this? It's the latest thing, a rain-resistant coat made out of material invented by a Mr. Charles Mackintosh.”

Dean just stared at him.

“Is something wrong, Dean?” the omega asked, concerned.

The alpha finally found his voice.

“That coat..... it looks good on you... so good.....”

Castiel knew that voice. It meant the coat would be joining the caveman, maid and certain other 'special items' in his wardrobe.

“Give me a few minutes to sort out payment, then we can go”, he smiled.

His only answer was a strangled whimper, and Castiel knew they would shortly be booking a room at the nearest acceptable hotel. There was no way they were going to make it all the way back to Winchester House when his husband had that look in his eyes.
On reflection, he ordered three more coats. Just in case.
Chapter Summary

Raziel gets into Oxford University (without applying!), whilst Ellen Singer wins a bet. Castiel and Dean visit the Collinses before returning to Derbyshire for a brief while, and Victor finds his worst suspicions are, as usual, right.

June 1823

Bobby and Ellen Singer were at breakfast when the mail arrived. He looked quickly through it, then nodded to Ellen, and placed one particular letter by one of the two empty seats. He had barely sat back down when his nephew entered, yawning.

“Good morning both”, Raziel said. Then he saw the letter at his place, and stared in surprise at the crest on the envelope.

“Well?” his uncle said with a smile. “Open the damn thing!”

Raziel carefully slit the envelope open, and pulled out a set of papers. He read the top one, then blinked several times.

“Oxford has accepted me!” he said, sounding amazed. “And they're giving me a full scholarship! But I didn't even apply!”

“That's brilliant!” his aunt beamed. “Though it would have been nicer if you could have studied closer to home, I should say.”

“At least he's got the Collinses, just over the border in Hertfordshire, if he needs them”, his uncle said. “Mr. Collins gave me his address when I told him you were applying, and said you should call any time. I think his son Ion is about your age, isn't he?”

Raziel blushed.

+++++

“What was all that about?” Ellen asked, once breakfast was over and their nephew had retired to his room in order to read through the details of his offer.

“You saw that young Collins boy eying him up at the wedding”, her husband retorted. “I don't say there's anything between them, but this will be the first time the boy had been on his own in his life. It would be good to have someone nearby he can turn to, if things are tough.”

“The heir to both Lucas Lodge and Longbourn”, Ellen mused. “And when Castiel's mother does move to Surrey, the Lucases will be the only important family in the area. I hope Raziel knows what he is doing. I love the boy, but people can be very cruel.”

They were interrupted by the loud arrival of their daughter, who stormed into the room and threw herself into an empty chair. Bobby and Ellen looked at each other in surprise.
“I will kill him!”

“Is something wrong, love?” her stepfather asked.

Jo turned to glare at the world in general.

“That... groper found out I was working in the library!” she snapped. “So what does he do? He sends me a single red rose. Every bloody day!”

“Language!” her mother said reprovingly.

“Clearly a terrible crime!” her father teased. “Sending a girl flowers. We should definitely alert the authorities!”

She glared at him.

“And now he comes in and just sits there, staring at me!” she groused. “He is really starting to freak me out!”

“I assume we're talking about the Bingley boy”, Ellen said. “Why not just go on a date with him? Then you can make it quite clear where you stand.”

Her daughter pulled herself up.

“We're going for a coffee after work next Friday”, she said gruffly. “And then I can tell him exactly what he can do with all those roses!”

“The nineteenth?” Ellen asked with a grin.

Jo stared at her, confused.

“Yes”, she said. “Anyway I'd better change; I said I would go back and help with a delivery this afternoon.”

She left the room. Bobby sighed, and handed a note over to his wife, who grinned in triumph.

“Damnation!” he groused. “You were one day closer!”

+~+~+

Castiel cuddled closer to his husband, the bed mercifully warm against the relative cold of the room. Longbourn had always been a difficult house to heat properly, and the omega felt he would not miss it much if, as now seemed certain, his mother moved to Surrey.

“What do you think of your future stepfather?” Dean asked, running his hand through the omega's hair.

Castiel smiled.

“He seems a good man”, he replied. “A little loud, perhaps, but that seems to make mama much calmer than I remember. I think they will do well together.”

“And Balthazar?” Dean asked. “He seems to get on well with him.”

“He does. Though I hardly recognize him nowadays. It's like the shock of all that business with Wickham has turned him into another Michael!”
“Would you like to invite him to stay with us for a while, once we get back from Cumberland?” Dean offered. “Your mother's wedding is just after we get back; you could come here, then bring him back with you. And it would mean him not being here all alone.”

“That would be very nice, Dean”, Castiel smiled. “You really are very kind to my family.”

The alpha grinned.

“I'm sure there's some way you can show your appreciation!” he smirked.

To his surprise, Castiel turned away from him.

“Not tonight, Dean, I have a headache.”

“What?” the alpha pouted.

Castiel turned back, and Dean felt those wonderful long fingers running down his chest, all the way to....

“Just kidding!”

“Why, you....!”

+~+~+

They visited the Collinses the next day, who were delighted to see them. Dean presented Mr. Collins with an envelope, saying 'for the new arrival' as he handed it over. The beta opened and read it, then looked confused.

“It's a local carpenter”, Castiel explained. “He will come and build you a crib to your own design. We thought since it was some time since Paul, your old one might not be good enough. And I doubt poor Inias will feel much like shopping before too long!”

“Very true!” his friend laughed. “Crowley thinks it might be twins or triplets, judging from how big I already am!”

His husband wrapped an arm protectively around him.

“I don't care what or how many are in there, provided they and you are healthy”, he smiled, kissing his mate.

“So what other news from Derbyshire?” Inias asked. “Are the newlyweds back from the Lakes yet?”

“They should be back when we get there”, Castiel smiled. “Wolfie actually wrote me a letter, saying how much they were enjoying it. And at least he managed to stop Galahad from diving into the lake!”

Dean swatted at him, and the others laughed at his mock grumpiness.

“And we had a letter from the Singers”, Dean said. “They said Raziel had got into Oxford, and to thank you for letting him have your address.”

“Not a problem”, Crowley smiled. “It will be the boy's first time away from home, and that can be nerve-wracking. I did think Ion might want to go to university as well, but he seems content to stay home for now.”

“Yes”, Inias smiled, “though he broke up with that girl he was seeing. We thought he might relapse back to his old ways, but he took up with an omega who’s two years older than him, and already at Oxford. He wants to follow him there in a couple of years' time, so it was no trouble to give your cousin our address.”

“It was very good of you, anyway”, Castiel said.

++++

The journey back to Derbyshire was, as with much of the year so far, done in the pouring rain, and both of them were glad when the big house came into sight.

“Home at last!” Castiel sighed.

“Not for long, though”, Dean pointed out. “Just a week, and then we're off to the cottage by the lake.”

“Do you not want to go?” Castiel asked, surprised.

Dean took him by the hand.

“I want to be wherever you are”, he said softly. “That will always be my home, be it a humble cottage or Pemberley itself.”

Castiel smiled at him.

“Just for that, I may take the maid's costume with us when we go!”

“You do know you're going to kill me one of these days!” Dean laughed.

“Here lies Dean Winchester, who died with a smile on his face!” Castiel laughed back.

They held each other close as they went up the steps.

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Six days later, they set out for Cumberland, planning to call in on Castiel's aunt and uncle on their way back. As their carriage rolled away down the drive, Dean truly felt he had rarely been happier.

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The post was early today. Which meant he got the bad news that much quicker.

‘Dear Victor,

I hope this reaches you in good time. I have arrived in New York, and as you requested I reported directly to Mr. Westaway's Detective Agency in the city (he sends his regards, by the way, and congratulations on your new son). It took him the best part of a week, but he has acquired the information you requested.

I am afraid it is not good news. No-one answering the name or description of Mr. Brady DeVille arrived from England on the ship in question. Additional inquiries revealed the ship made two calls before crossing the Atlantic; at Plymouth in Devonshire and Queenstown in Ireland. I am afraid that you will have to make further investigations as to which of these ports he disembarked at, and his
movements thereafter.

Mr. and Mrs. Westaway say they and their family may visit the old country in a few years' time, once young Eulalia is old enough to travel, in which case they would very much like to see you.

Yours most respectfully

Silas Currington Esq.’

Victor folded the letter up and placed it in a locked draw before swearing profusely.

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Owen Jones grinned at his wife as he sat down for dinner.

“Good day, love?” she smiled, placing a plate of meat and potatoes before him.

“Very good”, he smiled. “I caught some sneak thief breaking into one of the houses by the docks, and threw him in gaol. A wild one too; lucky I had Tom and Llew with me, or he'd have gotten away. The ones that arrive from Ireland are always the worst.”

“How do you know he's Irish?” his wife asked, sitting down with her own meal.

“Oh, he's not Irish, but he definitely came over on the fish-boat”, her husband grinned. “I could smell it on him! He can spend a week or two cooling his heels before I throw him in front of the magistrate.”
Chapter Summary

Castiel's new coat gets lots of use despite the dry weather. However, his trip to his mother's wedding is rendered less pleasant by an unexpected arrival from America. Scaden and Samandriel leave to start a new life in the New World.

June 1823

The locals had been right, Castiel thought, as he sat outside their lakeland cottage. Summer seemed to have finally arrived, and the seemingly endless rain had been reduced to an occasional shower. Which meant he got little use out of his expensive new coat.

Well, not outside use. For some reason the simple item of clothing always reduced his husband to a quivering wreck, and the residents of Kendal had been somewhat surprised to see an apparently sex-starved alpha all over his omega on a public street. They had had to book into a local hotel to allow Dean to 'get it out of his system'.

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July 1823

Their time at the cottage passed far too quickly, and they were on their way back to Pemberley, though not before calling in at the Singers first.

“You must be very proud of Raziel getting into Oxford”, Dean observed.

“Yes, he starts in early September”, Ellen said. “Though they've set him another essay to do; apparently his entry one was so good, they're now considering him for an advanced course.”

“Does he want access to the library again?” Castiel asked.

“No, it's just an expansion of his first effort, and he can get the books he needs from the local library”, Bobby said. “Jo works there two days a week now, so she can help him.”

“How did her date with Joss go?” Dean asked curiously.

“A disaster!” Ellen beamed. “They argued over everything from the menu to who was paying, and she stormed out and left him in the end!”

“You seem happy about it?” Castiel said questioningly.

“'She's got another date with him later this week”, his aunt grinned. “To show the idiot boy how to do things properly' she 'claims'."

“They're as stormy a couple as Wolfie and Galahad”, Castiel smiled. “Though they seem to have settled down now Wolfie's agreed to move into the estate manager's cottage.”

“I wonder if Wolfie will have children any time soon”, Dean mused. “It would give them something
else to argue over. It's a good thing Cas and I never quarrel.”

“Because I'm always right!” grinned the omega.

“Hey!”

“Oh, and I must show you both my new waterproof coat.”

Bobby and Ellen both wondered why that statement made the master of Pemberley blush so fiercely.

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They had only been back in Derbyshire for three days, and already Castiel had to set out again, this time for his mother's wedding. Dean's and his present to his mother was an ornate jewellery box, carved with the family coat of arms, including a ducal coronet to show the Bennet-Winchester connection (not heraldically accurate, but Castiel knew his mother would love it). His husband had also arranged for Castiel to take Wolfgang with him, after which the omega would travel on to London to spend a week or so with his brother. Castiel suspected that this was at least partly because the alpha was scared of Castiel travelling alone (i.e with only half a dozen servants). But he enjoyed Wolfgang's company, and was looking forward to the trip.

Dean had also agreed to have Balthazar come and stay with them for at least the happy couple's honeymoon, and possibly beyond if he felt like it. Castiel had grown increasingly worried over his younger brother, and looked forward to their having some time together before the big day. However, when he finally reached Hertfordshire, he found someone unexpected waiting for him.

“Rafe?”

Sure enough, it was his other little brother, although not so little anymore; clearly lack of food was not a problem over in Maine. Raphael Bennet had grown decidedly portly.

“Laird Castiel!”, he said in a mocking tone. “How gracious of you to bestow your presence on us lesser mortals.”

He was clearly annoyed that his brother, like the rest of the family, had politely declined his letters requesting financial assistance. Judging from his frown, he clearly felt that Castiel at least had been in a position to help.

“Your church prospers in Maine?” Castiel asked politely.

“Of course!” Raphael said, as if it was obvious. “It is doing so well that I can afford to take some time out to visit the home country, although I shall of course be seeking funds to do God's work even more faithfully.”

Castiel was briefly reminded of his husband's reaction to his brother's last begging letter, retorting that if even Raphael had managed to find God, then God needed to find a better hiding-place. He suppressed a smile.

“You must call in on us during your stay”, he said politely, hoping against hope that his brother might find some reason not to.

No such luck.

“I shall look forward to it, brother.”
Balthazar could not have presented a sharper contrast with the omega less than a year his senior. Castiel recalled the first few times he had met Dean, and how both his younger brothers had often disgraced themselves and him by their boisterous behaviour. Now they were chalk and cheese; Balthazar barely looked up from his book when Castiel entered.

“Hullo, Bal”, he smiled.

“Oh. Hullo, Cassie”, his brother replied, closing his book and placing it carefully down beside him. “Mother says I am to come back with you for a while.”

“Well, it hardly seems fitting for you to accompany the newlyweds on their honeymoon”, Castiel pointed out. “And we shall keep you busy; Dean is funding an extension to the library in Lambton, and they need someone to go through all their books and decide what needs keeping and what other books they need to acquire. I would have asked Michael to help, but now he's moved into Standford, he's far too busy.”

Castiel tactfully neglected to add that the expansion had been his idea, in an attempt to keep his brother busy during his stay in Derbyshire.

“I.... could look forward to that”, Balthazar, looking a little more hopeful. “I would be glad to be away from this place. I like Mr. Devereux, but mother has been all about the wedding these past two months, and now Rafe is here....”

“Indeed!” Castiel said heavily. “I had to invite him to pay a call, but I am sure it will not be a long one.” He knew Dean's feelings about religion, and if Raphael started on about it whilst at Pemberley, he would be at severe risk of being escorted off the premises.

“Over twenty years”, Balthazar said softly.

“Pardon?”

“Since you said yes to your lord, and I ran off with Wickham. The best decision of your life, and the worst one of mine. I nearly ruined everything for you, Cassie.”

He looked very downcast. Castiel sighed, and placed a finger under his brother's chin.

“There is something you could do to start making it up to me”, he smiled.

“Name it.”

“Stop calling me Cassie!”

Balthazar smiled.

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The wedding went off without a hitch, although Castiel could not help but note the disapproving glances that Raphael kept shooting at the vicar conducting the service, clearly finding fault with just about everything. Then the happy couple were off to Mr. Devereux's cottage in Cornwall, where they would spend two weeks before making their way back to Surrey.

“You do know your mother has said she is not coming back to Longbourn”, Mr Collins said after the couple had gone.
Of course Castiel hadn't known that.

“What about poor Balthazar?” he said. “Mother didn’t even think of him.”

“Mr. Devereux has offered to set him up in a small house of his own in the area, but I think he would rather leave”, Mr. Collins said. “It is not as if he has many happy memories here, after all.”

He saw his mate approaching, and hurried to help him to a chair. Inias smiled at him.

“Rafe is coming to Pemberley soon”, Castiel sighed. “And I had better start packing; I need to be on my way back.”

“You seem in a hurry?” Inias asked.

“Scay and Alfie are leaving for America next week”, Castiel explained. “We're seeing them off from the house the day before. I doubt we will ever see them again.”

“You still have four fine sons here, though”, Mr Collins said. “Talking of which, how are the twins doing?”

“Both doing well, thank you”, Castiel smiled. “Castor had an ear infection last month, so of course Polydeuces got one as well just after! Dean says I worry too much about them.”

“Typical alpha!” Inias snorted. “Give me a nice, reliable beta any day.”

Mr. Collins smiled at his mate.

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Two carriages stood outside the main door to Pemberley. The second one was filled with assorted pieces of luggage, whilst a small group had gathered outside the first.

“Papa, you know I can't leave until you let go of me!” Samandriel smiled.

Gabriel pouted.

“And your point?” he sniffed, clearly trying not to cry.

Sam slapped his son on the shoulder, then gently levered his mate off him. Dean shook Scaden's hand, and his son then kissed Castiel.

“Remember we're just a letter away!” Dean told his son gruffly. “The two of you get into any sort of bother, and you write us at once!”

“We will, dad”, Scaden grinned. He reached over and kissed his mate, then helped him into the waiting coach, before following him inside.

“We have one thing for you before you go”, Dean said, “and it's from all of us. The four of us, Dino and Garth, and Bren and Ry contributed as well.”

He handed his son a long envelope, which Scaden looked at curiously then opened. And he gasped.

“That money will be sitting in a bank in St. Louis when you arrive”, Dean said. “We had it shipped in gold bars, so it's perfectly safe; they wrote and told me last month. I know you two want to make it on your own, but just in case things don't work out, you've got something to fall back on.”
“Thanks”, both young men said together.

The carriage driver clicked his horses, and the two eldest sons moved off on the first stage of their great adventure, waving from the window until the coach disappeared down the driveway.
Locked Up

Chapter Summary

Galahad Bingley gets a surprise, and Dean has cause to be grateful to Heinrich Albertson. Bad news from London leads to a hasty departure, whilst Brady DeVille's plans receive another setback.

August 1823

Doctor St. John read the passage through once, then read it again, just to make sure he had fully grasped it. The medical knowledge involved was rare to the point of being almost unknown, but the repercussions were…. alarming. He looked at the calendar on the wall, did a quick mental calculation and swallowed hard. If his maths was right, he had no time to lose.

He ordered his carriage immediately.

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He burst through the door of Well Cottage, and was relieved to see one of the two men he had come to see alive, and apparently unharmed. Galahad Bingley looked up in surprise at his sudden appearance.

"Is something wrong?" he inquired.

"Where’s Wolfie?” the doctor gasped.

"In the garden. Why?”

"Is he pregnant yet?”

"Well, we did it enough times during his heat, so he should know any day now”, Galahad grinned. Then his smile faded, as he realized how worried his visitor was. "What’s the problem?"

"I’ve been reading up about false omegas”, the doctor said, regaining his breath. “Apparently when they become pregnant and know about it, their characters undergo a…. well, a change.”

“What sort of change?” Galahad asked.

Before the doctor could answer, the back door burst open, and a large and sweating beta stood there, glaring at them both. His gaze switched to his husband, and he all but snarled.

"You! Upstairs! Now!”

“They get a bit more possessive!” the doctor said, edging away to the safety of the front door. “And I really have to be leaving!”

He made it to the door before he heard Galahad’s strangled yelp, and Wolfgang’s answering growl.
Slipping carefully round the front of the house, he raised the red flag by the door, although before he 
could reach the relative safety of his carriage, he heard some frantic yelling that was most definitely 
that of a beta.

“And you’ve got a whole week of that to look forward to!” he grinned as he left.

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Anna carefully tucked baby Petroc into his crib, and looked across at her husband.

“So basically Wolfie is behaving just like an alpha?” she asked. “That’s strange!”

“Apparently becoming pregnant increases a false omega’s possessiveness by several thousand per 
cent”, her husband explained. “I just hope Galahad didn’t have any serious plans for this week, as I 
doubt Wolfie will be letting him out of the bedroom! I called in on Sam, just to make him aware, and 
he’s arranged for food to be delivered to them for the week.”

“Poor Galahad!” Anna laughed. “Still, he always did think a little too much of himself. It will be 
good to see him after all this is over.”

“What’s left of him!” her husband smirked.

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A week later, Galahad came to dinner with his family. He noticed at once how quiet they all were.


He moved gingerly over to his seat, and pulled his chair out, then glared at his papa, who was 
looking far too innocent. There was a large cushion on the chair.

“I hate you all!” he scowled, as he carefully sat down, wincing only once.

“So”, Gabriel beamed round at his family. “Any of you done anything interesting this past week?”

He ducked the sausage that was thrown from across the table.

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Galahad Bingley wasn’t the only person enduring the torture of a family dinner that evening, as it 
happened. After the one at Pemberley was over, Dean pulled his mate into his study.

“When is he leaving?” he hissed.

“I thought you were getting on well with Balthazar”, Castiel smiled, knowing full well what his 
husband meant.”

“I meant Preacher Rafe!” Dean almost growled. “If I have to put up with another sermon over 
supper, I shall do something with the potato spoon that you won’t like!”

“I think he plans to leave at the start of next month”, Castiel said. “Though I suspect that Balthazar 
may stay on for a bit; he wants to avoid travelling with him.”
“I know how he feels!” Dean groused. “And why isn’t Wolfie back yet? I thought he was only going into Lambton?”

“No, Chesterfield”, Castiel corrected. “It’s easier for him to pick his uncle up there, rather than have the man have to go to the trouble of hiring a coach for the last ten miles. They should be back before dark.”

“Good”, Dean said. “I’m sorry for poor Uncle Heinrich, but if I’m to be saddled with that bible-thumper for another few weeks, I want everyone to share the misery!”

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“I disagree.”

Those two words, spoken so calmly over dinner the following evening, might as well have been a bomb going off. Raphael stopped in mid-diatribe and looked up the table to where Heinrich Albertson was sitting with his nephew.

“Excuse me?” the omega said archly. “You disagree with the Word of God?”

“I certainly disagree with your interpretation of it”, Heinrich said, yawning. “And you are far too fond of the sound of your own voice….”

Castiel glared at his husband as Dean narrowly failed to suppress a smirk.

“You are questioning the Holy Bible?” Raphael could not have looked more shocked.

“I am questioning the use you put it to”, Heinrich said softly, ignoring the warning look from his nephew. “And we’re here to eat, not discuss theology.”

“There is never a time not to talk of God’s work…”

“Except when I’m eating”, Heinrich finished. “I can discuss it with you after food - if you are up to it, of course.”

Raphael bristled.

“If I am up to it?” he repeated archly.

“See you in the library”, Heinrich retorted. “Wolfie, please pass the sausages.”

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“I owe Wolfie’s uncle so much”, Dean said a few days later.

“Rafe has certainly been a lot better company”, Castiel observed. “I think he realized he’s outgunned at the dinner table, so he’s saving his powder for their arguments in private.”

“And saving all our ears in the process!” Dean grinned. “Talking of brothers, how is Balthazar doing?”
“He’s enjoying working at the library, and I know he’s also been spending some time with Michael”, Castiel said with a smile. “I never thought the day would come when those two started discussing high literature!”

“And only two weeks till the preacher leaves”, Dean sighed. “I think he might actually live to see it, if Heinrich keeps working his magic.”

In retrospect, it was a foolish thing to say. Experience should have told him that Fate needed precious little tempting when Dean Winchester was involved.

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Castiel came down next morning to find the house in turmoil, and his husband a mess.

“A letter arrived from Victor this morning”, Dean explained. “Bruno gave birth to a son last night, but he’s fallen ill. The doctors say….”

“You should go and be with your friend”, Castiel said at once. “You can take Heinrich and Wolfie down with you.”

“But I can’t leave you alone in the house with guests, Cas”, Dean said anxiously. “And I promised to take you to that recital in Manchester….”

“Forget it!” Castiel said firmly. “Victor is far more important than a bunch of musicians, especially with all he's done for us. Your place is with him, Dean, and you should go as soon as we have some food for your journey. I’ll go and talk with Mrs. Campbell.”

Dean kissed him lightly.

“I don’t know what I would do without you”, he whispered.

“Bear that in mind if they come and take me away for fratricide in the next two weeks!” Castiel smiled. “I'll pack you a few things. I presume you've told Wolfie?”

“We’re picking him and Guy up from their house”, Dean said. “Thanks, Cas.”

“Give my regards to Victor, and good luck!” the omega said as he went back upstairs.

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Judge Mark Williams eyed the man before him in the dock.

“You have nothing to say in your defence?” he asked dryly.

The man shook his head slightly.

“Breaking into someone’s house is a severe crime”, the judge frowned. “And being fresh off the boat does not excuse it. Three months. Take him away.”

Brady DeVille scowled. This was all he needed.
Beautiful Distractions

Chapter Summary

Bruno faces problems after a difficult birth. Jo's relationship with Joss edges slightly beyond utter and unabiding hatred/loathing'detestation, whilst Balthazar's tastes in literature cause a surprise. Raphael's dinner guest makes a somewhat unfavourable impression.

August 1823

“A girl, Victoria”, Victor said. “But that’s not who you’re here to see.”

He led the four of them through to a small private room, walking straight in. Bruno was sitting up in the bed, looking exhausted.

“Hullo all”, he said softly. “Excuse me not bowing.”

Wolfgang went over and hugged him.

“What’s wrong?” he whispered.

“Just a difficult birth”, Bruno sighed. “I just feel so tired. Lost a lot of blood.”

He looked across at Galahad, who was hanging back slightly.

“So you’re the beta who won Wolfie’s heart!” he smiled. “Uncle Hemmy here was kind enough to fill me in on your recent, er, adventures.”

Galahad and Wolfgang both blushed fiercely.

“What’s the outlook?” Wolfgang asked hesitantly.

“A lot better than it was yesterday”, Victor said before his mate could speak. “The longer things go without any further complications, the better.”

He gestured to Dean to go outside, and the two left Bruno and his family alone for a moment. Once outside, Victor visibly sagged.

“It’s a bad time to ask, but I need a favour”, he said.

“Name it!” Dean said at once. “You know Cas and I would do anything for you.”

“Can you have a word with the doctor, and let them know Bruno’s a friend of yours?” Victor asked. “I know he’s probably doing his best, but I think he’d add another ten per cent if he knew the nobility was involved. Though it’s wrong of me to say that....”
“Not wrong, just realistic”, Dean said at once. “Take me to see him now, Vic.”

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Twenty-four hours later, and the doctor was more pleased with Bruno’s progress. He said that he still wasn’t out of danger, but things were definitely looking up. The only downside was that he had a new nurse, whose manic cheerfulness and permanent grin unnerved everyone. The omega remarked that it was one way to make sure people got well soon, and begged not to be left alone with her!

The visitors also got their first sight of Victor's new daughter.

“She's underweight because she came three weeks early”, Victor said, “but the doctors say that's not a problem. Fortunately she has my looks.”

There was an annoyed grunt from across the room, followed by Bruno's “I heard that!”

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September 1823

Just a week later, and Bruno was out of hospital (‘that nurse really scared me!’ he admitted) and recovering at home. The doctors had discovered that, ironically given all the oranges he had consumed during his pregnancy, he had developed an allergy to apples, and eating one shortly before the birth had triggered his problems. Meanwhile Sam had written from Derbyshire, telling Galahad to stay with his mate and take as much time off as he needed, which had been a relief to his son.

Dean and Victor were enjoying a drink at the latter’s house whilst Bruno rested, and Galahad and Wolfgang were out for a walk.

“I made inquiries at Plymouth and Queenstown”, Victor told him. “I drew a blank at both, though. My network’s mainly in the capital, worse luck.”

“You think this Brady DeVille may try something?” Dean asked anxiously.

“I think he’s as morally bankrupt as his late and unlamented father”. Victor said archly. “My guess is he got off at Queenstown, where the authorities are a bit more lax than Plymouth, and would then try to make his way back into either England or Wales. I’ve also put out feelers in Derby.”

“Why? Dean asked.

“County town, and the most likely place he would make for”, Victor explained. “He might think he could find out more about what happened from local people, and the nearest large town would be a mine of gossip. You know what people are like.”

“Yes”, Dean sighed. “I was surprised the authorities didn’t follow up Wickham’s death more thoroughly.”

“The law’s a bit strange where duelling is concerned”, Victor said. “I think the government will ban it one day, but in the meantime they just try to make it as difficult as possible. That said, I guess the sheriff of Nottinghamshire knows full well what took place in his county, and is doing what Lord Nelson did at First Copenhagen, turning a blind eye.”
“Thankfully”, Dean said.

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Dean had written to his mate that they would be back the following week, clearly hoping that he might be lucky and return after Raphael’s departure. He was less than pleased when Castiel immediately wrote back, saying his brother’s sailing had been cancelled and he had had to rebook on another, later in the month.

Five days later, they all left the city. Mr. Collins had invited Victor to spend some time recuperating at Longbourn; Mrs. Devereux as she was now was staying in Surrey, as had been predicted. That would enable the alpha to still be close to London, whilst his mate enjoyed some country air. The other three then all continued back to Derbyshire, where Castiel was delighted to welcome his husband home. Dean requested that his mate wear the angel outfit that night, and it was worth Diniel and Garth both smirking at him the following morning when he kept yawning during their meeting about estate matters. He was fifty, after all!

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Heinrich entered the study looking for Raphael, only to find his younger brother there. Balthazar looked up at him.

“Rafe had to go into Lambton, to sort out some new clothes”, he said. “He should be back in a couple of hours.”

“Oh”, Heinrich said. He looked at the book Balthazar was reading, and frowned.

“A romance novel?” he said, surprised.

“Miss Morris writes well”, Balthazar said defensively. “And the way the world keeps changing, twenty years ago is fast becoming ancient history!”

“Young brother would doubtless not approve of the female of the species actually being allowed to write”, Heinrich pointed out.

“My dear brother does not approve of many things”, Balthazar said tartly. “We may be barely a year apart, but we have grown up very differently.”

Heinrich sat down opposite him.

“What do you like about Miss Morris?” he asked.

Balthazar thought for a moment.

“I know she is not highly regarded yet”, he said slowly, “but there is something so wonderful about the way she draws people, with all their imperfections. There is never any black and white, just many shades of grey, and even the good characters have failings. This is Learmouth, the book she died before finishing. I know it's only half – or a third – of a book, but it's still fascinating, especially wondering how things might have turned out. I have all seven completed novels, and her juvenilia.”

“Perhaps one day someone will write an ending for it?” Heinrich suggested. “You, perhaps?”

Balthazar laughed.

“I'm no writer!” he said. “But I would like to see someone try and finish both this and her other
unfinished work, Miss Holmes.”

They were interrupted by the sound of a carriage arriving. Heinrich craned his neck round to look out of the window.

“Your brother is back”, he observed.

“Then you had better resume your 'discussions' with him”, Balthazar said.

Heinrich sat back in his chair.

“I think I'm comfortable here”, he smiled.

Balthazar raised an eyebrow at him.

+++

The following week, Ellen and Bobby Singer called at Pemberley.

“No Jo?” Castiel asked, surprised.

His uncle grinned.

“She's over at Lynton, seeing her boyfriend.”

Both Dean and Castiel looked surprised.

“Joss?” Castiel asked.

“The very same!” his aunt smiled. “Poor Gabriel; he's just finished with Wolfie endlessly arguing with one son, and now he's got my daughter doing the same with another!”

“So they're seeing each other?” Dean asked. He noted his guests eying the cake with interest, and added, “yes, Mrs Moseley made it.”

“Can't we just take it home now?” Ellen asked with a smile. “Or better still, take her back with us.”

“Definitely not!” Castiel put in. “But I did ask her to make a second one for you to take with you when you go.”

“That's why you're our favourite nephew!” Bobby beamed.

The Singers had brought Castiel's birthday present with them, a charming little music-box that the omega loved. They also spent some time cooing over Castor and Polydeuces, before leaving to drive back to Cheshire. Castiel and Dean both waved them off before returning to the house. To Castiel's surprise, Dean ushered him into his study.

“I haven't given you my present yet”, he whispered.

“Isn't it a bit too early in the evening for that?” Castiel teased.

Dean lightly slapped his behind, then pulled a small envelope out of his pocket and handed it to his mate. Castiel opened it, and stared at the small card inside in confusion.

“Mr. Wells is one of the greatest architectural designers of our age”, Dean explained. “I know how much you loved that little Greek temple we saw on our travels in Cumberland, so I thought I could
have him design and build one here. He's working for the King of France until the end of next month, but if it works out we could lay the foundation stone on my next birthday and formally open it on yours. What do you think?”

Castiel threw his arms around his mate.

“I love it!” he whispered. “And as it's my birthday, I think I might choose to wear the maid outfit tonight!”

Dean groaned. But it was a pleasurable groan.

+++

Dean had, very reluctantly, agreed to allow Raphael to bring a fellow cleric over to dinner one evening, fearing that the man might prove as big an irritation as his brother. Edgar Wayland was a greasy-haired beta of about forty, thinning on top and as certain in his beliefs as Raphael. Even more annoyingly, most of the other family members and guests cried off for various reasons, although in Balthazar's case a sudden heat was, Dean supposed, a fair enough excuse. It just left him and Castiel to have to pretend to look interested for an hour or so.

Normally the gentlemen would have retired for port after dinner, but Raphael wanted to show his guest the library, so at least Dean was spared that. He went into his study to write a letter, and had almost finished when he heard a commotion outside. Hurrying out, he found a somewhat unusual sight; Mr Wayland was lying prone at the foot of the stairs, groaning loudly whilst Raphael attended to him. A clearly furious Heinrich was standing a few stairs up, glowering at him.

“What happened?” Dean demanded.

“This bastard forced his way into Balthazar's room whilst he was in heat!” Heinrich stormed, glaring at the prone man. “Fancied a little after-dinner omega, did you?”

“Don't talk to my friend like that!” Raphael stormed. “I'm sure Balthazar only encouraged him.”

Dean could make out the youngest Bennet's form at the top of the stairs. He was clearly trembling.

“Mr. Wayland, you will leave this house at once”, Dean said firmly. “I will have a servant call your carriage for you.”

“If he goes, I go!” Raphael said firmly.

Dean looked hard at him, then across at his mate, who had just emerged from the other door. Castiel nodded slightly.

“Then I suggest you start packing, and your 'friend' can take you back to Lambton with him”, Dean said angrily. “No-one who condones such behaviour is welcome in this house. Cas, please take Balthazar back to his room.”

His mate nodded, and hurried up to his brother, leading him away. Heinrich glared at the two figures before him one more time before following at a distance and, once the brothers were inside Balthazar's room, standing guard outside it.

+++

Raphael Bennet left the house that same evening. They never saw either him or his friend again.
A Changed Man?

Chapter Summary

Balthazar Bennet recovers from his ordeal, and Ion Collins has an unexpected visitor. In both Hertfordshire and Derbyshire, romance is in the air.

The fluff before the storm.....

October 1823

The fact they were blood brothers enabled Castiel to stay with Balthazar for the remaining five days of his heat, and to help him recover from the events of that fateful dinner. The Laird of Pemberley could also not help notice how curiously attentive his brother's rescuer was during that time, asking after him on several occasions. Dean arranged for food and drink to be sent up, and also kept tabs on their recently departed guest.

“Dean checked for me, and Rafe left for America today”, Castiel told his brother on the last day of his heat. “His ship was held up for someone important from London, apparently.”

“I bet he was annoyed he wasn’t the important one”, Balthazar said shortly.

“Mr. Albertson likes you.”

Balthazar promptly coughed up his mouthful of soup, fortunately mostly into the fire. It was not a really cold day, but Castiel had had the servants lay one whilst his brother was in the bathroom.

“Cassie” - he saw his brother's look and quickly corrected himself - “Castiel, you’re not thinking….”

“Why not?” Castiel said quietly. “I know he was married before, but he separated from his mate after the man refused to help him hide Bruno and Wolfie that time. That was years ago. And he likes you.”

Balthazar blushed.

“How can you tell?” he asked.

“He’s always asking about you, and how you’re getting on, and when it will all be over”, Castiel said. “Do you like him?”

“I…. Cas, you know what I’m like!”

“No, Bal, I don’t”, Castiel said. “I know what you were like before all this blew up, but you’ve changed a lot. And you deserve a little happiness, after all you’ve been through.”

His brother said nothing, but looked thoughtfully into the fire.

+++-+++
Ion Collins walked into the breakfast room at Lucas Lodge, and was immediately suspicious. His parents and younger brother were talking across the table, and stopped abruptly as soon as they all saw him. He looked at them warily, but got himself some food and sat down.

“Your father and I are going shopping in Meryton today”, Inias told him casually.

“All right”, Ion said, wondering where this was heading.

“I have someone coming over, but we should be back before he’s here”, his father said. “If we are not, can you show him in and talk with him for a little.”

“Who is it?” Ion asked.

His papa let out a sudden cry. His father was at his side in seconds.

“Just the baby making his presence felt”, Inias smiled. “Ion, could you fetch me my book, please? It’s in the front room; the one with the blue cover.”

Ion nodded and left the room. Mr. Collins looked disapprovingly at his mate. Inias stared back at him.

“Well, I had to distract him somehow!” the omega remarked. “And who made me like this!”

Mr. Collins blushed, and Paul chuckled.

+~+~+

It was barely an hour later that Ion, poring over some convoluted accounts from their London agent, heard the front door bell ring. Moments later, a servant arrived to tell him a visitor had been shown into the waiting room. Sighing – he knew from experience that his parents would not be back for at least another two hours – he went to see who it was.

The guest was standing in the waiting room, staring out of the window, so Ion could only see his back. He was dressed very finely, clearly a young man of some taste. There was something vaguely familiar about him....

Then the man turned round and Ion gasped in shock. It was Raziel Turner.

Ion swallowed hard. By the Gods, the man looked wonderful!

“Hullo, Mr. Collins”, he smiled. “Your father kindly said I could stay for a week whilst the college is closed. I trust that is not a problem?”

“No!” Ion said, in a voice that was at least an octave too high. He swallowed and tried again. “Er, no”, he went on, finally noticing the large suitcase next to the man. “May I get you a drink?”

“I don’t drink alcohol”, Raziel smiled. “But a cup of coffee would be most welcome.”

Ion led him out and into the main room, trying to pull himself back together again. So now he knew what his relations had been plotting that morning!
Balthazar was working alone in the library – he had loaned his two helpers to the church as they were preparing for All Saints’ Day – when he heard a polite cough from in front of his desk. He looked up politely. And promptly went pale.

“Mr. Albertson!” he said, shocked.

“Is this a bad time?” Wolfgang’s uncle inquired politely.

“Um, no”, Balthazar ground out. “I was just about to close up anyway; everyone is busy helping out at the church, so it’s very quiet. What can I do for you?”

“I was wondering if you might like to go to lunch?” the alpha said.

Balthazar stared at him for a moment.

“With me”, Heinrich went on, seeming a little put off by the omega’s non-reaction. “Unless you have other plans….”

“No!” Balthazar almost shouted, before recovering. “Um, no, definitely not. Just sandwiches. Yes, I... brought sandwiches today. But I would love to go to lunch with you.”

Heinrich smiled.

+---+

“You seem… different.”

Raziel smiled. He and Ion were walking around the Lucas Lodge estate, having just dropped off a package for Lady Amelia (a bottle of quality sherry and a large bag of dog treats; Inias knew his mother well).

“I know it’s only been a few weeks, but you have to be quite forward to survive at Oxford”, he said wryly. “Three people have already quit my course because it was too hard for them. I met a nice omega called Lewis in the first week, and he encouraged me to do this self-confidence course for new arrivals. I do feel a whole lot better for it.”

Ion looked at him thoughtfully.

“So this Lewis is a friend of yours?” he asked tentatively.

Raziel gave him a look that made it quite clear he knew where that line of questioning was heading. He hesitated a moment before answering.

“Yes. He’s engaged to an alpha in the city, who wanted to put him through the engineering course. Very unusual for an omega, but Neil is quite progressive in his thinking.”

“Oh.”

“You were jealous, weren’t you?” Raziel teased.
Ion blushed.

“Shut up!” he muttered.

Raziel laughed.

+++

“Are you going back to Pemberley?” Heinrich asked as they finished their meal.

“No, I thought I would do some shopping first, then a bit of tidying-up back at work”, Balthazar said. “The carriage doesn’t usually pick me up until five, so I didn’t tell them to come any earlier today. Why?”

Heinrich looked away from him.

“It’s just I’m looking at purchasing one of the estate properties”, he said, “and I was going to look at it this afternoon. Would you like to come?”

Balthazar looked at him in surprise.

“I didn’t know you were thinking of settling here”, he said.

Heinrich suddenly looked straight at him.

“I hadn’t planned to, until recently.”

The omega blushed.

“Oh”, he said faintly.

+++

“What are your plans for the future?” Raziel asked, as he and Ion sat at dinner the following evening. Ion’s parents had gone over to visit some friends, and would not be back until late, and Paul was visiting his omega friend in Meryton.

“Dad wants to set me up in Longbourn, and then stay here with papa”, Ion said.

“And you don’t want that?” Raziel said, surprised. “I heard it was quite a big house.”

“Too big”, Ion said. “Draughty and hard to heat. I’d like something much smaller, somewhere I could curl up in front of a warm fire with just a few rooms, and leave society to its own devices. I could have had it too, if….”

He stopped, remembering the events of the year before. Raziel coughed tactfully.

“I doubt society would leave you, though”, he said. “And you may want to start a family one day, so you would need at least some extra rooms.”

“Yes, but I think would only want at most two children. Providing one of them was a son, of course.” He looked across at his guest, and added, “any alpha or beta I chose would have to accept
“If they loved you enough, they would”, Raziel said confidently. “I know I would.”

There was a definite pause.

“Would you really?” Ion asked.

Raziel rose and came across to him, taking his hand and kissing it with the lightest of touches.

“You’re worth it”, he said quietly.

+++

Missouri Moseley braced herself before knocking at the door, which looked as if too hard a blow might cause it to collapse. This was it. If she went through that door, she knew full well what the consequences would be.

She knocked just once.

At first she thought – hoped? - the owner might be out, though she knew that was unlikely. Then the door slowly opened. A tall, pale woman was standing there, looking unsurprised.

“I knew you were coming”, she said quietly. “It’s been a long time. Come in.”
Chapter Summary

Things start to come together for Brady DeVille, and it looks as if his luck has finally turned. And two happy events make for a joyous Yuletide at Pemberley.

November 1823

Welsh prisons, Brady DeVille had decided, were even worse than American ones. The food gave slops a bad name, and the foul stench made him want to claw at the bare walls. Only the certain knowledge that the slightest bit of errant behaviour would have them doubling his sentence kept him quiet, and it was with great relief that he was finally let out the day before Guy Fawkes’ Night. He could have used the meager funds he had gathered in Ireland to make his stay more comfortable, but he knew he would need every penny he had for what lay ahead.

A visit to the local shipping company brought mixed news. Derby, the nearest place he could ask after, was over two hundred miles from Pembroke, which even if he walked for all of each and every day, would take him at best a couple of weeks. On the plus side, the agent told him of a local coal merchant who was looking for men to travel one-way to Bristol to help him with a particularly large shipment he had to pick up in Swansea. It was only slightly nearer his goal, but at least it was in England, and there was the chance of finding someone who needed him to travel north from there, which was much more likely that finding anyone in as remote a place as this. Plus he would be paid and fed.

++++

The same day Brady was tasting his first free air for a while, Victor Henriksen received a letter in London. Strangely the anonymous sender had actually paid the postage – a rare extravagance in these days. Even stranger, the letter ran to precisely two words.

‘Surprise, Bristol’.

He thought for a moment, then picked up his pen. Whatever this was, his gut instinct told him it was worth investigating.

++++

Thank heavens for Mrs. Moseley, Castiel thought, as he cuddled closer to his husband and watched the bonfire light up the November sky. The Pemberley cook had warned him that bad weather was moving in, and the traditional Parsons Field bonfire could be a washout. Dean had reacted immediately, ordering the built fire covered up, and sure enough, just after midday on the fifth the heavens opened. Fortunately the storm blew through quickly, and after one extra day spent setting everything up again, the event took place on the Friday, just two days late.

“This is better than any water attraction!” Dean smiled, wrapping a blanket around them both. Castiel had been telling him earlier about a new pier opening at Brighton, where people could stand above the sea whilst trying various amusements. “Dry land, and dry people, thanks to Mrs M!”
“Did Wolfie’s uncle buy that house off you?” his mate asked.

“Off us, beloved”, Dean corrected. “The first one was a bit too small for him, but he saw something bigger I found for him yesterday, and he seemed to like that.”

“I’m just glad for Balthazar”, Castiel said. “He’s been through so much in his life.”

Dean kissed him long and hard.

“What was that for?” Castiel asked breathlessly.

“You’ve been through so much more, yet you still think of others”, Dean whispered. “But I’m glad for your brother, even if only because it makes you that little bit happier.”

“I have you”, Castiel said simply. “How could I not be happy?”

Dean did not cry. Much.

+++

It took over a week for the lugger – the Surprise - to make its wearisome way from Pembroke to Bristol via Swansea, and a further day to unload its heavy cargo. But at least Brady had some money in his pocket now, and he could spend a few days looking out for an opportunity to get north.

That opportunity came sooner than he could have hoped. On his first day in the city, he was in a mean little restaurant when he heard a customer complaining to the waitress that he would have to hire someone especially to take a letter to his cousin in Leicester. Just a couple of days travel from Derby, Brady thought.

He hurried over and introduced himself to the man. It turned out he wanted to return his brother’s horse, and had arranged to drop it off at an inn in the midlands town. He was also taking the chance to sort out some legal matters arising from their late father’s will; apparently there had been some disagreement in the family over the settlement. Brady didn’t really care; the money was not much, but he had a free ride most of the way to his destination, and more money in his wallet.

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He arrived safely in Leicester and delivered his horse, then went to inquire about getting to Derby. It turned out there was a weekly coach from London to York, and it went through Derby and Nottingham on alternate weeks. It was running the next day, but unfortunately to Nottingham. It was just over thirty miles from Coventry to Derby, so Brady decided he would have to walk it. Though as things turned out his luck was in once more; he was overtaken by a farmer's cart just outside the town, and the man who was going to Stoke offered to take him as far as Ashby de la Zouch, cutting his foot journey roughly in half. The cart moved barely faster than walking pace on the country roads, but at least it saved his energy.

December 1823

He arrived in Derby on the first of the month, having taken two days to make the journey from Ashby. He was footsore and weary, though at least his shoes were still intact, the farmer having given him an old pair that were lying in the back of the cart. Now all he had to do was find and deal
with his target.

Though he would first have to find out who that target was, of course.

It took a couple of days, but finally he managed to find a woman at the inn who, in exchange for a huge amount of beer, was willing to give him some of the facts of what had happened. It turned out she had worked at Lynton at that time, but had since left—dismissed, Brady suspected but didn’t say. She told him that Brady’s father had tried to lay claim to the Lynton estate by marrying the current owner’s sister Margaret Bingley, and then producing a document that showed her brother was illegitimate. Except the whole thing had been a set-up; somehow someone had known of the plan, and it turned out it wasn’t Sam Bingley who was a bastard but Margaret herself. Wickham had tried to get revenge by publicly insulting the mate of his former rival, Sam Bingley’s friend Lord Winchester, knowing full well that Mr. Bingley’s son Galahad, a weapons expert despite his age, would be training him for the resultant duel. The woman (now on her sixth beer; did she have an iron stomach or something?) had not been at the duel, but had heard from a co-worker that his father had turned early to shoot and kill Galahad, only for Lord Winchester’s mate’s valet, who had been attending to represent his master, to kill him with a throwing-knife. Galahad and this man, Wolfgang, had later married, and the latter was now pregnant with their first child.

Brady smiled evilly.

“Difficult thing, childbirth”, he muttered after his ‘guest’ had finally slipped under the table.

+++ + ++

He knew that if he stayed in the town for too long, word about him was bound to get out, and could possibly reach the ears of his target, so he had to move fast. Fortunately the woman the night before had given him an address of a local wise-woman (‘we don’t call her a witch, sir, not after what she did to the poor mayor; poor man still has to wear loose trousers!’) in the town of Lambton, not far from where Mr Bingley lived, and a day’s travel took him there. Louisa—she either did not have or use a surname—greeted him the following morning as if she had been expecting him, and only slightly raised an eyebrow when he told her what he wanted. She looked at him thoughtfully for some time.

“How much money do you have on you?” she asked at last.

He told her.

“I’ll sell you what you need for that minus your coach fare to Liverpool”, she said shortly. “I know exactly how much that is, by the way, so don’t try anything. You’ll have to work your way across the ocean.”

“All right”, he said.

She hesitated, then rose and crossed to an old dresser. Drawing a key from a chain around her neck, she unlocked a small drawer, and drew out two small pill bottles.

“Get this wrong, and it will be the death of you, not him”, she said firmly, taking one pill from each bottle and placing it in a third bottle. “The red pill will cause the omega who takes it to abort the child they are carrying, and injure if not kill them in the process. The orange pill is harmless, but since your victim may well suspect you despite your cover story, you can take that to reassure him.”

He didn’t ask how she knew he would have a cover story.
“Why are you helping me?” he asked curiously.

She suddenly glared at him.

“The mayor asked too many questions,” she observed tartly.

Brady swallowed hard, then counted out the money for her before taking the bottle and leaving.

++~++

‘Dear Monseigneur Bingley,

My name is Bradley Gaines, and I am currently doing a course on omega studies at Cambridge University as part of my training to become a doctor. A friend told me you were a 'false omega' (I hate the term, but it seems there is no other) who is pregnant. I wonder if you might consent to providing me with a urine sample for my studies, as I have several for a paper I am writing but none from such as yourself? If you would agree to this, would it be possible to meet me in the St. George Hotel in Lambton on December 30th at two of the clock, as I am passing through that town on that day? I am afraid I cannot recompense you in any way as I have not yet obtained my degree, but I feel the study will benefit society's understanding of omegas in general which, I think you will agree with me, still has a long way to go.

Please write back to me care of the Blacksmith's Arms in Derby, and I will collect the letter from them. I am actually staying with an omega friend, but his alpha is virulently opposed to my studies, and I do not wish to cause further friction between them.

Yours sincerely

Bradley Gaines (Mr.)

Wolfgang folded the letter up, and thought for a while before reaching for his pen to write back. It was a reasonable request, and the man was right – this could only be for the good of society.

++~++

It was Christmas Day at Pemberley, and the day could hardly have been more joyous. The day before, a letter had arrived from Hertfordshire, informing them that Inias Collins had been safely delivered of an alpha, who was going to be called Cary after his father. Nine pounds; no wonder Castiel's friend had been so big! That in itself would have been reason enough for celebration, but just moments after Castiel had announced the news at the dinner table, his own son had suddenly gone into labour, and four hours later Dean and Castiel had a second grandson, a beta. Ellen and Bobby Singer had come over for the holy day, although Jo had gone to spend Christmas with Joss and the Bingleys, whilst Raziel was staying in Hertfordshire with his fiancé.

“Your second son”, Dean said proudly to his son and heir, who was sat on the couch looking tired but happy. Garth sat next to him, cradling his new son to his chest. “I'm so proud of you both.”

Diniel cuddled closer to his husband, and looked adoringly at his son.

“A few weeks early, so thanks for getting off my bladder!” he smiled. He looked up as Ellen and Bobby came across to him. The older man had been instrumental in the birth, the midwife being unable to make it to the house in time. Diniel looked at his husband, who nodded slightly.

“We've already chosen a name”, Garth said quietly.
“What is it?” Castiel asked.

“Robert.”

Bobby Singer paled. Garth looked at him.

“And we'd like to ask you and Ellen to be his godparents”, he added.

For once Castiel's uncle seemed to have lost his voice. Ellen came up beside him and took his hand.

“We'd be delighted!” she smiled.

“And next month Ry and Bren are due to have theirs”, Castiel observed. He smiled at how happy his aunt and uncle looked, as Garth carefully handed the baby to Bobby to hold.

Things were wonderful just now.
Two Came To Pemberley

Chapter Summary

There is an ending, and a new beginning.

January 1824

“What on earth is that?”

Castiel looked up, to see his son and grandson standing there. He smiled at Alexander, who half-hid behind his papa but smiled shyly back at him.

“It's the model for the Greek temple Dean's having built for me”, he said. “The first stone will be laid on his birthday, and it will be officially opened on mine come September.”

Diniel stared at the model in confusion.

“It looks familiar from somewhere”, he said, patting his son's hair.

“It's a model of the Oracle at Delphi”, his papa explained. “Dean's having it built for me by the ornamental lake. That's why the men are making such a mess over there, digging test-pits.”

“What did you get father for Christmas?” Diniel asked curiously. “I don't remember seeing you give him anything?”

His papa looked at him coyly.

“You're too young to know!” he said with a smile.

Diniel looked horrified.

“Euw! Not in front of my son, please!”

Alexander stared up at his blushing papa in confusion.

+~+~+

“Don't forget Bron and Vic are coming over later”, Wolfgang reminded his husband as they sat at the breakfast table.

“How could I; you've reminded me like twenty times!” Galahad groused. He watched nervously as his mate moved his huge stomach around the table. “Are you sure you want to go into town like that? You're due in less than three weeks, remember?”

“Wow, I had forgotten!” Wolfgang quipped. He looked down at his stomach in apparent confusion. “How did I get like this again?”

“If I didn't love you, I'd make you pay for that!”

Wolfgang laughed.
“Good thing you do, then. See you later.”

“Thank you very much for seeing me, Mr. Bingley”, Brady smiled, showing the beta to a chair.

“Not at all”, Wolfgang smiled. “Always happy to help those who support omega rights.”

Brady took out a pill bottle, and removed one of the two pills from inside it.

“I wonder if I could ask you to take this?” he asked, sounding nervous. “It's a vitamin supplement, that reacts with chemicals inside your body to turn your urine a different colour depending on its constitution. Unfortunately I can't apply it afterwards as it degrades once exposed to air.”

Wolfgang seemed to hesitate.

“I know taking pills from someone you've barely met is a bit strange”, Brady said, removing the other pill from the bottle, “and I would never ask someone to do something I wasn't prepared to do myself.”

He swallowed the orange capsule, easing it down with a glass of water. Wolfgang smiled, then did the same with the red one. Brady managed to suppress a grin of triumph.

“Now we eat, and wait for nature to take its course”, he smiled. “I must thank you again for paying for all this.”

“As I said, anything to support my fellow omegas”, Wolfgang grinned.

“I don't feel well!”

Wolfgang grasped the back of the chair he was sat on in Brady's room, wincing in pain. Brady looked at his watch, and was unable to stop a smile.

“Would you like another glass of water?” Brady asked politely.

“Yes, please.”

“Then perhaps you should not have killed my father!”

Wolfgang sat up in shock, before doubling over in pain again.

“What do you mean?” he gasped out.

Brady drew closer to him.

“It was you who knifed my poor dad!” he snarled. “I made sure of that fact before concocting this little scheme. That pill you took is designed to make sure your body rejects the spawn growing inside of you. Forced abortion, just like you deserve!”

Wolfgang groaned.

“Your father tried to cheat.....”

“Details, details!” Brady scoffed, as the huge beta writhed on the chair. He looked at his watch and
sighed. “Now my coach leaves in barely an hour, so I had better be on my way. I'm locking the door, so there's no way out, you bastard!”

He grabbed his bag off the bed, and threw a last glance at the prone figure by the window before going over to the door. He opened it – and stepped back sharply.

Two men were standing right outside. The first he recognized as Bruno, his victim's brother, who he had seen walking with Wolfgang in town the day before. The other was a tall blond man with a monocle. Both were looking at him expectantly.

“Did you want something, gentlemen?” he asked politely, trying to block their view into the room.

Bruno pushed him easily aside and went over to the window and his brother. The other man stayed in the doorway, a grim expression on his face. Something about him told Brady he was definitely not getting past.

“You're too late!” he spat out defiantly. “A few more minutes, and it'll all be over!”

“I quite agree.”

Brady stared in complete shock. Wolfgang had spoken as his brother helped him up from his chair, apparently unharmed.

“What the....?”

“You took a terrible risk there, Wolfie”, Bruno said disapprovingly. “What if he'd got it wrong and gave you the bad pill?”

Wolfgang reached into his breast pocket and extracted a small red pill.

“You mean this thing”, he said with a grin. “Oddly enough I didn't survive this long by taking strange pills from strange men, Bron! Besides, it was only a sleeping pill, just like the one he took.”

Brady suddenly made a break for it, but the tall blond man hauled him effortlessly back into the room.

“You're going nowhere, Mr. DeVille”, he said firmly.

Brady gasped at his name.

“You know me?” he demanded.

“I knew you were coming”, the man said. “Oh, and seeing as you’ve not got long in the land of the conscious, I'd better introduce myself. Victor Henriksen, husband to Bruno here.”

“How did you know?” Brady's limbs suddenly felt like lead.

“I didn't”, Victor admitted. “I knew you got off that boat at either Plymouth or Queenstown, but the first I knew for certain was when Mrs. Moseley wrote me, with the name of your boat to Bristol.”

“Who is...?”

“Lord Winchester's cook, Wolfie's friend, and, unfortunately for you, a seer. It was my agents who helped you get here, the man who needed a letter sending to Coventry and the obliging farmer who gave you free boots at Ashby.”
“That woman in the inn?” Brady yawned, sinking back into a chair.

“One of our most accomplished actresses, with a capacity for alcohol like you would not believe”, Victor smiled unpleasantly. “She directed you to dear Louisa, who is indeed a talented lady, and also half-sister to Mrs M. As Wolfie said, both tablets are just mild sleeping pills.”

Brady tried to stand up, but fell back again.

“What are you going to do with me?” he managed.

All three men laughed.

“Make sure you never trouble my family again”, Victor said firmly.

The last thing Brady DeVille saw before he passed out was Victor and Bruno dragging a large chest into the room.....

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Missouri Moseley sighed as she passed her sister a slice of cake.

“I'm going to miss it”, she said wistfully.

“You knew the rules”, Louisa said firmly. “We all do. The minute you use your knowledge to interfere directly in events, you lose the power.”

“But you did check the futures for the masters as I asked?

Louisa smiled.

“I did”, she said, nibbling the delicious cake. “And you'll be pleased to know that after all they've been through, it's plain sailing nearly all the way now.”

Missouri looked at her sister uncertainly.

“Nearly all the way?”

Louisa grinned knowingly.

“Well, His Lordship does have a couple of small surprises left, one of which will be sooner than he expects. But the first will be a pleasant one, when someone unexpected comes back into his life. It will be many years before he has to face the second. And when he does, many years from now, he won't exactly be in a position to complain....”

+++~+++

There was a brief burst of applause as the foundation stone was lowered carefully into position. Dean cuddled his mate, trying to shelter him from the cold January wind.

“Nicely done”, came a voice from behind them.

They both turned to find Victor standing there alone.

“How did it go?” Dean asked anxiously.

“They're going to call him
Gawain."

“That is good news!” Castiel smiled. “I was so worried when he went into labour this morning. Thank God Peter was here.”

“By the way”, Dean said, “you never told me what happened with Mr. DeVille. Did he make it back to England?”

Victor looked meaningfully at one of the now filled-in test holes for the future temple.

“He did”, he said meaningfully.

The Lord and Laird of Pemberley shared a look of understanding.

“Since they were doing so well, I left Wolfie and Guy, and came back via town”, Victor said, reaching into his pocket. “They had the things you wanted ready, Cas."

He handed the omega a small box. Dean looked at it curiously, as Castiel handed it to him.

“The second part of your birthday present”, Castiel smiled.

Dean opened the box to find two thin rings, both with wings and a halo engraved on them.

“I already wear your wedding-ring, Cas”, he pointed out.

“This is for special occasions”, the omega smiled. “You don't recognize them?”

“Should I?”

“They're made from the bullets from your duel last year”, Castiel explained. “Peter gave them to me after he extracted one from Galahad. I thought it would be nice to have a reminder that we could both wear on special occasions.”

Dean kissed him.

“Thank you”, he whispered. “And this is only part of my present?”

Castiel leant in closer.

“I had another costume made for tonight!” he smiled. “You did say that what with Scay and Alfie leaving for America, you always wanted to be a cowboy?”

Dean Winchester, Lord of Pemberley, would like it put on record that he did not whimper with happiness at this point. And if he did, only Victor was close enough to hear, and he knew well enough not to. So there.

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Dean walked (or limped) downstairs the following morning to find his mate talking to a guest in the living-room. There was something vaguely familiar about the visitor, even though he could only see him from behind, but before he could place it, Castiel ushered him back out of the room.

“The final part of your birthday present is here”, he said, gesturing to the visitor.

“I don't understand”, Dean said, frowning.
Castiel smiled.

“If I said his name is Mr. Benjamin Braeden, would that ring any bells?”

Dean stared at his mate in shock.

“My son!” he blurted out. “At least.....”

“Lisa died two months ago”, Castiel explained, “and Victor has been negotiating with Ben's stepfather ever since. Ben wants to spend time with his father, Dean, and that's you.”

“But he's not your son, Cas.”

“He's yours, Dean, and that's what's important. Go talk to him.”

Castiel reached up and kissed him, then slipped away. Dean swallowed hard, then went back into the room.

“Hullo”, he ground out,

Benjamin Braeden looked up at him through a familiar pair of green eyes, and Dean's heart skipped a beat. The young man smiled in welcome.

“Hullo, dad!”
Happily Ever After?

Chapter Summary

It ends with a certain tan-coloured coat. For now, anyway....

January 1855

Dean sighed, wondering whether he should bother making an effort today. Yes, it was his eighty-second birthday, but there was no pressing reason to get up. He sighed, and snuggled back into the comfort of the bed.

Comfortable, perhaps, but painfully empty. Castiel, his beloved, wonderful, beautiful Cas, had died last February, aged seventy-seven, a ripe old age for an omega in this day and age. Dean had been beside himself with grief, but Cas, that sneaky little angel, had extracted a promise from him that his husband wouldn't try to follow him into the next world before his time. Dean's faith had been so battered by events in his life that he was almost sure there wasn't a next world, but he would have done anything to ease his mate's last few hours, and he had promised. And he always kept his word to his mate.

The last year had been particularly rough for Dean, not just because of the loss of his mate. Gabriel Bingley had died two months after his brother, and his husband had not long outlived him, dying in June on (appropriately enough) the longest day of the year. The two had some time ago turned Lynton over to Lancelot, who somehow found time to both run the estate and father a further nine children with Sasha. Galahad worked as his estate manager, and was still riotously in love with Wolfgang (except for the time when the latter had his bursts of possessiveness, which left his mate aching for several days at a time!). Their six children had all turned out on their papa's scale, even their two daughters. Wolfie's brother Bruno also lived on the estate with his five children, having moved there after Victor had died five years ago. Dean missed Sam badly, though he knew that his friend had been hurting from the loss of Gabriel probably as much as he did from Castiel.

The other major loss amongst Dean's acquaintances had been Crowley and Inias Collins, whose ship had been lost in a storm three years ago. Ion and Raziel Singer had moved into Disley Place when Bobby and Ellen had passed on within days of each other nine years ago, and the two lived there happily if noisily with their five children. Dean saw both them and Castiel's brother Balthazar occasionally; the latter had had several books published, and had had one son with Heinrich Albertson, the two still living on the estate. Longbourn had passed briefly to Paul Collins, but he soon sold it to move abroad with his omega mate.

To his surprise, Dean still received regular letters from the United States. Scaden and Samandriel had done well there, settling for some years in Kansas City before they had moved last year to help found a new town called Lawrence. They had been joined the year before that by Diniel's second son, Robert.

In 1843 Dean had decided to retire on his seventieth birthday, making Diniel the new master of Pemberley. Garth had decided to step down as estate manager at the same time, and Dean had been pleased that his place was taken by Ben, who had moved to Derbyshire permanently two years earlier, and now had two sons with a local girl. Five years after that Dean's grandson Alexander had married a lovely omega called Yorke, and last year they had had their first son, Dean's great-
grandson, an alpha whom they had named Drake Castiel Winchester. He had been born barely a month before Castiel ad passed, so at least the omega had lived to see the future secured for his descendants.

Diniel and Garth had gone on to have six more children of their own; one of their sons, Gereint, had even managed to get a job as a footman to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in Buckingham Palace. Ryazan and Brenton had gone on to produce no less than nine more children, including two sets of twins. It was a running family joke that any clerical preachings about abstinence were on somewhat shaky ground.

Castor and Polydeuces had grown up well, the former ran a gymnasium in Derby, whilst the latter was now a member of parliament for Derbyshire, and was often to be found in Westminster, helping to shape the nation's future. The day after their eighteenth birthdays their parents had sat them down and told them the truth about their conception, but both boys had insisted very firmly that Dean and Castiel were all the parents they ever needed or wanted. Dean had shed a tear at that, but as usual his mate had not told anyone about it.

Anna St. John had meanwhile secured the happiness that had been denied to her mother. Her marriage to her doctor produced five children, the eldest of whom, Petroc, was now training in the same profession as his father. Michael’s marriage to Lord Adam had also gone well; they also had five children, including a second set of twins. Jo Singer had dragged her new husband off to preach the Good Word somewhere or other; the last place they had written from was New Zealand, on the other side of the world. They had not had any children, but they both seemed happy enough. Ash and Kevin had two sons and had run their shipping company very successfully for fifteen years before selling it and retiring on the proceeds, although Ash sometimes went to London to do something or other for the government.

The world seemed to be changing faster every year, and it made Dean feel every year of his great age. Fifteen years ago the newfangled railway had reached the town of Chesterfield, not that far away, and it was now possible to be in London in barely half a day. six years past Lambton Station, on the line between Derby and Manchester, had brought the world even closer to Pemberley. The Railway Age had brought cheaper goods, but also encouraged more people to move away from the countryside into towns, which hurt estates like Pemberley and Lynton. The estate’s West Indian holdings had been sold off after the abolition of slavery in 1833, and was now owned by the very people who had once been owned by it.

Birthday or not, an octogenarian needed his rest. The alpha relaxed back into his bed, and dozed off. For the last time, Dean Winchester slept.

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He woke to find a familiar figure sat on the window ledge, reading. The light from outside was far too bright, and he held a hand over his eyes.

“Cas?”

His mate looked up, and smiled that wonderful eye-crinkling smile of his.

“Hullo, Dean.”

Oh. A dream. That explained why he and Cas were young again. His mate got down from the ledge, and came across to his side of the bed, as Dean pulled himself slowly upright. Oddly enough the bright light came with his mate; it seemed to be coming from inside his body. Cas kissed him lightly on the forehead.
“Do you trust me, Dean?” he whispered.

“Always and forever, Cas. You know that.”

“I want you to do something for me.”

“Of course. Name it.”

“Shut your eyes and think of me.”

Dean stared at him in confusion.

“But you're here!” he pointed out.

“Please, Dean?”

“All right.”

He obediently shut his eyes, and concentrated, trying to picture his mate. But something was wrong. He couldn't see Cas as he was or had been, he was seeing....

Suddenly it hit him, so hard he almost fell back onto the bed. This wasn't Castiel James Winchester, nee Bennet, his own beautiful, perfect omega of the amazing blue eyes and impossible hair. This was a different Castiel, a magnificent all-powerful being with brilliant wings that somehow managed to be both blinding white and night-black at one and the same time, with a halo that illuminated that impossible hair and made him look almost ethereal, with such a serene beauty that Dean knew for certain he was no longer in his body, because the mere sight of this being would kill him as surely as Wolfgang's dagger had killed the hateful Wickham all those years ago.

“I am still your Cas”, the being said, and even his voice was different, almost musical in its intensity. “Look at me, Dean.”

Tentatively he opened his eyes just a crack, and was relieved to see that the brilliance of the creature – the angel – in front of him had been toned down a little. And beneath all the power and the glory, it was unmistakeably Cas, looking at him shyly and lovingly. His Cas, who he had missed so much.

“This is it, Dean”, Castiel whispered. “This is Heaven.”

“So.... I'm dead?”

“Yes. You're with me now.”

Dean stared at him, hope filling his heart, or whatever was where his heart had been.

“Forever?” he asked hopefully.

The reply was like a bucket of ice-cold water.

“No. Only for eight cycles.”

A cold fear gripped Dean's heart.

“Is that like eight days? Hours?”

“One cycle is fifteen and a half years, so a little over a century, Dean.”
Dean stared at him in amazement.

“A little over....?” he said, a smile slowly creasing his features.

“Yes. After which I have to undertake the second part of my assignment.”

“Assignment?”

“Yes, Dean. I am an angel, after all.”

Something belatedly clicked in Dean's head.

“Wait a minute!” he said. “So you weren't just named after an angel. You actually.... were one... are one?”

“Our Father wanted to see if angels and humans might co-exist one day, so he set two of us a task to find our true mate in two different lives”, Castiel explained. “Mrs. Bennet's first two children died at birth, like her next two would. Gabriel knew Sam was his love match and I knew you were mine, so the two of us were dispatched in turn to replace her two eldest sons. Like Gabriel, I had no memory of who I was in Heaven, and no powers. Everything that was between you and I on Earth was down to us, and us alone.”

“So you could have died on me?”

“Yes, Dean. I would have returned here, but I would have lost you forever.”

Dean shivered.

“But you said you have to find me again?” he asked.

“Diniel's son Robert, who went over and joined Scaden and Alfie”, Castiel said. "Robert's great-great-great-grandson Dean will be born on your birthday in the Earth year of nineteen hundred and seventy-nine. He will die after just a few hours, but you will be put in his place. Your life will be very different then, and I shall meet you as an angel. You won't remember any of this or your previous time on Earth; I shall have to prove myself worthy of winning your love one more time. It won't be easy.”

“I will always love you, Cas.”

“Dean, the first thing you will attempt to do when we meet up again will be to stick a dagger into me!”

Dean stared at him in horror.

“I won't hurt you, though?” he asked. “You.... are an angel, after all.”

“You won't. But you won't trust me, either. I shall have to win your love from scratch. If I do, my reward is for you to become an angel alongside me, along with anyone else you consider worthy.”

Dean was almost afraid to ask the next question.

“And.... if you don't?”

“I am never allowed to see you again.”

Apparently you could feel pain in Heaven.
“But you found me this time!”

“Yes. I found you.”

“And now we get to be together for.... over a century?”

Castiel smiled.

“A little over. But I am sure we can find some way to pass the time. You always said I should get round to teaching you chess.”

Dean laughed and tried to get up, but suddenly Castiel was on top of him, holding him down with ease whilst his wings flapped gently behind him. They were truly magnificent.

“Angels are much stronger in Heaven, Dean”, he said with a warning smile. “I think you'll soon realize that I'm the one in charge here.”

Dean relaxed and laid back.

“You going to make good on that boast?” he teased.

Castiel grinned at him, and Dean suddenly found himself very naked, his arms and legs gently but firmly pinned to the bed. And his mate was wearing nothing but that incredibly sexy tan coat.

“I intend to!” the angel smirked.

And he did.